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## **An Coiste um Oideachas, Breisoideachas agus Ardoideachas, Taighde, Nuálaíocht agus Eolaíoc**

**An Ardteistiméireacht a Athchóiriú: an gá atá le Sraith Shinsearach nua  
Bealtaine 2022**

## **Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**

**Leaving Certificate Reform: the Need for a New Senior Cycle  
May 2022**



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## CATHAOIRLEACH'S FOREWORD



The Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science recognised that the current Senior Cycle in Irish education is seriously outdated. It identified *Leaving Certificate Reform and the Need for a New Senior Cycle* as a key priority issue.

The Joint Committee agreed to produce a report having identified the following key Modules:

- Assessment Options
- Key Subject Areas and Digital Learning
- Access, Equality and Well Being supports
- Higher and Further Education Requirements, Vocational Options and Career Paths.
- Irish Language and Irish Medium Education
- International Evidence and Best Practice

The Covid 19 pandemic forced seismic changes in the education system and the Leaving Certificate went ahead despite serious challenges. The Committee is of the strong view that now is the opportune time to fundamentally reform the Senior Cycle for the benefit of students, teachers and indeed, wider society.

The Committee sought and received written submissions from a wide range of stakeholders. The quality of the evidence based on comprehensive research findings and the knowledge and insights provided were of tremendous assistance in preparing this report. The submissions are contained at Appendix 1 as valuable reference material.

The Committee met with key stakeholders including relevant unions; school management bodies; key statutory and representative bodies; the Ombudsman for Children; organisations dealing with well-being supports for young people; and, most importantly, we heard the voices of young people themselves. Ms. Emer Neville, Cathaoirleach, Irish Second Level Students Union (ISSU); Ms. Clare Austick,

President, Union of Students in Ireland (USI); Mr. Ryan Sharpe, a sixth-year student in the Cork Life Centre (CLC); Ms Amber Sheridan O'Callaghan, a past student of the CLC; and Mr. Hugh Ahern, a student at the Patrician Academy, Mallow, County Cork, assisted the Committee greatly by sharing their perspectives and experiences.

The Joint Committee also met with a panel of distinguished Irish and international academic experts who provided excellent guidance and support to the Committee. I would like to thank Professor Anne Looney, Executive Dean, School of Education, Dublin City University (DCU) who provided expert advice at the outset and continued the great partnership between the Joint Committee and DCU on key issues in education.

Mr Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, came before the Committee with key statutory bodies under the aegis of his Department.

Senior Department of Education Officials also briefed the Committee on proposals for the future of the Leaving Certificate Examination.

Arising from this, the Committee examined the evidence heard and the submissions received and drew up this Report containing concrete and feasible recommendations. The Committee genuinely believes these can be implemented without delay and will have a transformative impact on the Senior Cycle.

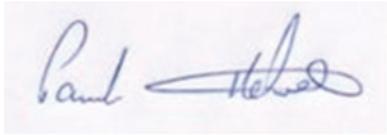
It should be emphasised that this Report sought to look at the Senior Cycle in a holistic way rather than narrowly focusing on the Leaving Certificate examination. The Committee is of the view that students should leave school with a final assessment that reflects fully their efforts and abilities. It should give them the confidence to enter the wider world proud of their achievement and with the life skills to progress to whatever path in life they choose to take.

Once again here I reiterate that young people are our future. I believe this needs to be said again here and in an emphatic way. This Committee is determined that it will play a role in transforming the Senior Cycle and in doing so, providing a strong foundation for the next generation as engaged citizens of this country.

The Committee is committed to ensuring these recommendations are implemented as expeditiously as possible.

On 10 May 2022, the report was agreed to be published by the Committee.

The Joint Committee also requests that the issues raised in this report be the subject of a debate in both Houses of the Oireachtas.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Kehoe', is shown within a light blue rectangular box.

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**Paul Kehoe T.D.,**

**Cathaoirleach,**

**Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research,  
Innovation and Science.**

**2022**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current Senior Cycle in Irish education is seriously outdated and needs a wholly transformed Senior Cycle as distinct from adjustments to the terminal examination. This will require significant changes that reflect a changed world. The Committee believes that the Leaving Certificate should be renamed the Senior Certificate to demonstrate that it will now be a Final Certificate of Achievement as Senior Cycle students progress on their journey in life.

The syllabus for each Senior Cycle Subject is fundamentally important and it is the foundation upon which teachers can be supported to educate their students. The evidence from key stakeholders is that the proposed new syllabi is not clearly specified with comprehensive instructions for teachers. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) needs to review the syllabi as an urgent priority to ensure students are taught to the highest professional standards.

All Senior Cycle students should have the option of combining traditional Leaving Certificate (LC) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Subjects so that students can study both academic and vocational subjects. There is an urgent need to redress the imbalance between academic subjects and vocational options so that both are considered equal.

There is a consensus that Senior Cycle needs to move from one terminal examination to a hybrid model that includes assignments taken over the entire Senior Cycle. Modularisation for each subject, involving 2 written assignments over Senior Cycle, is recommended. Students would also make an oral presentation on the assignment and be offered a broad range of options to encourage self directed learning. There would be one terminal examination at the end of Senior Cycle where students can demonstrate their learning over the full senior cycle. Transition Year Assignments should be incorporated into the marking scheme of terminal results.

The provision of school-based emotional counselling and therapeutic support services is an area where Ireland is behind many other countries and which could prove transformative, particularly at Senior Cycle. Emotional Counselling and Therapeutic Supports on site should be provided, as needed, in all primary and post

primary schools through a reconstituted and expanded National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

Senior Cycle Students will be significant users of school library services, in terms of increased Assignments and Project Work. Libraries are places of sanctuary that promote positive mental health and a calm, safe space too. All Primary and Post Primary Schools should have a School Library, School Librarian and full access to the School Digital Library Service.

There is a need for a comprehensive review of the Junior Cycle Irish curriculum in tandem with reform of the Irish Senior Cycle curriculum. The proposed L1 and L2 Specifications in Irish at Senior Cycle should be reviewed further with a view to aligning it with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should establish *A Task Force on Entry to Higher Education* to consider the future entry level requirements to third level education with the CAO integral to any structural reforms.

In terms of future pathways, the Curriculum should also prepare students for Apprenticeships, Further Education and entering the Workplace, with Guidance Counsellors playing a pivotal role here.

The other recommendations include:

- A National Citizen's Assembly on Senior Cycle Reform
- Mandatory training for teachers on Modularisation.
- More research to assess the validity of Student Self Assessments.
- Oral and aural assessments focusing on improved conversational fluency.
- Expert Working Groups on *Modern Foreign Languages* and on *STEM Subjects and Increased Female Participation*.
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) as a Senior Cycle Subject and 2 classes per week of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).
- LCA students gaining direct entry to Higher Education Institutions.

- Completing terminal examinations and assignments on a computer or other appropriate digital device.
- Digital literacy classes from Junior Cycle onwards.
- Wellbeing supports as an integral part of Senior Cycle.
- *An Online Streaming Initiative* so that all schools can teach subjects at Honours Level.
- Retain Foundation level Irish.
- Encouraging fluent Irish Speakers to take up places in teaching courses where Irish is required.
- Decreasing undergraduate courses and increasing postgraduate ones.
- Introducing an *Apprenticeship Communications Campaign* and *Apprenticeship Information Days* in all Post Primary Schools

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are the Ten Key Report Recommendations, listed by order in which they appear in the main body of the Report. They are all equally important.

1. The Leaving Certificate should be renamed the *Senior Certificate* following on from the Junior Certificate to clearly demonstrate that it is a transformed Senior Cycle.
2. As part of Senior Cycle reform, a key priority for the Department of Education must be that the revised syllabus for each subject is far more detailed with comprehensive instructions for teachers. The Committee recommends that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) reviews the proposed design of the new specifications to ensure teachers are properly supported and students are taught to the highest professional standards.
3. Modularisation should be introduced for all subjects, to comprise:
  - Written assignments prepared in class under the class teacher's supervision, marked by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), with a broad range of options to give student's the maximum freedom to select topics as a way of encouraging self-directed learning.
  - An oral presentation using power point slides on the selected topic, recorded and assessed by the class teacher with external validation checks by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

It is recommended for all subjects, that 2 Modules are completed over Senior Cycle, one in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Year. A written examination would then take place in each subject at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> year. The Marking Scheme should be determined by the Department of Education in liaison with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

Consideration should be given to incorporating Transition Year Assignments into the final marking scheme.

4. All Senior Cycle students should have the option of combining traditional Leaving Certificate (LC) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Subjects. To this end, Department of Education, in liaison with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), should review the LCA Model, to identify how the evidentially successful parts of it could be incorporated into the Senior Cycle.

5. The Department of Education should develop *A National Online Learning Programme*, to be rolled out to all primary and secondary schools, as a matter of urgent priority, to include:

- One centralised Learning Platform.
- Appropriate support and training for all principals and teachers and parents who are home schooling.
- Remote device purchase that ensures disadvantaged students have access to devices for online learning.
- Adequate broadband for online learning.
- Provisions for Blended Learning, and
- Transition Measures for Schools as the Plan is rolled out.

6. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be reconstituted and expanded urgently as the National Educational Psychological and Counselling Service (NEPCS) and mandated to provide specialist Emotional Counselling and Therapeutic Supports, on site, in all primary and post primary schools. The Service should be adequately resourced and funded to ensure it can deliver on its mandate. In this regard, the Ministers for Education and Health should initially set up an interdepartmental pilot initiative that will transfer Therapists from the Health Service Executive (HSE) to the Department of Education, in a geographically equitable way.

7. Senior Cycle Students will be significant users of school library services when they enter Senior Cycle, in terms of increased Assignments and Project Work. The Department of Education should establish a *National Advisory Group on School Library Provision* by the end of September 2022, to develop a *National Strategy for School Libraries* with the key aim of ensuring there is a School Library, School Librarian and full access to the Digital Library Service in all Primary and Post Primary Schools by end of 2024. In the interim, it should expand both the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) Demonstration Library Project and JCSP Digital Library Service as an urgent national priority.
  
8. The Department of Education, in liaison with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), should complete a comprehensive review of the Junior Cycle Irish curriculum in tandem with reform of the Irish Senior Cycle curriculum. To this end, the proposed L1 and L2 Specifications in Irish at Senior Cycle should be reviewed further with a view to aligning it with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).
  
9. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should establish *A Task Force on Entry to Higher Education* to consider the future entry level requirements to third level education. The Central Applications Office (CAO) should be an integral part of the Task Force and be mandated to consider reforming the CAO System to accommodate future changes. The Task Force should consider, as an urgent priority, the feasibility of decoupling Higher-Level Entry Requirements from the Senior Cycle.
  
10. The Senior Cycle Curriculum should prepare students for Apprenticeships, Further Education and entering the Workplace, as a key national priority, with Guidance Counsellors playing a pivotal role in communicating these options to students.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

1. In her submission, Dr Áine Hyland, Professor Emeritus in Education, University College Cork (UCC), stated that *'The Leaving Certificate has traditionally been highly valued in Ireland. It is regarded by most young people and their families as a passport to their future. It is the verification of successful completion of second-level education and as such has multiple purposes. For as long as the Leaving Cert has existed (for almost 100 years) it has been prized not only as a personal achievement, but as a qualification held in high esteem by employers, nationally and internationally, and used as a selection mechanism by the further and higher education sector.'*
2. In its submission, the Joint Managerial Board (JMB) noted that the scale of change is challenging but many significant educational and curricular shifts have occurred during times of economic restraint. Two key examples are the introduction of free secondary education in 1967 and the development of the current Leaving Certificate programme while the modern Irish State was itself just emerging.
3. In oral evidence, on 2 November 2021, Mr Simon Harris, TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, opined that the Leaving Certificate system currently in place does not equip a student with regards to many life skills. He stated *'It is time we took courageous decisions around assessment for, and of, learning while trusting in the professionalism and instinctive fairness of our teachers. Confidence in Certification represents a requirement of civic society that cannot be diluted.'*
4. The Minister also stated that *'Ireland needs a fair and consistent assessment system which can give the students feedback alongside a clear understanding of their strengths and talents which would allow them to make reliable decisions.'*

5. In oral evidence, on 9 November 2021, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, pointed out to the Committee, that *'in 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Children recommended that reform of the Leaving Certificate was needed, following a meeting with young people from Ireland in Geneva.'*
6. In its submission, Drinkaware noted that *'the Leaving Certificate is viewed as the end goal of the Senior Cycle and the measurable output of Ireland's formal education system. As such, it should mirror the stated objectives of the Senior Cycle, of intellectual, personal and social development. No one aspect should take precedence over the other. Intellectual ability without personal and social development does not adequately prepare students for the challenges they will face beyond school. Dewey wrote that "the ultimate aim of education is nothing other than the creation of human beings in the fullness of their capacities"<sup>1</sup>.'*
7. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Ms. Arlene Forster, CEO, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) stated *'The Council oversaw a review of senior cycle between 2016 and 2020. The review involved extensive work with schools and high levels of collaboration and engagement with stakeholders. It culminated in the development of the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report which was submitted to the Minister for consideration and published following the Minister's announcement on March 29<sup>th</sup>.'*
8. Ms. Forster further stated that *'the report identifies three key areas for further research and action. These include providing more flexible pathways through Senior Cycle; having a greater mix of subjects and modules, including technical, creative and vocational options and broadening assessment and reporting arrangements.'*
9. Ms. Evelyn O'Connor, Acting Director, NCCA referred to a key finding in the review that *'one of the things that was most positive about the whole process of reviewing senior cycle was how clear-sighted people were about what they*

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey 1930/1984, p. 289

wanted senior cycle to be about. It is easy to gloss over it but people were very clear. The teachers, students and parents took issue with this funnel, this narrowing and this singular perspective. When we worked with them, heard their voices and worked with a range of schools they were saying these are people and we want to develop the whole person; we want to help them to be more enriched by and engaged in their learning; we want them to be able to access whatever future they see for themselves; and we want to support them to see many options, not just one track; and that education serves collective and not just individual purposes. That was great to see because people in our education system are clear-sighted about what they would like to see improved. It is a great starting point to have an agreed purpose and vision of where we go from here’.

## SYSTEMIC ISSUES IN IRISH EDUCATION IMPACTING ON THE CURRICULUM

10. In oral evidence, on 16 November 2021, Dr. Áine Hyland referred to ‘A very serious issue that is currently threatening Senior Cycle and Leaving Certificate reform is the approach being taken by the NCCA to curriculum and syllabus design. In the past, new subject syllabi produced by the NCCA and approved by the Minister for Education included details about the content, breadth and depth of treatment of a subject as well as detailed information about how the subject would be assessed. Parallel with the review and reform of senior cycle currently being undertaken, the NCCA is producing new subject syllabi (which they refer to as specifications) which are vague outlines with no information about detail or assessment. The approach was described by a teacher in an op ed in the Irish Times some time ago as like “an IKEA flatpack with no instruction leaflet.”

The design or template being used by the NCCA is not an appropriate design for a syllabus that will be assessed nationally. Teachers need more detail about each subject so that they can ensure that their students are learning at a broadly similar level to other students throughout the country. This design will further disadvantage those students who are already disadvantaged. It makes

*no sense and does not happen in any other jurisdiction. I have analysed curriculum and syllabus documents in more than ten other countries and based on that analysis I predict that the current NCCA “experiment” is doomed to failure. Why should Irish Leaving Cert. students be guinea pigs for a curricular and syllabus experiment that has not been carried out anywhere else in the world?’*

11. The need for more concrete specifications was also echoed by the Irish Agricultural Science Teachers’ Association (IASTA). In its submission, the IASTA states that *‘the draft specification was a very vague document. It is written using the same template as was used in writing the Junior Cycle Science specification, i.e. simply a list of learning outcomes with no depth of treatment provided to teachers to enable them to interpret and implement these learning outcomes in the classroom.’*

12. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Mr Barry Slattery, Deputy CEO, NCCA, stated that *‘there are different perspectives. It is fair to say that different people understand curriculum in different ways. Some see it as an official text that will be faithfully implemented and received in schools and prefer a very highly prescriptive curriculum, whereas others see it as something that is more dynamic and prefer a more, let us say, permissive curriculum that has less emphasis on specifying every single piece of content and more attention on the development of skills, for example. I will not come down on the side of either perspective but the irony is that both perspectives are premised on the same assumption, namely, the national curriculum, be it a permissive or prescriptive curriculum, will be implemented in schools exactly as intended. However, the reality is that teachers are not passive conduits who deliver somebody else’s curriculum. They will be translating and mediating the curriculum within their own context to meet the needs and interests of their students. Both perspectives underplay the complexities of this reality of the social practice of curriculum and the curriculum-making that happens in schools.*

*I will get to the answer now with two points. The strength of the network-based school approach to the redevelopment of the senior cycle is that it will give us the opportunity to work with teachers in a way that will allow us to look at the exact nature and form of the curriculum, the resources, the supports, the professional development and the professional time that is required for teachers to work with the curriculum in the best possible way to deliver the best possible outcomes for their students. Absolutely, we intend to conduct additional research and consult with teachers on those issues even before we engage with schools. I wish it was as simple as conducting research that says this is exactly the way it should be and that it would solve all problems. We have seen this issue in other jurisdictions. That issue came up only as recently as yesterday, but I have been hearing about the same issues in other jurisdictions for more than ten years.'*

13. In oral evidence, on 2 November 2021, Mr Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, opined that any reform of the Leaving Certificate must take account of the entire senior cycle reform. In this context, he stated that *'the programme, subjects, skills, and objectives must come into the conversation alongside the terminal exam.'*

14. In her submission, Professor Sylvia Draper, Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, Trinity College Dublin, stated that the Leaving Certificate *'is one cog in a very large educational eco-system and it is important to understand how changes in it affect the bigger picture. The teaching of problem-based mathematics has created issues for students entering third level mathematics courses.'*<sup>2</sup> *Leaving Certificate change, when it happens, can occur in leaps, but it should never happen once and for all time. It should be subjected to a considered and iterative process of review, refinement and improvement.'*

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<sup>2</sup> [The Irish Journal of Education, 2020, pp. 74-108, Gerry Shiel, David Millar and Rachel Cunningham.](#)

15. In oral evidence, on 16 November 2021, Professor Anne Looney, Executive Dean, Institute of Education, Dublin City University (DCU), stated *‘The Leaving Certificate has its current form not because it reflects best practice in assessment, or our most recent research insights in how to support learning and learners, but because it is culturally embedded. It persists, despite an annual liturgy of handwringing and head wagging about inequalities in class and gender, concerns for student wellbeing, and pernicious impact on the kind of learning and lives we want for young people, because it has become part of Irish social and cultural life – well beyond the school system.’*

16. Looking to the future, Professor Looney expressed the view *‘Given where we find ourselves, before we move on to the next edition of the Leaving Certificate that will further embed our current educational imaginary, should we give some time to considering whether this imaginary is the one we want and need to get us through what are going to be the most challenging decades in human history? Addressing this question, at least putting our current educational imaginary through some form of examination, whether through the Citizens Assembly on Education as proposed by the current government, or another deliberative process, has never been more urgent for us’.*

17. In its submission, the Citizen’s Assembly for Education (CAFÉ) stated that *‘the forthcoming Citizens Assembly for Education (CAFE) will help to raise public awareness and get ‘buy-in’ for reform of the education system at all levels including the Leaving Certificate. To ensure the success of the Assembly this Committee calls on the Government to:*

- *announce the date of the Assembly*
- *ensure that sufficient time is given to consider the big questions on purpose and culture at all levels of education from early childhood to adult learning including the reform of the Leaving Cert*
- *provide sufficient resources for the design of the assembly to ensure the voice of young people is central, to ensure the availability of experts and to commission surveys or research projects deemed necessary for the work of the Assembly*

- *commit to setting up an implementation committee to activate the Assembly's recommendations as quickly as possible and publish an annual report on progress.'*

18. In its submission, Barnardos stated that *'Education is highly predictive of individual life-chances in Ireland and a Leaving Certificate qualification has become a 'minimum' to secure access to further education/training and high-quality employment, among other outcomes. Educational qualifications are an important determinant of an individual's occupational success influencing their level of income, risk of unemployment, housing and wider material circumstances.'*

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Leaving Certificate should be renamed the Senior Certificate following on from the Junior Certificate to clearly demonstrate that it is a transformed Senior Cycle.

As part of Senior Cycle reform, a key priority for the Department of Education must be that the revised syllabus for each subject is far more detailed with comprehensive instructions for teachers. The Committee recommends that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) reviews the proposed design of the new specifications to ensure teachers are properly supported and students are taught to the highest professional standards.

2. A *National Citizen's Assembly on Senior Cycle Reform*, with strong student representation, should be established by Quarter 3 of 2022, with a mandate to report back to Government within six months.

## CHAPTER 2 ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

19. In oral evidence, on 28 September 2021, Mr John Irwin, Association of Community and Comprehensive schools (ACCS) noted *'We have to engage in assessment, whether that is a formative or summative assessment. The formative assessment is there to support learning. As we go through the programme, we have to engage in assessment. This is because we have to try to promote learning. In order to try to promote and support learning, one would have to have formative assessment. The latter is used to assess competencies and skills, what a student has learned up to a particular point and how we are going to support that learning into the future. As a result, if there is anything that we need to amend in our styles of education, we can assist in that particular area. If we even take a look at the accredited or calculated grades which we have had in the past two years under the two systems, these are all forms of assessment to be able to provide accreditation and acknowledge the efforts students have made in the final two years of senior cycle in school. That is important.'*

20. In its submission, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) stated that the purpose of the range of components already in place is to allow students to work independently, research areas of interest to them and to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills, in areas that cannot always be assessed in a written examination.

21. In its submission, the NCCA outlines international practice in assessment of senior cycle. It notes that where jurisdictions offer an increasing variety of pathways and where environments outside of school make a key contribution to experiential learning, planning is increasingly important at both a student and local level. Resources to support student decision making and planning for a particular route or pathway are critical. The goal is to achieve flexibility and coherence, diversification without fragmentation, for students and schools.

22. The submission further states that as new and revised specifications continue to be introduced at Senior Cycle, there is a move to include components other than written examinations, in the few remaining cases where these do not already exist, and where it is considered appropriate.

23. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Ms. Arlene Forster, CAO, NCCA, stated that *‘Obviously, assessment is one of the three main areas that were identified in the review. There is an acknowledgement in the advisory report - the Minister picked up on this - of the need and importance of additional research and of working closely with schools and the education partners in terms of examining the details of what updated assessment arrangements might look like.*

*Regarding teacher assessment and whether other forms of assessment could fulfil that role, one of the findings of the senior cycle review – it is clearly set out in the advisory report – was the importance of looking at broadening the range of assessment approaches and methods. One of the key reasons for doing this is to assess a much broader range of the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that we deem important for our young people and, in doing so, reduce the emphasis on the written examination. Internationally, different systems put different assessment arrangements in place, but there are common characteristics across many jurisdictions. One of those is a move towards teacher-based assessment. One of the rationales used in many jurisdictions that introduced teacher assessment was the emphasis on greater validity, or in other words, putting assessment arrangements in place that can better capture the range of learning and experiences that we deem important for our young people and, in doing so, give young people opportunities to demonstrate their learning in different ways.*

*A point that is often made by authorities in the assessment field – the committee has met some of them during its deliberations in recent months – is that it is important that, when broadening assessment arrangements, the additional assessment components that are introduced do not necessarily emphasise the paper and pencil format. They need to look to other methodolo-*

*gies. The Deputy asked about practicals for a young person to demonstrate particular skills or techniques in a discipline. That is one of the reasons that teacher assessment is sometimes used in other jurisdictions, in that it opens up different methods and forms of assessment. As the Deputy rightly pointed out, though, the details of all of this need to be worked out. We need to draw on research and work with schools to see what is manageable and feasible and what supports need to be put in place to enable this approach in our school system.'*

24. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Ms. Andrea Feeney, CEO, SEC, stated that *'we will be engaging in a programme of research and development on a number of aspects including the impact of weighting and timing of additional components worth at least 40% of all subjects. We will also implement interim measures to spread the load of assessment pending full subject redevelopment.'*

25. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Ms. Elaine Sheridan, Head of Examinations and Assessment Division, SEC, noted that *'The findings of the predictability research<sup>3</sup> disproved the idea that rote learning was rampant throughout the exams. That was particularly true in the case of any of the less content-based specifications that were introduced in the mid-2000s. As a result of those specifications, the exams aim to analyse, assess and reward critical thinking. Even in the likes of English, a subject the Deputy mentioned, the predictability report suggested, having re-viewed the papers, scripts and marking scheme, that candidates were being rewarded for higher order thinking and not for producing stock answers. To a certain extent, there is a sense this is the case. Our marking schemes are set out in such a way that marks are awarded for originality. The approach to marking in various subjects ensures marks are set aside for creative and original answers. That has been addressed through new specifications, and working closely with the NCCA on*

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<sup>3</sup> Research conducted for the SEC in 2018 by Oxford University.

*the design and development of new specifications has ensured rote learning approach is no longer really an issue.'*

26. The SEC submission referred to technology enabled assessment and noted that the expansion of online marking, when embedded, may provide opportunities for the delivery and marking of a greater range of components than is currently the case and may also support other service improvements.

27. In its submission, the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) stated that *'assessment is not separate to the curriculum: rather, it is an intrinsic component, the core purposes of which is to establish progress in learning.'* It notes that *'teachers engage in assessment every day as they observe their students, provide feedback on their learning, and set and mark homework.'* It also stated that *'more formal assessment takes place to mark the end of the completion of programmes of study, namely the Junior Cycle and the Senior Cycle.'*

28. The ASTI submission also opined that the *'positive side of the current assessment structure includes a high level of public trust; its capacity to serve as a valid and objective statement of students' academic achievement; its fairness, impartiality, and transparency.'* It also states that *'what is deeply problematic about the current model is the fact that the terminal examination is the sole pathway for school-leavers to higher education.'*

29. This view of the current model as having an inherent fairness and a high degree of public trust was shared by Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) in its submission. It stated that, *'any mooted changes to assessment structures must not simply result in extra pressure and stress being placed on students and staff alike.'*

30. The ASTI cited the submission to the NCCA Senior Cycle Review Consultation, by Dr. Áine Hyland in 2011. That recommended options such as

the 'decoupling' of entry to higher education from the Leaving Certificate, changes to the examination or variations on the current point system.

31. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Ms Andrea Feeney, CEO, SEC, noted that *'In terms of the decoupling, there was matriculation back in the day. We talk about the stress and pressure on students currently so I wonder, in the decoupling space, what are we talking about replacing it with? If there were to be another type of examination or assessment that students had to do in order to progress, that would exacerbate the stress and pressure on those students. Therefore, we need to be careful about what we replace it with. There are jurisdictions that have slightly similar systems to us. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, UCAS, is looking at reviewing its system and trying to even out some of the inequities. I am not sure that there is a perfect system. We would need to be very careful in this particular area.'*

32. In its submission, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) noted that exam-based assessment retains a dominant role across the Leaving Certificate established programme, and stresses that exam-based assessment is a particularly high-stakes mode of assessment. It further stated that its research indicates that exam-based assessment is a negative source for teaching and learning of Leaving Certificate subjects, impacting negatively on both the skills acquired by students and their wellbeing.

33. In its submission, the ESRI also referred to the preparation for exam-based assessment. It noted that classes in fifth and sixth year are often characterised by teacher-led instruction that places a strong emphasis on regular homework and completing exam papers. The ESRI contended that *'this exam-focused approach to pedagogy is seen by students, parents, and teachers as conducive only to rote learning, wherein material is memorised at the expense of authentic understanding, as well as at the expense of the development and assessment of broader skills.'*

34. In its submission, Cork Life Centre (CLC) stated that *'Key to Senior Cycle reform is a recognition as exists in other jurisdictions that post junior cycle secondary education students can choose a stream for further education depending on their intended vocation or career path. In practice this should mean that those wishing to enter a trade can progress to a technological college post Junior Certificate. Those who wished to continue their academic studies, perhaps with the intention of later progressing to university, would remain in secondary school for a further two years. This type of education system is well established in countries such as Denmark where from the age of 16 onwards students can attend upper secondary school to complete a two-year higher preparatory examination or technical upper secondary school or technical college.'*

35. In its submission, Fóroige stated that *'reform of the Leaving Certificate, needs to be encompassed in the development of a three-year Senior Cycle'*. It contended that *'a three-year Senior Cycle will allow for flexibility within the curriculum and the ability to respond to the individual needs of the young person. Individual pathways of learning can be created along with the capability to broaden the scope of assessment to include collection of 'credits' throughout the three years.'*

## **METHODS OF ASSESSMENT**

36. In her submission, Dr. Áine Hyland stated that *'in reforming the Leaving Cert. (i.e. how the subjects are assessed) I strongly favour additional forms of assessment for every subject that could be carried out during and NOT at the end of the two year senior cycle so that by May / June of the final year students would already have completed at least 50% of Leaving Cert assessment. Assessments undertaken during the school year could be done under teacher supervision and sent to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for assessment. This could include English and Irish essays as well as some of the questions on unseen aspects of the LC course in other subjects. The subject syllabi could be modularised (as is now the norm in most higher education courses) with assessment carried out at the end of each module.'*

*Some assessments could take place at the end of Fifth Year and others could take place around the time of the Christmas tests in Sixth Year or at other times during the final year. This would reduce the pressure on the exams at the end of the final year. If at least 50% of the marks was allocated for practicals, orals, CBAs, portfolios, and other forms of continuous assessment, there would only be one paper for each subject in June of the final year - which would be worth at most 50% of the total marks available. And there should be plenty of choice on the final papers – not the narrow focus (and guessing game) that currently exists for many subjects. In my view, examinations should be an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know and can do, not an obstacle race designed to trip them up.*

*External assessment should be the norm ie. a student's own teacher should not normally be asked to assess his/her student for certification purposes. Irish teachers have traditionally seen their role as champions of and advocates for their students – not as their judges – so I was not surprised in 2020 and 2021 when teachers were asked to predict their students' grades, that the results they predicted were up to 20% higher than would have been expected if the students had sat the established Leaving Cert. And unlike in some other countries, teachers in Ireland did not underestimate the performance of students from less advantaged backgrounds – if anything they over-estimated them.'*

37. In its submission, the CLC recommended that *'that all subjects at Leaving Certificate need to be assessed via regular continuous assessment (during both years of the course) Assessment should be external-projects or assignments sent for marking to the State Examinations Commission or its equivalent. Also, external examiners should be sent to schools or education centres to assess project work.*

*All subjects should be broken into distinct modules. Such a modular approach aligns more closely with the 3<sup>rd</sup> level system. Continuous assessment of*

*various modules should account for up to 60% of assessment in any given subject. The remaining modules could be examined by way of a terminal or final exam which should be no more than 90 to 120 minutes in length.*

*Assessments should take a range of formats including essays, research projects, practical projects, practical skills demonstrations and other presentations. Terminal examinations should comprise no more than 40% of the students' final mark in any given subject and students should be updated on their marks and performance as assessments take place. This is key in relation to students maintaining their motivation and momentum throughout the two-year course. It also mirrors the 3<sup>rd</sup> level education system.*

*The continuous assessment arrangements should allow for the 'banking' of marks in subjects at the end of 5<sup>th</sup> year. Performance in the assessments undertaken in 5<sup>th</sup> year should be weighted in relation to the final mark at the end of the two-year cycle. Again, this mirrors the 3<sup>rd</sup> level system and tackles the issue of students struggling with motivating their studies on a two-year course with no tangible assessment in the first year of study. It would be recommended that the 6<sup>th</sup> or final year of study is more heavily weighted in terms of the final grade achieved.'*

38. In its submission, the Irish Educational Publishers' Association (IEPA) agreed with spreading assessment involving *'examination on a more continuous basis, across fifth and sixth year.'*

39. In its submission, Cork Life Centre (CLC) Students, proposed a method of modularisation and streaming into academic or more vocational career opportunities. It also made a key point that *'Flexibility of choice emerged as a key factor for students in relation to their assessment. It would allow them to feel a sense of control and choice over a significant period in their education. The past year of blended learning has shown the country many methods of learning and testing that were extremely effective. It also indicated that there are accurate and effective assessments beyond written examination.'*

40. In its submission, the Irish Second Level Students Union (ISSU) noted that *'there is a robust demand for students to have the opportunity to assess their knowledge and skills through Second Component Assessments (SCA)'s via projects, presentations, oral and practical work.'* It stated that *'a clear majority of students approve of an increase in SCAs, with 63.9% of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing for this option to be made available.'*

41. The ISSU also recommended implementing a model of Second Component Assessments throughout 5th and 6th year that would form the basis of students' final grades in the Leaving Certificate in line with the *Universal Design for Learning Framework*.

42. In oral evidence, on 16 November 2021, Professor Michael O'Leary, Prometric Chair in Assessment, Centre for Assessment and Regulatory Practice in Education (CARPE), Dublin City University (DCU), proposed four solutions to approaching assessment of Leaving Certificate:

- A reduction in the content of fifth and sixth year with the exams spread out within these years, which would gradually move from paper-based to computer-based examinations.
- Continuous Assessment that would involve a combination of tasks that could be set externally and marked by the State Examinations Commission (SEC). This would be alongside tasks set and assessed by student's teachers.
- Collective marking by In-School Teams of teachers across the key skills framework of senior cycle.
- Student self-assessment which would contribute to results around the grading of some projects and competencies within the key skills framework.

43. Professor O’Leary stated that *‘Data from all four modes of assessment would support a more balanced system of certifying achievement at the end of post primary education in Ireland.’*

44. Several submissions and oral evidence made the point that Continuous Assessment has negative connotations for some students resulting in anxiety and worry. Modularisation could be viewed as a more neutral term that denotes maturity in the students and prepares them for further and higher education.

45. In oral evidence, on 16 November 2021, Dr. Jim Gleeson, Adjunct Professor School of Policy and Practice, Dublin City University (DCU), discussed modularisation in terms of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Dr. Gleeson opined that *‘the LCA process of modularisation is 25 years ahead of its time. It is a semesterised system, with gradual accumulation of credit which focuses on skills as opposed to content.’* He further advised that *‘the traditional Leaving Certificate should emulate the LCA Model in Future Reforms.’*

46. Several submissions and witnesses also proposed that students should be able to combine subjects from the traditional Leaving Certificate and the LCA. This would assist students in acquiring more practical skills to enhance their future career options.

47. In oral evidence, on 16 November 2021, Professor Anne Looney referred to Continuous Assessment, and the concern that it could be *‘colonised by people who will sell a deal to get students a better mark in the continuous assessment if they attend a two-day course for €100.’*

48. The ESRI submission referred to consultations it has had with students, parents, and teachers that has led them to believe that there is a need to spread out assessment during the senior cycle, and to adopt a broader variety of approaches to assessment, such as project work, portfolios, and presentations.

49. The ESRI submission also recommended a type of Continuous Assessment, starting in fifth year. It would include assessment from Transition Year (TY) Soft Skills assignments. Soft Skills, it opined, are also key life skills which should be regarded as highly as academic abilities. It also recommended that assessment should include examinations, but also projects/portfolios and oral examinations as appropriate for the subject.

50. In its submission, the Yellow Flag Programme noted that the current method of assessment as *'valuing memorisation of materials over other skills, such as communication and presentation... reflects a monocultural approach to education and assessment, that does not accommodate the diversity of skills present within an intercultural classroom – in Yellow Flag schools, this diversity has surpassed 83 ethnicities and nationalities since 2009.'*

51. Several submissions refer to the need for reform of Transition Year (TY) and for TY assignments to be incorporated into the terminal result.

52. In its submission, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) stated that *'most students (about 70%) complete an optional transition year programme (TY) between lower and upper secondary education, in order to sample different subjects and undertake work experience to inform future education and career choices. Currently, many valuable learning achievements during TY are not certified, compromising their portability and subsequent recognition. Recognised certification, including micro-credentials, should be explored as tools for enhancing the transparency, portability and recognition of TY learning achievements.'*

53. In oral evidence on 16 November 2021, Professor Tom Collins, Emeritus President of Maynooth University, outlined how extracurricular activities undertaken in TY, such as sport and artistic pursuits like drama, music and others such as social activism, are highly formative opportunities for students.

54. Professor Collins contended that because *‘the previously mentioned activities are outside the scope of Leaving Certificate assessment, the potential of realising the broader goals of Post Primary education have been greatly diminished.’*

55. Professor Tom Collins raised a concern that ‘the whole aesthetic of the TY Programme could be sacrificed in the context of the assessment protocols.’ Dr. Jim Gleeson mirrored this concern and opined that ‘interfering with the culture of transition year and making any changes, need to be carried out very carefully.’

56. In oral evidence, on 16 November 2021, Dr. Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, reiterated the idea that assessment in TY should be considered in terms of improving the senior cycle. He referred to the JMB oral evidence, which highlighted the range of possible assessment options which are already in place through transition year, which includes projects, portfolio-based assessments, end of year interviews and modular credit-based assessment.

57. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Mr. Tony Donohoe, Chairperson, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, (EGFSN), stated that *‘there is a definite opportunity for TY to be included, in some way, into the leaving certificate assessment.’* Mr. Donohoe also stated that *‘the assessment does not necessarily need to involve examinations, but that it does need to be included in the evaluation and assessment process.’*

58. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Mr Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer, Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME), stated that *‘From the moment a young person leaves school and goes to college, he or she will be subjected to continuous assessment. In the workplace, he or she will be subjected to continuous assessment. It is hard and sometimes brutal for that to happen and the sooner they get used to it, the better. I will summarise the point by stating the manner in which continuous assessment was executed in the*

*leaving certificate years of 2020 and 2021 is not the way we can execute it in future.'*

59. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr. Ryan Sharpe, student, CLC, stated *'continuous assessments are a tool that is completely underutilised in the system... They are a gateway to learn how to gain life skills in researching and developing an idea, and putting it into a format, in addition to learning how to show the world what you have.'*

60. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Ms Meadhbh Costello, Social Policy Executive, Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), stated *'there are many positives associated with the leaving certificate that we need to retain in any reformation including the public perception that there is a high level of fairness in the final exams. However, the leaving certificate does not completely prepare students for entering further education or the world of work. We really need an assessment model that champions what we value in the student experience and recognises and rewards all types of learners. This needs to embed transferable skills as well as employability skills. These higher order skills really need to be recognised as a valuable component of an individual's learning. The current assessment model, because it focuses on a final examination, narrows the student's learning experience to rote learning and an ability to recall, at one moment in time, two year's worth of knowledge. What we would like to see is continuous assessment in different formats which would be better able to capture a learner's learning journey across those two years. This should take place over a number of different assessment modes that can capture things such skills in areas like critical thinking, problem solving, team work, communications, data analysis and data identification which will enable students to develop an ability to tackle the grand challenges facing society.'*

61. In oral evidence, on 25 January 2022, Mr Dalton Tattan, Assistant Secretary Department of Education, regarding the spread of assessments over two years and the accumulation of the qualification through accredited grades and examinations stated *'The sort of scenario the Deputy has painted is one that*

*would certainly have the potential to help students in alleviating some of the stress. However, a couple of things strike me that mean we have to think carefully about it. One issue is that a very modularised experience might not be as positive for students. For example, we could decide that the oral examinations should happen at the end of fifth year. Nobody would think that a good idea because a major part of the experience of pursuing a language subject could potentially fall away at a very early stage. That does not mean there are not some aspects we could do earlier in the two-year cycle and that could potentially include things in fifth year if we thought that was appropriate. An argument is often made, quite rightly, that spreading these assessment events out ought to reduce the stress levels but there is a risk if there are a lot of them, or if we start to introduce lots of different assessment components across the range of subjects, that students could be hitting assessment events on a regular basis. That could impact on what is happening in the classroom as they would not be able to see beyond the next practical, the next project or whatever it might be. We have to be careful and structure things in such a way that they do not have unintended consequences.'*

62. In its submission, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) stated that *'the existing integrity of an examination that is anonymous, objective and the same for everyone should be preserved. A significant part of the final grade should be attributed to such an exam. Why? Because preparing for an exam is an important life skill that replicates and prepares students for high stakes tasks they will be required to perform under pressure in their careers and which if they fail they will be replaced by peers who can. e.g. sales representative, pilot, surgeon. Most jobs require us to perform to a set standard and to respond to events that we may not expect or be fully prepared for. e.g. a critical incident in a school. That life is a competition, that we can learn from failure and that it does not cripple us is an essential life skill that all students need to learn. With recent changes to grading, we are protecting students from failure. This is neither healthy nor wise as, when they leave school they will be unable to cope with failure in the world of work if they have never picked themselves up from a*

*disappointment or re-invented themselves after a failure in their formative years.'*

63. The IGC also noted that *'because teenagers operate predominantly in the present tense and do not have the same relationship with future events as adults do, projects or tasks that are graded as part of continuous assessment, need to take place within a number of weeks, 8 maximum.'*

64. In its submission, the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) stated that any reform of the Leaving Certificate must *'continue with [the] practice of external and blind assessment in order to override issues pertaining to racism and unconscious bias.'*

65. In its submission, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) stated that *'since 2018, a number of new Leaving Certificate subjects have been introduced, all of which have one or more assessment component in addition to the written examination, which have been designed so that they provide opportunities for students to demonstrate as wide a range of knowledge, understanding and skills as possible. These components are submitted in a digital format to the SEC for marking and include Politics and Society, Physical Education, Computer Science, Economics and Agricultural Science.'*

66. In its submission, the NCCA state that the Advisory Report recommends that students should experience a variety of assessments appropriately spaced across the two or three years of senior cycle. Assessment methods, items, component weightings and timings could be developed to achieve greater alignment with the flexible learning pathways envisaged within this redeveloped stage of a young person's education.

67. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Ms. Arlene Foster stated that *'throughout all four years of the senior cycle review one prominent theme, in addition to those I mentioned already, was the ambition to conserve what is really good, what works well and the strengths, alongside ongoing evolution. Many strengths*

*were identified through the review, including the range of subjects and modules that are already in existence and the opportunities they present to young people, as well as the range of assessment approaches and methods in particular during transition year, the leaving certificate applied, and the leaving certificate vocational programme. There is rich practice in those programmes. Some of the other strengths referenced were the addition in more recent years of additional assessment components and the opportunities those present to young people to demonstrate a greater range of learning.*

*Transition year received huge positivity and support throughout the review. What was high lighted in particular were the unique opportunities transition year opens up for young people's learning without the pressure of a State exam. The school-based dimension of transition year was highlighted again and again.'*

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

3.Modularisation should be introduced for all subjects, to comprise:

- Written assignments prepared in class under the class teacher's supervision, marked by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), with a broad range of options to give student's the maximum freedom to select topics as a way of encouraging self-directed learning.
- An oral presentation using power point slides on a selected topic, recorded, and assessed by the class teacher with external validation checks by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

It is recommended for all subjects, that 2 Modules are completed over Senior Cycle, one in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Year. A written examination would then take place in each subject at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> year. The Marking Scheme should be determined by the Department of Education in liaison with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

Consideration should be given to incorporating Transition Year Assignments into the final marking scheme.

4. Mandatory training on Modularisation should be provided in all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses, and to all secondary school teachers as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

5. The Department of Education should liaise with Centre for Assessment Research, Policy and Practice in Education (CARPE), Dublin City University (DCU), with a view to conducting more research to assess the validity of Student Self Assessments.

6. Oral and aural assessments in foreign languages should be reviewed by the Department of Education, in liaison with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), with the aim of improving students' conversational fluency rather than rote learning of responses. This reform would be in conjunction with Recommendation 8 (see Chapter 3), and the findings of the proposed *Expert Working Group on Modern Foreign Languages*.

## CHAPTER 3 KEY SUBJECT AREAS AND DIGITAL LEARNING

### KEY SUBJECT AREAS

68. In her submission, Dr Áine Hyland contends that *‘it is not appropriate for such a high proportion of senior cycle students to follow an academic senior cycle programme as is currently the case.’* She noted that *‘fewer than 10% of Senior Cycle students currently follow the Leaving Cert Applied Programme.’* She stated that *‘the overall senior cycle needs to be reviewed and reformed so that a higher proportion of students choose a less academic option after Junior Cycle.’*

69. In its submission, Fóróige stated that *‘we believe that in order to make real, impactful change within the Leaving Certificate and Senior Cycle, non-formal education must be valued within the formal system. The Senior Cycle comes at a pivotal time in young people’s lives, a time where they are leaving adolescence and entering adulthood. Yet this is also a time where young people face many challenges and require an education system that meets their needs. There is a profound gap between the knowledge and skills students learn in school and the knowledge and skills they need to excel in 21st century communities. There is a growing movement, echoed by this review, to address this gap and develop a more rounded version of student success. Non-formal education gives young people the opportunity to learn, practice and master 21st Century skills such as emotional intelligence, critical thinking, empathy, communication, teamwork, planning, resilience, and creativity are those which employers attest to being crucial for employability and economic development. Developing these skills enables young people to not only have a positive influence in their own development but also in the development of Ireland’s economic future.’*

70. In his submission, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, stated that consideration should be given to *‘reducing the number of examination subjects that a student must take from 7 to 5 and thereby freeing up one day a week for*

*them to focus on the issues/ideas/hobbies that they enjoy. This may involve a work experience scenario or practice of a hobby or development of a project that they are interested in. That day should be recorded, via a journal or video blog, and offered as support for a more rounded, positive and personalised experience for their senior cycle and, ultimately, their Leaving Certificate. This would facilitate and encourage all those students who have skills that are currently outside of the scope of the academic focussed senior cycle, to build on them and be proud of them. Students who farm, work on engines, do hairdressing, gardening, sports, charity work and many other diverse activities would be offered a chance to build on their love for an activity and learn that society values them for those engagements too.'*

71. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr Hugh Ahern in his analysis of key Leaving Certificate subjects stated *'The current key subjects for the Leaving Cert are English, Maths and Irish. Currently, syllabuses are available in 36 subjects. But not all schools offer all 36 subjects... Unfortunately, I see many all-girls schools not encouraging the Applied Sciences (woodwork, engineering and metalwork) and I see many all-boys schools not encouraging home economics. I feel this is outdated as many girls are interested in this career (i.e. Gwynne Shotwell, COO of SpaceX) and many boys make excellent chefs (i.e. Gordon Ramsey). Also, I think that the Leaving Cert encourages students to go to college and not all students want to go to college.'*

72. This opinion was echoed by Jigsaw who stated in their submission that *'there is a gendered aspect to the subjects covered in some schools, i.e. agricultural science not covered in all-girls schools and home economics not covered in all-boys schools.'*

73. In its submission, the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies Ireland stated that while *'current third level business and accounting courses have capacity for additional students, Leaving Certificate Accounting is failing to sufficiently engage, encourage and enthuse students to choose accounting programmes at third level. Whilst demand for accountants across all sectors of*

*the Irish economy continues to grow, the corresponding pipeline of new talent seeking to enter the profession is insufficient to fill the opportunities available. If steps are not taken to address this, it will inevitably lead to an increase in the critical skills shortage which could seriously impede Irish economic recovery and future growth prospects.'*

74. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Dr. Ruth Freeman, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), stated that *'[Students] need to be equipped with the ability to solve complex problems by nurturing creative thinking and innovation. Students entering the workforce will benefit from having good communication and interpersonal skills and the ability to work as part of a diverse team and will be personally effective. Ultimately, we need to create students who will be lifelong learners.'*

75. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Mr. Neil McDonnell stated that *'on key subject areas, Programme for International Student Assessment, PISA, rankings now include a focus on digital literacy. However, ISME and our members have noted basic failings among graduate-level recruits in accomplishing relatively simple tasks, such as formulating a cogent paragraph of text on a business-related topic free of spelling or grammatical errors.'*

76. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Dr Emer Smyth, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) noted that *'As well as pointing to gaps in the preparation for the world of work and adult life, young people we have surveyed have repeatedly said they do not feel their second level education is fostering that love of learning. This relates to reading for pleasure, appreciating art and music and even engaging in sport and physical exercise.'*

77. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Ms Amber Sheridan O'Callaghan, former student, Cork Life Centre (CLC) opined that *'if we [were] learning things that were useful to us in life, it would be more beneficial. It is very stressful to have to learn everything on the curriculum, especially when we know we will*

*not use it... If we learned things that actually benefited us in life, it would be much less stressful.'*

78. In its submission, Citywise Education called for *'recognition and accreditation to be given to those 'non-academic' aspects of education carried out in schools if these aspects of education are not to continue being side-lined by individual teachers or schools chasing results for their students. Thus, participation and the learning achieved in non-exam programmes (civics, religion, personal development, sport, work experience) should be assessed and credited as part of Leaving Certificate assessment. This would require school-based assessment with outside validation of the assessment methods used. Such validation should be subject to national standards set by the SEC.'*

79. In its submission, Gaisce also highlighted the need for "soft-skills" and noted how Gaisce have *'prospered within Transition Year (TY) because the purpose of Gaisce, and that of TY, is to encourage personal and social development. In providing a structured and progressive framework through which young people learn and develop physically, cognitively and socially. Gaisce encourages and rewards young people to discover their passions and challenge themselves, positively impacting themselves and the world around them.'*

80. In its submission, An Taisce called for schools to focus on teaching children about the environment and noted the good work that was done in the academic year 2019-2020, for schools participating in the Green Schools programme. It noted in its submission that *'as the COVID-19 pandemic begins to decrease in severity the issues of Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss will re-surface and increase as major issues which most younger people will consider a very real and existential threat. This will undoubtedly lead to a need for the Senior Cycle to provide for this reality.'*

81. In its submission, IDA Ireland noted that *'the digital transformation of business is changing how people work, new digital technologies and business models are altering skills profiles for existing roles and creating new roles. With*

*greater automation of routine tasks, the future of work will become increasingly about non-routine, problem-solving, creative and interpersonal tasks.*

*Transversal skills such as critical thinking; reasoning and complex problem-solving; creativity and innovation; collaboration; communication; active learning; initiative and self-management, are the skills that will enable an individual to adapt and upskill to meet the demands of the continually changing enterprise landscape. Industry is increasingly focused on the T-shaped employee, who has a depth of technical knowledge and a breadth of transversal skills that enable them to work across business functions and be flexible and responsive to changes.'*

82. In its submission, Rethink Ireland noted that *'creativity and the Arts have been outlined by numerous reports as being an integral principle underpinning the curriculum reform process in Ireland. Further to this there is evidence for beneficial outcomes for students who engage in creative practices such as community building, enhancing personal development and engendering a sense of wellbeing.'*

83. In its submission, Localise Youth Volunteering noted the importance of including volunteering into a Senior Cycle programme and stated that *'Leaving Certificate has been found to have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of students and on teaching and learning, which permeates much of the educational experience. Inculcating a planned programme of volunteerism does much to redress these adverse effects as young people, become connected, respected and contributors to their communities.'*

*If we truly believe that volunteering helps young people to have successful lives, and that volunteering helps to create the civic, social and community leaders of the future, then a structured approach to building a youth volunteerism framework is essential and valuing volunteerism in the way we do academic achievements is a must.'*

84. In its submission, the National Parents Council Post Primary (NPCPP) noted that *'The overall educational trend still focuses mainly on the academic abilities of a young person, where the physical / practical talents, creative abilities and general non-academic achievements are not awarded equal attention or priority. Results have demonstrated the positive effects of arts education in several areas including a students' intrinsic enjoyment, art form knowledge and skills, social and cultural knowledge, creativity and thinking skills, communication and expressive skills, personal and social development, effects that transfer to other contexts.'*

## DIGITAL LEARNING

85. In her submission, Dr Hyland noted that *'students and teachers are now adept at learning online due to the Covid 19 pandemic.'* She proposed that *'this experience should be built on and some teaching and learning should continue online. Some assessments could also be carried out online – preferably within the school building and under teacher supervision.'* However, she said that *'for this to be successful the issue of access to technology needs to be addressed with financial or other resources provided to ensure all students have equal opportunities.'*

86. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Ms. Andrea Feeney, CEO, SEC, stated *'we welcome the inclusion in the announcement of exploration of the potential uses of ICT in examinations and assessment and also the recognition that this must be tied into the Digital Strategy for Schools.'*

87. The SEC Submission refers to the fact that digital versions of coursework completion booklets in a range of subjects are provided to students with special educational needs are provided under the scheme of Reasonable Accommodation. Consideration is being given to migrating to the digital completion and submission of the coursework reports in History, Geography and Religious Education for all Leaving Certificate candidates.

88. The submission also notes that coursework components in Leaving Certificate Physical Education, Computer Science and Design and Communications Graphics (DCG) are submitted digitally for marking. In the longer term, once the marking of e-Coursework has been trialled and implemented, it is planned to migrate the marking of these components on the online system. In the meantime, an interim measure is being interrogated which may be a portal-based marking system.

89. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Ms Maebh Costello told the Committee that *‘Digital skills is a key area. Ireland is a hub for many major global ICT firms, and we need to ensure there is a strong pipeline of ICT graduates, which will continue to raise Ireland’s profile in this regard. It is a fact that digital skills and digital literacy have penetrated almost every sector of society and that everybody will need to have access to those skills. We need to see digital literacy embedded across the education system and the foundation for that needs to be built not only at second level but also in primary schools to ensure that students have the right preparation to launch them into more advanced digital skills such as computer science, coding, data analysis and even artificial intelligence (AI) skills.’*

90. In oral evidence, on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021, Department of Education Officials noted that Minister Foley had announced, *‘an extensive consultation process to help inform the development of the new digital strategy for schools. This is intended to be a successor to the previous digital strategy which saw more than €200 million invested in the embedding of digital technologies across teaching, learning and assessment.’* The Department stated that, *‘in consultation with the NCCA, it will ensure all new and revised curricular specifications include clear statements that focus on the development of digital learning skills and the use of digital technologies as a resource in achieving specific outcomes across the curriculum.’*

91. In his submission, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, proposed that *‘The Department of Education needs to develop, or select, a single digital*

*platform which they will support across all schools so that every school has access to the same online option in the future. They must also offer training to teachers on how to use and maximise such a platform so that pupils' experience of online learning is not determined by whether or not their school has someone who knows how to use a particular platform. Standardisation will offer consistency and certainty for all pupils.'*

92. The ISSU submission stated that *'98.6% of students they surveyed<sup>4</sup> enjoy using digital technology to help their learning. 59.6% stated they needed frequent access to a device to help them study and complete homework assignments and a further 80.5% stated they would like to use digital technology more in school to help with their learning.'*

93. In oral evidence, 5 October 2021, Mr. Eamon Dennehy, President, Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI), referred to the move to remote teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. He opined that *'this change to remote teaching has shown both the potential of digital learning as well as the limitations.'* Mr. Dennehy pointed out that digital literacy is not just to enable people to use digital technology for learning, it also has benefits with social and cultural skills, critical thinking and *'understanding bias to enable young people to participate fully and ethically in a digitalised social world.'*

94. The ASTI submission further stated that *'Digital Literacy is a key skill across all subject areas. It comprehends practical technical skills, collaboration skills, social and cultural skills, critical thinking, and understanding bias to enable young people to participate fully and ethically in a digitalised social world.'*

95. The SFI submission noted that *'Many schools now want to capitalise on the efforts made by their teachers during the pandemic and on the new knowledge they have acquired to support different practices. We also support the development of digital skills and digital technologies that can contribute to*

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<sup>4</sup> [ISSU Senior Cycle Reform Report 2021](#)

*future resilience while ensuring that such developments are inclusive and remain focused on bridging the digital divide.'*

96. The IBEC submission noted that a *'reformed leaving certificate needs to support learners in developing their digital literacy and provide greater opportunities to engage in STEM and digital learning. Our experience with Covid has demonstrated the value and importance of digitally enhanced learning both at home and in the classroom. However, it has also brought into stark relief the digital divide that exists between schools across Ireland. All students need the opportunity to develop the mixture of digital and complementary soft skills necessary to fully engage in an increasingly digitalised society and the future of work. This requires bridging the divide between schools in relation to access to technology, broadband connectivity and technical assistance.'*

97. In its submission, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFNS) stated that *'there are a range of critical skills areas for Ireland's economy that need to be reflected in this process of reform. One area is the development of digital skills as a core workforce competency, as well as higher-level ICT skills to facilitate and leverage digital transformation across Ireland's economy.'*

98. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr Hugh Ahern told the Committee that *'all students should have access to digital devices for schoolwork. Covid-19 has shown us that there is a need for all students to have access to a digital device. Currently, only 81% of DEIS students have access to a digital device for schoolwork while 88% of non-DEIS students have access to a device.'*

99. In its submission, the Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI) stressed the need for the *'enhanced use of enabling technology in everyday teaching and learning settings.'* It explained that *'this greatly enables dyslexic students, and others, to access the curriculum.'* It made the point that *'access to textbooks in alternative formats (e.g. e-books, pdf, daisy format etc.) both in class and at home would help dyslexic students greatly.'* Furthermore, it called for these formats to be

available for any assessment activities including project work, classroom-based assessments, and formal exams. Finally, it stated that *‘students should be able to use appropriate digital devices in school and the infrastructure in schools should support this.’*

100.The DAI also called for clarity on what digital devices are permitted for use in assessed situations such as exams. It stated that *‘students are discouraged from using technology in everyday classwork for fear that they won’t be granted permission to use the same in formal exams.’* It noted that *‘students generally only find out what they are permitted to use a few months or even weeks before their exams if they will be allowed to use this technology during their exams.’*

101.In oral evidence, on 5 October 2021, Ms. Clare Austick, President, Union of Students in Ireland (USI), echoed these concerns by stating that *“the digital divide must be bridged to ensure all students have equal access to learning materials such as a laptop, strong Wi-Fi connection or the technology and software that is needed for the use of an online hybrid model.”* Ms. Austick expressed the view that *‘State funding will be needed to assist students from deprived backgrounds and low-income households in this regard.’*

102.In its submission, Fóroige stated that digital education should *‘focus on digital skills development, digital literacy, digital citizenship and digital safety and be taught and facilitated at foundation, advanced and creative levels.’*

103.Fóroige further proposed the *‘need to enable young people to become creators, rather than only consumers of technology, and to support them to use their innate interest in technology and natural curiosity to explore their potential as leaders, digital creators and change makers.’*

104.In its submission, COGG noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic, there were difficulties for schools with no broadband coverage, and it believed it is essential to ensure that every school in the country, regardless of geographical location, has reliable high-speed broadband coverage.

105. COGG further stated that *'Information and Communication Technology (ICT) needs to be a core subject in the post-primary education system.'*

106. COGG also noted that The Department of Education and Gaeltacht Education Unit's hub school project, who made the Leaving Certificate physics course available online to students in Gaeltacht schools, was a great success. It recommended that it be extended to include more schools and that more subjects be made available. It stated that the *'main challenge for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium post-primary schools is the ability to recruit qualified teachers with a high standard of Irish and this problem could be alleviated with hub schools.'*

107. Several submissions identified key challenges that come with digital learning such as ensuring equal access to high-speed broadband, access to appropriate digital devices, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers, clear policies within schools and dedicated leadership posts.

108. In its submission, the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) stated that *'digital learning tools and technology combined with core e-safety skills enable students to develop effective self-directed learning skills, sharpen critical thinking skills, accommodate different learning styles and promote online safety and ethics, which are vital preparation for developing safe, independent and digital literate learners. In reality, to prepare students for the modern world, digital literacy should be considered as the fourth pillar of education alongside reading, writing and maths.'*

## LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED (LCA)

109. In his submission, Dr. Jim Gleeson stated that the *'main components of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) include a focus on the engagement of students in active, experiential, integrated, community-based learning.'* He referred to the fact it is modular and semesterised in structure which facilitates the accumulation of credit over time. He opined that *'the LCA can be viewed as well ahead of its time now that the emphasis of the traditional Leaving Certificate is moving from the teaching of content to the learning of skills.'*

110. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Dr. Jim Gleeson stated that *‘the LCA could assist in reimagining the traditional Leaving Certificate.’* He further stated that *“the LCA, alongside transition year, could be the stimulus and foundation for the reform of the traditional Leaving Certificate.”*

111. Dr. Jim Gleeson recommended the following *‘involve increased use of continuous assessment, similar to that of LCA. This could help to refocus minds on the educational significance of grades as against the current tendency to see them purely in terms of a points score and the current ‘big bang’ situation where students don’t receive any official results until eight weeks after they’ve finished the exams.’*

112. The ISSU submission noted that *‘only some students have access to the LCA while those in other schools do not, as these choices are often defined along the lines of gender and socioeconomic factors.’*

113. In its submission, the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) stated that *‘currently at Senior Cycle there are 4 separate programmes, Transition year, Leaving Certificate Established, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Leaving Certificate Applied. NAPD advocates for an integrated Senior Cycle programme that links these Senior Cycle programmes in a coherent and student-centred manner in line with Looking At Our School (LAOS)<sup>5</sup>, 2016 vision for highly effective Teaching, Learning and Assessment.’*

114. In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Mr. Barry Slattery, Deputy CEO, NCCA, noted that *‘In addition to learning from other jurisdictions there is also much to learn from the leaving certificate applied programme that currently exists. It is a credit-based programme where the credits are allocated on the basis of different modules, so it is semesterised as it is broken into four sessions. Ms Forster mentioned the work with schools. That has flagged numerous times that*

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<sup>5</sup> [Looking at our School 2016](#)

*one of the main directions for development in a redeveloped senior cycle is diversifying pathways. We have been asked to look at how we can break down any ring-fencing. There is also a very loud consensus from the reviews that we need to address the ring-fencing, which relates to many of the other issues we discussed earlier because it has a huge impact on parity of esteem and that has an impact on the uptake of the leaving certificate applied programme itself. There is much in that programme and as we work to break down the barriers between the various different programmes there is much opportunity there. It is really exciting.'*

In oral evidence, on 26 April 2022, Ms. Andrea Feeney, CEO, SEC , further stated that *'We spoke briefly about the pathways with respect to the leaving certificate applied. One of the challenges within the system is that the leaving certificate applied is not valued. It is not appreciated. The leaving certificate applied is a wonderful programme. We spoke about having a very high rate of retention. Much of that is down to the leaving certificate applied. Students who might have left school after the junior cycle in the past will go on and complete their leaving certificate applied and their qualification is as valued as the leaving certificate. Unfortunately, the leaving certificate applied is not valued in the context of progression and students have more limited opportunities. They can use it for further education but cannot use it to go to higher education directly. They can pursue post-leaving courses but they cannot go directly to higher education. There is a challenge in having that valued. The debate and discourse on the senior cycle has been extremely helpful in shining a light on the leaving certificate applied programme and what it is doing for a cohort of young people who would have possibly left school without this final qualification were it not for that programme. We would love there to be more recognition for that programme, the wonderful work leaving certificate applied co-ordinators in schools do and the wonderful engagement by students in that programme, which they bring throughout their two years in the senior cycle programme'*.

## FOREIGN LANGUAGES

115. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr Tony Donohoe told the Committee that *'we need foreign language skill sets, to support the competitiveness and diversification of Ireland's trade with non-UK markets post Brexit and allow Ireland to operate and advance its interests in an increasingly globalised economy. Importantly, transversal or softer skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communications, creativity and leadership will also need to be embedded to support students' capacity and resilience, as well as that of the wider economy, in dealing with change, such as the transition to a digital and greener economy and the resulting impact on job roles and occupations.'*

116. Furthermore, he added *'I find languages the most problematic of the lot, with regard to how they are actually addressed. It is a disadvantage of being an English-speaking country. I do not think the teaching and learning of Irish has done any favours, which is due to the way that Irish is taught rather than the fact that it should be taught. It might have dissuaded some people from taking up languages. Basically, we need to give young people opportunities to use languages, be it in sport or wherever else and in different contexts. Believe me, language skills are critical in this post-Brexit world. Those in the Irish indigenous sector, in particular, will have to diversify their markets. There is an old saying that you buy in your own language, but you sell in your customer's language. If one wants to be successful in export markets one needs to have staff who have a facility with languages.'*

117. In its submission, IBEC stated that *'we have people of more than 200 different nationalities in Ireland. We need to look at the impact of issues such as Brexit and globalisation, which are actually driving the demand for the learning of different languages. We must look at the challenges around the dominance of English in the global area, the lack of awareness around opportunities that foreign languages can bring to the individual and the perceived difficulty around learning languages, as well as the shortage of teachers who are qualified to teach modern languages.'*

118. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr Eamonn Moran, Principal Officer, Department of Education, told the Committee *'I mentioned earlier that among the new leaving certificate subject specifications introduced in recent years were four new foreign language specifications: Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese and Mandarin Chinese. These arose essentially from the Department's foreign languages strategy, Languages Connect<sup>6</sup>, which was published a few years ago. It is a strategy to ensure an increased take-up of languages by students and also to seek to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages... Within the leaving certificate there is a facility for students to take some non-curricular languages. These are EU languages that are not currently taught in schools. Our foreign languages strategy is approaching its mid stage.'*

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHS (STEM)

119. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Dr Ruth Freeman, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) noted that *'schools [are] being measured by students getting 97% conversion to university with other schools getting much lower levels. There is an argument that schools with 97% conversion are failing huge numbers of their students. There are probably many students in that cohort who are perhaps very technical and would do very well through STEM routes, in apprenticeships and in other kinds of STEM-type roles. Perhaps we could do that through having other routes as well, through STEM in the leaving certificate, and not just a points race with these three very clearly divided subjects that, because of stereotypes, attract very different cohorts of students to study them. That does not really represent science in the real world.'*

120. Dr Freeman continued *'we hugely welcome the new options on the CAO form. STEM has consistently been associated with high academic achievement in maths but we know there is a range involved. We need far more diverse ways of thinking in STEM than just people who are getting top marks in higher level maths. I fully endorse having a broad range of pathways into STEM. STEM needs to be broad and diverse if we are to solve the problems.'*

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<sup>6</sup> [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie))

121. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Department of Education Officials told the Committee that it has set up a group to examine how to improve gender balance in STEM. This group has representation from industry, higher education, parents and students with a view to seeing what interventions had been tried and tested, which ones worked and which did not. It was stated that *'In short, a key finding was that no single intervention will achieve gender equity. Rather, there is a requirement to support multiple interventions addressing different segments of the ecosystem to effect the change that was required.'*

122. In its submission, the Irish Science Teachers Association (ISTA) noted that *'in 2000 the introduction of Science in Society topics to the Physics, Chemistry and Biology syllabi currently being taught was in keeping with international trends in science education and was done at the specific request of the science inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. Unfortunately, in the current draft specifications (syllabi) a vast array of topics showing the relationship between science and society has been deleted. For example, in the current Leaving Certificate chemistry syllabus, the contributions of Marie Curie and Dorothy Hodgkins are highlighted in the Science and Society column. Both of these scientists have been completely removed from the proposed new chemistry specification. In fact, there is not a single woman scientist mentioned anywhere in the new chemistry specification. This is also the case in the physics and biology specifications. At a time when the public understanding of science is paramount, the removal of the Science in Society pillar makes no sense and goes against all international trends in design of science curricula as well as undermining efforts to encourage more females into the STEM subjects.'*

123. In its submission, IDA Ireland stated that *'the activities [our clients] carry out in Ireland are wide-ranging, constantly evolving and highly dependent on a workforce with a depth and breadth of scientific, technological, engineering, and mathematical skills. It is vital that our education system continues to produce graduates with STEM skills aligned to these sectors, as well as responding to*

*skills needs as these sectors evolve and new areas of opportunity emerge, such as AI; Industrial Automation; Advanced Manufacturing; Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products; Renewable Energy; Cloud Computing, and 5G.*

*To meet the growing demand for STEM skills we need to increase participation in STEM subjects at Leaving Certificate Level. Recent years have seen increases in numbers of students taking Physics, Chemistry and higher-level Maths, this momentum must be maintained through reforms that will increase the attractiveness of STEM subjects and STEM careers to Leaving Certificate students. Developing new learning methods and demonstrating real world application of STEM is required to foster greater interest in these subjects. In particular, we must focus on increasing participation rates among girls in all STEM subjects and ensure the full range of STEM subjects are available in all post-primary schools.'*

## **SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)**

124. In his submission, Mr. Hugh Ahern recommended that Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) should become a Leaving Certificate Subject. He stated that *'I also believe that SPHE should become part of the senior cycle curriculum as many schools do not have a SPHE Class.'*

125. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr Hugh Ahern said that *'home economics should also be offered in all schools regardless of the gender profile of the school. Running a household correctly and knowing how to cook is an incredibly important life skill. Unfortunately, a lot of boys' schools do not offer this. There should be a new subject of social, personal and health education and life skills. For students who do not select home economics and for schools that cannot offer it as a subject, a life skills course should be offered to help students deal with life's situations.'*

126. In its submission, the Irish Traveller Movement stated that *'life skills and wellbeing'* must be incorporated *'as core components of the senior cycle/ leaving cert curriculum.'*

127. In its submission, *Gambling with Lives* stated that ‘UK Gambling Commission estimate that 450,000 11–16-year-olds gamble in the UK, with 55,000 children already addicted, whilst YouGov research suggests that there are 5 million people currently negatively impacted by gambling. The submission further stated that direct gambling causes harm including damage to mental health, finances, life opportunities, and relationships and that one in four gamblers are at high risk of suffering harm. It also noted that there are an estimated 250-650 gambling-related suicides every year in the UK, with young people most at risk.’

128. The *Gambling with Lives* submission also called for ‘a public health approach to gambling, including a regulatory objective that the entire population should be protected from harm and exploitation.’ It referred to the mode and frequency of gambling which has changed dramatically.

129. The submission also referred to a programme it launched in 2021. It was created by academics, educational specialists, clinicians, an award-winning film maker and people with lived experience of gambling harm, for young people aged 14 and over. The submission recommended that the Irish Government adopt a similar approach here in Ireland.

## RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE)

130. In oral evidence, on 2 November 2021, Mr Simon Harris, TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, referred to the provision of RSE in schools and that [the current system] ‘*Bizarrely, it does not teach students properly about sex education and consent. We in the higher education system then find ourselves having to play catch-up. We all know the huge difficulties around sexual harassment, sexual violence and consent. Why do we bury our heads in the sand on these issues when students are at a much younger age?*’

131. In its submission, the ISSU referred to a survey<sup>7</sup> conducted in conjunction with the ESRI that found that 1 in 3 students did not receive any form of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). Additionally, 60.4% of students who were provided with RSE only received it at a minimal level.

132. In its submission, the USI stated that it echoed *'ISSU's calls for legislation to ensure that RSE classes are provided in a secular, denominational format not influenced by the characteristics of any school and for the material to be approved by a relevant union within the Health Service Executive.'*

133. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Dr Emer Smyth stated that *'The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA, is currently reviewing relationships and sexuality education. Data from Growing Up in Ireland have shown that there are still gaps for young people. We assume that young people are talking to their parents about sex and relationships, when they are not necessarily, and young men in particular may be missing out on those conversations. It is important that we have a nuanced view of sex education in our schools in the context of broader well-being.'*

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

7. An *Expert Working Group on Modern Foreign Languages* should be established by the Department of Education as an urgent priority, in line with the commitments made in The Programme for Government to encourage student's proficiency in modern foreign languages. The Group should be chaired by an external expert and comprise teachers, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA); language experts; cultural organisations, industry representatives and senior officials from the Department of Education. The Department of Education should ascertain if there is EU Funding available to support Foreign Language Learning as in Further and Higher Education.

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<sup>7</sup> [ISSU Senior Cycle Reform Report 2021](#)

8. Senior Cycle students, studying a foreign language, should be given the opportunity to immerse themselves in the language and culture of that country. This would involve exchange programmes and similar initiatives. Students could be assessed on their immersion experience by the completion of a Report in the language being studied. Funding should be made available to ensure all students can participate in exchanges.

9. An *Expert Working Group on STEM Subjects and Increased Female Participation* should be established by the Department of Education to review current policy and teaching of these subjects from Primary School up to Senior Cycle. The Group should be chaired by an external expert and comprise teachers, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), Subject Matter Experts, industry representatives and senior officials from the Department of Education.

10. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) should become a Leaving Certificate Subject. The Department of Education, in liaison with the the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), should develop a syllabus with a view to introducing it for Senior Cycle students from September 2023. The new subject should include, *inter alia*, modules on Domestic and International Politics; Personal Financial Management, Alcohol and Drug Addiction; Gambling Addiction (*Gambling for Lives* Programme); Consensual Behaviour; Online Safety; Positive Mental Health (to include Anti Bullying Measures and Resilience) and Home Economics.

11. The Department of Education should mandate all Secondary Schools to provide at least 2 classes per week of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). In addition, legislation should be introduced to ensure that RSE classes, and materials taught in these classes are part of a new national curriculum and not influenced by the ethos, denomination, or any other characteristics of individual schools. To this end, the Department of Education, in liaison with the the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), should develop

an appropriate syllabus for roll out and mandatory delivery, with regular inspections, in all primary and secondary schools.

12.All Senior Cycle students should have the option of combining traditional Leaving Certificate (LC) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Subjects. To this end, the Department of Education, in liaison with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), should review the LCA Model, to identify how the evidentially successful parts of it could be incorporated into the traditional Senior Cycle.

13.Senior Cycle students who complete the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) should gain direct entry through the Central Applications Office (CAO) system to Higher Education Institutions.

14.The Department of Education should develop *A National Online Learning Programme*, to be rolled out to all primary and secondary schools, as a matter of urgent priority, to comprise:

- One centralised Learning Platform.
- Appropriate support and training for all principals and teachers and parents who are home schooling.
- Remote device purchase that ensures disadvantaged students have access to devices for online learning.
- Adequate broadband for online learning.
- Provisions for Blended Learning.
- Transition Measures for Schools as the Plan is rolled out.

15.Senior Cycle students should be allowed complete their Senior Cycle examinations and assignments on a computer or other appropriate digital device from 2023 onwards.

16. Digital literacy classes should be introduced from Junior Cycle onwards from September 2022 to ensure all students are digitally literate. Teachers should be provided with training in this area as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD) with financial allowances for teaching Digital Skills.

## CHAPTER 4 ACCESS, EQUALITY AND WELL-BEING SUPPORT

### ACCESS AND INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION

134. Several submissions referred to the need for quality of access to subjects regardless of it being a single sex or a co-educational school.

135. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr. Hugh Ahern stated that *'On the applied sciences in girls' schools, when the students from the girls' school in Mallow come to my school, the teachers who teach applied sciences offer the teaching of applied sciences during the evening. We do not offer metalwork or engineering; we only offer woodwork and technical graphics. I know there is a huge uptake in those with the girls. Home economics should be offered in boys' schools. I think there would be a huge uptake. One of the most successful chefs in the world, Gordon Ramsay, is male. It should not just be considered as a subject for females. It should be offered.'*

136. Deputy Ó Ríordáin noted, at a meeting on 9 November 2021 that *'some 15% of students who go to DEIS second level schools do not make it as far as leaving certificate. Overall retention of students to Leaving Certificate level is approximately 91%, which reflects pretty well internationally, but it is 85% in DEIS schools. The number of DEIS schools where not a single student studies higher level English at leaving certificate level is 31.'*

137. In his submission, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, stated *'I believe the same system of streaming and recording could also facilitate many of the DEIS schools to offer different subjects or to offer higher level options where only a few students want that. If schools offering higher level maths could stream their classes to another school for 5 - 10 students, then accessibility and ambition could align for many young people in less advantaged areas. It could help too in subjects where there is a shortage of teachers such as languages or history.'*

138. In its submission, the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) acknowledged the support provided by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in developing Wellbeing Supports available on the Department of Education website. However, the submission noted, *'it is also important that students should be able to access therapeutic, socio-emotional and counselling support in the school setting.'* It opined that *'these supports are required from early years right up to senior cycle.'* The submission further stated that *'it believes all pupils, including those with Special Educational Needs should be entitled to access national certification of their educational achievements.'*

139. The ISSU submission noted that, *'in a survey conducted in conjunction with the ESRI, when students were asked to respond to the statement: 'The Leaving Cert Examination is an accurate reflection of my work during 5th and 6th year', more than half (51.6%) of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed.'*

It also noted that students who attended fee-paying schools agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 29.9% more than DEIS school students. The ISSU stated that these figures *'highlight dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the Leaving Certificate amongst students as well as showcasing the inherent inequalities in Irish education.'*

140. In oral evidence, on 9 November 2021, Ms Tanya Ward, Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) stated that *'Metanarrative studies show that children's ability at the age of three can predict whether they get to third level or not, particularly for boys. That tells us that inequality is embedded from early in a child's life. How do we address that? It starts with early-years provision and having high intervention and wraparound provision through the kinds of programmes that Barnardos delivers. We must ensure those programmes are available and freely accessible for children throughout the country.'*

141. In its submission, Barnardos noted that *'education is a primary route out of disadvantage and poorer health. Unfortunately, some groups of children are unable to reach their full educational potential under the current Leaving*

*Certificate structure, as it fails to give appropriate allowance or consideration to their challenges and adversity, leading to restricted future opportunities across several aspects of their lives. Statistics demonstrate that children from more deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds attain poorer results than those from groups that are more affluent. Reforms should look to address inequality and seek to improve outcomes for those currently at greatest disadvantage.'*

142. In its submission, the HECA stated that *'we need to implement assessments which capture, and reward students' diverse learning abilities rather than the current Leaving Certificate which rewards learners who excel in memory recall. To have inclusiveness, the Leaving Certificate reform needs to accommodate different learning styles and help students to understand their preferences. Therefore, curriculum and assessment options at senior cycle should allow for sufficient distinction between students of different abilities and to support this objective, an emphasis on the principles of Universal Design in the classroom and on the digital learning environment is warranted.'*

143. In its submission, the Home Education Network (HEN) Ireland stated that the reasons they have for avoiding the senior cycle altogether include;

- The rigidity of the school system with a clear lack of flexibility in programmes or assessment modes to be truly inclusive of all students, especially those with additional & learning needs;
- lack of subject choice in the local schools/Youthreach or ETB centres;
- inaccessibility of subjects where a teacher is required to sign off on project work throughout the school year e.g Art, Building Construction, Engineering etc.;
- The requirement to spend two years preparing for terminal exams in up to seven content heavy subjects including the three mandatory subjects; and
- The perception of large portions of their time being wasted when they wish to be engaged in more fulfilling and purposeful pursuits.

144. In its submission, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) stated that *'more needs to be done in schools including learning life skills such as form filling and practical maths and there should be more effort to ensure students do not leave primary and secondary school with unmet literacy and numeracy needs.'*

145. NALA further noted that it is important that any reform of the Senior Cycle will properly *'re-engage with adults who left school early through targeted outreach, guidance and a range of options for participation.'*

146. In its submission, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) stated that they provide *'a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE Scheme) to support candidates who might have difficulty in accessing the examinations due to their special educational needs. The scheme provides accommodations for some 20,000 candidates each year with a variety of complex needs including learning difficulties as well as permanent or temporary physical, visual, hearing, medical, sensory, emotional, behavioral or other conditions.'*

*The purpose of the scheme is to allow candidates who have special educational needs that interfere with their capacity to engage with the standard examination arrangements to demonstrate what they know and can do, without compromising the integrity of the assessment. This involves such students being held to the same standard as other candidates with regard to what the examination is intended to measure. In common with similar schemes which operate in other jurisdictions, the focus of the scheme is on the need to remove barriers to accessing the examinations, while retaining the need to assess the same underlying skills and competencies as are assessed for all other candidates, and to apply the same standards of achievement as apply to all other candidates.'*

147. In oral evidence, on 9 November 2021, regarding students accessing grinds, Ms Mai Fanning, President of the National Parents Council Post-Primary

(NPCPP) stated that *'my argument would be that students spend enough hours in the school. They have direct contact with their teacher, so the necessity for grinds should not be so relied on. In many schools, particularly in those focused on the academic, and especially in science subjects, including chemistry, physics and mathematics at higher level, the expectation is that in order to get a good grade in the higher level paper it is nigh-on impossible without recourse to grinds. If the teachers cannot cover the curriculum, or they are struggling to cover it within the timeframe, that is a major flaw in how the curriculum is produced and presented to them. If it is a necessity to get a grind, that excludes many parents who just cannot provide to their children. It is a problem and it is one of the reasons we would like to explore the possibility of module learning instead of the final exam being everything.'*

148.The ISSU submission noted the high cost of schoolbooks each year and the rising number of families seeking assistance from financial support charities such as St. Vincent de Paul.

149.In its submission, the Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association (CSSPA) state that it is imperative that the Department of Education *'ensures equality of funding for second level schools thereby reducing the financial demands on parents in providing significant voluntary contributions.'*

## **STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)**

150.In its submission, the INTO proposed the introduction of age-appropriate curricula and learning programmes at Senior Cycle Level so that pupils who are at L2LP and L1LP at Junior Cycle level, can move on and access certification to acknowledge their educational achievement. The submission acknowledges that *'this will require a wider variety of assessment methodologies, more compatible with the needs and abilities of this cohort of pupils than the current terminal examination.'*

151. In its submission, the ISSU stated that *'there are socioeconomic disparities in access to SEN accommodations between schools due to, among other reasons, a lack of resources.'*

152. In its submission, AslAm stated that we must *'ensure that future reforms to the Senior Cycle are designed in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and on the Principles of Universal Design for Learning, so that all aspects of the Leaving Certificate are accessible to all Autistic students.'*

153. AslAm also called for the development of *'soft skills programmes, employment support programmes and increase access to career guidance advice and counselling services to ensure that all Autistic people, across a diversity of support needs, can access employment and higher and further education opportunities.'*

154. In its submission, Inclusion Ireland stated that *'reasonable accommodations for the Leaving Cert are mainly for people with physical and sensory needs but few accommodations exist to enable and empower people with intellectual disabilities to take state exams in an alternative way. More flexibility in accommodations need to be available with a focus on the broad range of support needs an individual may.'*

155. Inclusion Ireland further stated that *'lack of career guidance in schools leads to a lack of planning for post school options. Career guidance is needed in all special schools. Provision of career guidance in special schools would send a very clear signal to individual students about their worth, their capacity and capability to live a life fully participating in society.'*

156. Inclusion Ireland also noted that *'in recent years the reform of the Junior Certificate saw the introduction of levels 1 and 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications. There is less of a focus on traditional examinations and more emphasis on participation and continuous assessment through Specific*

*Learning Objectives rather than an examination framework alone. This approach has meant that students with Special Educational Needs can now achieve recognition for their work and achievement on the National Qualification Framework just like their peers. This can now happen in a special school or mainstream education setting. This model is working well and should be expanded and developed for the Leaving Certificate Curriculum.*

*It is understandable that such reform of the entire curriculum will take time so in the meantime where examination is an option, more reasonable accommodations need to be offered for students with intellectual disabilities in particular to have more time and support to engage in examination if it is something they wish to do.*

*The crux of the assessment matter is that there needs to be a suite of flexible, accessible options available so that all students can engage in the curriculum and attain a qualification.'*

157. In his submission, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, noted that *'some students with health, mental health or behavioural issues would benefit greatly from having recordings or streaming of classes because they can access them at home either simultaneously to their classmates, or at a time that is more appropriate to their ability to learn. This needs to be given serious consideration, initially for senior cycle students, but it is likely to benefit all students.'*

## **HEAR AND DARE SCHEMES**

158. In its submission, the ISSU stated that *'there is inaccessibility and difficulty with the HEAR and DARE application processes. As a result, a high number of students cannot qualify for DARE and HEAR, often due to the strict time constraints regarding the deadlines for submission.'*

159. In oral evidence, on 2 November 2021, Mr Tim Conlon, Head of Policy and Strategic Planning, International Programmes & Gender Equality, Higher

Education Authority (HEA) stated that *'equity of access to higher education is one of the key priorities for the HEA, it is important that any reform of the leaving certificate takes account of the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged students in accessing higher education. The higher education access route, HEAR, and disability access route to education, DARE, schemes, which offer entry to courses on a reduced points basis for socio-economically disadvantaged students and students with a disability, are an important mechanism in that regard.'*

*Overall, the leaving certificate, and any future reform of it, should ensure that all students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or who face barriers in terms of progression to higher education have as a fair chance of accessing higher education and achieving comparable outcomes as those from more affluent backgrounds. These outcomes cover both access to and progression through higher education, as well as completion and future career development.'*

## **GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS**

160. In its submission, IDA Ireland stated that *'the transformation of industry has created a variety of career paths beyond the traditional third level option. The role of career advisor is significant in guiding students towards the best option, and as such should be considered in the broader question of leaving certification reform.'*

161. In its submission, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) stated that *'the work of 5th year and TY (Transition Year) should be considered in calculating the overall Senior Cycle grade. In our role as guidance counsellors, practically every student we meet at the start of 6th year laments: "I wish I had worked harder in 5th year, but I just could not motivate myself after TY." Incorporating elements of 5th and TY years' work into the overall Senior Cycle grade would focus our students to work consistently through TY and 5th year and be better prepared for the workload and stress of 6th year.'*

162. In its submission Rethink Ireland stated that *‘student curriculum choices are led by how predictable the exam is, rather than what they actually want to pursue. There is a need for sustained career guidance from upper primary onwards. Often in schools career guidance is kicking in during the senior cycle when important choices around subjects have already been made. This is particularly relevant for young people who might not be coming from families/community cultures where the idea of further/higher education courses is valued.’*

163. In its submission, the CSSPA stated that *‘career guidance teachers to be part of the parent teachers’ meetings for 4th 5th and 6th year with a policy to meet parents in 1st 2nd and 3rd year by appointment during the year. This would provide clear pathways to a career plan for individual students.’*

## EMOTIONAL AND THERAPEUTIC COUNSELLORS

164. In his submission, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, stated *‘With regard to well-being, the lack of in-school therapists for children experiencing psychosocial difficulties or with a mental illness may have particular implications when married with the extreme stress that the Leaving Certificate generates in many students. This Office has consistently advocated for independent school therapists so that students can feel confident that their whole wellbeing is catered for across the duration of their educational career. It would be the ultimate prevention measure to avoid undue stress across the senior cycle. This idea forms part of the recommendations from this Committee in relation to the Mental Health Impact of School Bullying<sup>8</sup>.’*

165. The Cork Life Centre (CLC) submission stated *‘In terms of wellbeing supports a key recommendation is that students at mainstream secondary schools have access to counselling and psychotherapy services onsite as distinct from guidance counselling. In our setting outside the mainstream the*

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<sup>8</sup> [2021-08-23\\_report-on-school-bullying-and-the-impact-on-mental-health\\_en.pdf \(oireachtas.ie\)](#)

*ability to respond to psychological distress or trauma is key to the outcomes of our young people.'*

166. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Ms Anne Tansey, National Director, National Educational Psychological Service, (NEPS) stated *'at previous meetings of the committee, we have spoken about how the Department of Health has responsibility for the provision of counselling services in Ireland. They are provided through HSE primary care psychology services and CAMHS. The services are provided in the community and not in a school-based setting. Children and young people can access them through the referral pathways to the HSE services.*

*The HSE has increased the provision of electronic mental health services. Text and telephone supports are available through a range of service providers that are funded by the Department of Health, including Jigsaw, SpunOut and Bodywhys. The Department has increased the capacity of these services to support children and young people.*

*NEPS is rolling out workshops on the promotion of well-being and resilience. They will commence at the beginning of 2022. We hope to have workshops that will draw on the knowledge we have of adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed approaches. These workshops will be accessible and available to all teachers throughout the country through an online platform. They will commence early next term. In addition, guidance counsellors, students support teams, NEPS psychologists and year heads in schools are trained and supported in signposting the services available through the HSE to support the emotional well-being of children and young people.'*

167. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr Ryan Sharpe stated, *'the following has been my experience of the leaving certificate senior cycle so far. The education system has been by far the most stressful thing in my life. Getting an education was not something I looked forward to doing. Instead, it*

*felt like a challenge. Not a challenge that makes one work harder, but an unachievable goal that I was working myself to the bone for.'*

168. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Ms Amber Sheridan O'Callaghan stated, *'for me, the biggest issue was the lack of mental health resources. In the Cork Life Centre, I did have access to counselling and guidance counsellors, but in mainstream school there were no counsellors or mental health supporters to help us through the leaving certificate and the period afterwards. These are essential to get us through it.'*

*I know of quite a few people who would avail of the online services, but they are nowhere near as beneficial as actual counselling. Most of the time the online services are one-off, and they do not provide continuous support. It is only there if you are in an immediate crisis but not if it is a serious crisis either because it cannot deal with that. In-person counselling is really needed, especially in mainstream schools.'*

169. Mr. Sharpe also opined *'with regard to supports, counselling needs to be more generalised and supported in mainstream schools. A big concern I have is that guidance counsellors are not counsellors and counsellors are not guidance counsellors. They should be treated as per their role. It seems many guidance counsellors nowadays are dropping the guidance and giving advice and listening. While I can see what they are trying to do and how they are trying to help, that is not their job. Guidance counsellors are there to support us in our educational health and provide a stepping-stone to what we might do in the future. Counsellors are not in mainstream schools enough for leaving certificate students to have the ability to speak about what is stressing them or going on in their heads. It seems that when the leaving certificate is over, students are expected to forget about mental health because counselling services are not provided after the leaving certificate. Schools expect us to just drop everything and be okay.'*

*I want to touch on the difference between career guidance counsellors and counsellors. Counsellors are not really looked at as a necessary part of the education system. They are looked at as a side aspect that can help students in their personal lives. Mental health affects every single student in the leaving certificate and junior certificate system in one way or another. Students should be taught in schools how to preserve their mental health. Counselling should be more important in schools and it should be provided. The HSE does not touch on it much and counsellors are not provided. There needs to be a huge reformation of the counselling in the leaving certificate system.'*

170. In its submission, the Burren College of Art noted that *'in a volatile, uncertain and complex world social and emotional learning must be accorded much greater importance in what's recognized and assessed in the Leaving Certificate. Cultivating the creativity, agency and resilience of students to address contemporary world challenges such as climate change is vitally important – mindful that social and emotional learning correlates positively with academic success.'*

171. In its submission, Drinkaware noted that *'the period of 17/18 years appears to be a vulnerable one in terms of mental health. This may reflect the confluence of a number of stressors, including important exams, new relationship dynamics and additional responsibilities, together with greater access to potentially risky coping mechanisms such as alcohol, drugs and smoking (Growing up in Ireland Cohort 98, 2020). The Leaving Cert coincides with the transition from adolescence to adulthood which has been noted as a particular 'low' point in life stages (My World Survey, Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012) this further emphasises the need for the senior cycle and the leaving cert encompass a holistic approach to facilitate intellectual, personal and social development.'*

## **PROVISION OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

172. The Irish Library Association (LIA) Schools Group (SG) submission made the following proposals:

- Establish a National Advisory Group on School Library Provision – with a view to developing a National Strategy for School Libraries (similar to the Scottish Strategy 2018-2023<sup>9</sup>).
- The immediate recommencement of the expansion of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) Demonstration Library Project – as committed to in the 2005 DEIS Action Plan.
- Immediate expansion of the JCSP Digital Library Service to become a National Digital Library Service for all second-level schools and Youthreach centres. Referring to the allocation of €20 million to schools for ‘the purchase of books, audio books and other media for the purposes of improving their existing literacy resource banks’ in Budget 2022, it recommends directing a small part of this allocation to the establishment of a National Digital Library Service. It states that this Service would provide immediate access to a professionally selected and curated collection of eBooks, eAudiobooks, Read-Alongs and Digital Magazines to students and staff in all schools and Youthreach centres.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

17. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be reconstituted and expanded urgently as the National Educational Psychological and Counselling Service (NEPCS) and mandated to provide specialist Emotional Counselling and Therapeutic Supports, on site, in all primary and post primary schools. The Service should be adequately resourced and funded to ensure it can deliver on its mandate. In this regard, the Ministers for Education and Health should set up an interdepartmental pilot initiative initially that will transfer Therapists from the Health Service Executive (HSE) to the Department of Education, in a geographically equitable way.

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<sup>9</sup> [vibrant-libraries-thriving-schools.pdf \(scottishlibraries.org\)](https://www.scottishlibraries.org/vibrant-libraries-thriving-schools.pdf)

18. Wellbeing supports should be an integral part of Senior Cycle. Therefore, mandatory training on School Bullying, Wellbeing (including Developing Resilience and Emotional Intelligence), Autism and Neurodiversity, Disability, Racism, and Inclusivity should be provided in all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses, and to all secondary school teachers as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD).
19. Senior Cycle Students will be significant users of school library services when they enter Senior Cycle, in terms of increased Modularisation and Project Work. The Department of Education should establish a *National Advisory Group on School Library Provision* by end of September 2022, to develop a *National Strategy for School Libraries* with the key aim of ensuring there is a School Library, School Librarian and full access to the Digital Library Service in all Primary and Post Primary Schools by end of 2024. In the interim, it should expand both the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) Demonstration Library Project and JCSP Digital Library Service as an urgent national priority.
20. The Department of Education should establish an *Online Streaming Initiative* within DEIS Schools as a pilot initiative, so that students have the choice to study all subjects at Higher Level. The selected schools should have a geographic spread. Pending evaluation, the Initiative should then be rolled out nationwide as a Model of Best Practice. To this end, comprehensive training should be provided to participating teachers as well as Compensatory Allowances.

## CHAPTER 5 IRISH LANGUAGE AND IRISH MEDIUM EDUCATION

173. In its submission, the ISSU noted the importance of communicative Irish remaining a compulsory part of the Leaving Certificate Curriculum. It refers to a USI survey on the teaching of Irish. 70% of all respondents said they would send their own children to Gaelscoileanna, while 98% of those who attended Gaelscoileanna themselves stated they would send their own children to Irish-medium schools.

174. The SEC submission notes that the policy of awarding bonus mark awards in state examinations was introduced by the Government in the 1920s as one of several initiatives to promote the study of subjects through Irish, recognising the extra effort required by students and the lack of textbooks and other teaching resources available in Irish. The policy continues to the present day to take account of the wider issues of policy regarding the Irish language. It states that it is considered that the system of bonus marks is a valuable incentive to encourage the wider use of Irish and give due recognition to the extra effort put in by those studying through the medium of Irish.

175. In her submission, Dr Áine Hyland, stated that *'the recently introduced syllabus for Irish at Junior cycle distinguishes between Irish language (including Gaeltacht) schools (L1) and schools which teach through the medium of English (L2). It is now proposed to introduce a similar approach at senior cycle with different syllabi and examinations for L1 and L2 students. The Leaving Cert. Foundation level programme in Irish will be abolished. If this proposal is to be pursued it needs further consideration by the NCCA as there is no incentive for L1 students to take the more difficult course and examination.'*

176. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Mr Pádraig Ó Beaglaoich, Oifigeach Oideachais Iar-Bhunscoile, Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG), told the Committee *'There are 73 post-primary schools and 15,000 students within the Irish-medium sector at post-primary*

*level. Regarding the proposed reform of the Senior Cycle, it is assumed that there will be major changes to the subject syllabus, or specifications, as they will be known, and that the current subject choice will be expanded. It is essential that a complete provision of high-quality teaching and learning material is in place before the new specifications and subjects are introduced. It is not acceptable for these students to be disadvantaged because educational publishers do not meet their needs.*

*A wide range of subjects, almost 40, are offered for the Leaving Certificate and there is significant work involved to ensure the appropriate resources are produced for existing, newly established and revised subjects. To this end, it is necessary to provide the human and financial resources to the Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, COGG, to ensure the provision of textbooks and support resources, including online digital resources.'*

177. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Ms Fíona Uí Uiginn, Gaeloideachas, stated that *'it is not clear from the draft specifications whether the new L1 specification will be compulsory or optional for students in Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools. Without this information, the view is emerging in the public discourse that students in L1 schools will have to take a more challenging Irish course without compensation for the extra work involved in this course. Why would any student in an L1 school undertake this course?'*

Ms Uí Uiginn, continued *'we need to think about the context in which we are currently operating. This is that there are 25 bonus points available for students studying maths in the Leaving Certificate. Students, as we know, are very strategic at Leaving Certificate Level. They are not going to choose to do a more challenging course without compensation.'*

178. In his submission, Professor Pádraig Ó Duibhir, School of Language, Literacy and Early Childhood Education, Dublin City University (DCU), opined that *'few students will take on a more challenging course without incentive to do so'*. He states that *'the most feasible incentive, in the context of the Leaving*

*Certificate, is to award additional bonus points for honours Irish as as is the case for honours Mathematics.'*

179. In its submission, Gael Linn concurred with the proposal above. It stated that *'Nothing is mentioned in the draft specification as to how pupils will be incentivised to take on a more challenging course for the Leaving Certificate. Adequate recognition and incentives will be required to persuade L1 pupils to take on the more challenging course or else the new course is bound to fail. Bursary schemes or specially allocated places on teaching courses are not sufficient motivation for the majority of students.'* It further noted that a *'wide concern has been expressed by... stakeholders regarding the serious implications involved if L1 students are obliged to sit an examination that is more challenging, without being compensated.'*

180. Gael Linn proposed three options:

- a Communicative Irish Course which all students would study, and which would be based on the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFL) and a Culture and Literature Course. This course would be an optional subject and would cater particularly to native Irish speakers, post-primary Irish-medium students, and students who excel in Irish (this subject would be similar to Applied Maths) and should be incorporated into any new Leaving Certificate programme.
- Irish should remain a core subject at Senior Cycle and should be studied by all pupils.
- The Common European Framework for Languages should be utilised for the teaching and assessment of Irish and at both Junior and Senior Cycle.

181. Gael Linn also asked that *'clear information be provided on the subject, themes, topics and writing styles as the current learning outcomes proposed by the NCCA are unclear and not sufficient to serve as a guide for teachers or pupils.'* It opined that *'the current proposals will create a lack of confidence in the new course.'*

182. Gael Linn further opined that *'proper differentiation has not been made for L1 and L2 students in the draft specifications.'*

183. Several submissions opined that the consultation process on the new course is flawed and should be terminated immediately. Among the key points made are as follows:

- Literary texts and sample examination papers with marking schemes must be provided to allow for a thorough understanding of the new course.
- The Junior Cycle must be comprehensively reviewed before any similar methods are introduced in Senior Cycle.
- Clarity must be provided on the specifications of the new course. The current learning outcomes are too broad and too ambitious, and not substantial enough. Information needs to be provided about the content, themes and topics that would emerge from the learning outcomes. The recommended learning outcomes are unclear. This is insufficient as a guide for teachers and students.
- A higher proportion of the marks must continue to be allocated for the oral examination.
- An extensive Continuing Professional Development Programme must be put in place to support the operation of the reforms before they are introduced for the Senior Cycle.
- The Education Act (Section 7(2)(d)), makes it a statutory function of the Minister for Education to provide support services through Irish to recognised schools which provide teaching through Irish. To this end, it will be necessary to have teachers who are highly proficient in Irish and have experience of teaching through Irish.
- Clarification is needed on whether the course will be optional or mandatory in Gaeltacht schools.

- The draft specifications make no reference to the Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference<sup>10</sup>.
- An additional subject based on literature, heritage and culture: *Litríocht agus Saíocht na Gaeilge* should be introduced.

184. The Gaeloideachas submission stated that *‘there is a need for comprehensive, integrated and long-term planning for the Irish language in the education System, across all levels, in recognition of its status and importance as one of the official languages of Ireland.’* It referred to the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language, that states *‘the achievement by the education authorities of a more systematic and intensive national focus on the universal learning of Irish.’* In line with this guidance, Gaeloideachas recommended the integration of the following core policies:

- Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022;
- A Policy for Irish Medium Education - which is at an early stage of development by the Department of Education; and
- A Policy for the Teaching of Irish, which has been recommended for many years by education and Irish language stakeholders.

185. In his submission, Professor Ó Duibhir called for the introduction of four levels in the new Senior Cycle, to cater for the range of abilities of students. He proposed that the design of specifications, syllabi, curricula or courses should be based on students’ learning needs and their goals. The submission stated that *‘It is often more difficult for us to design a new specification than we first anticipated since we are influenced by current practice. These levels should be determined first and then we can look at how the learning outcomes can be best achieved at each level.’*

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<sup>10</sup> Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is used internationally as a basic accreditation to indicate that a person has sufficient fluency to use a language in a professional context.

186. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Ms Uí Uiginn stated *'regarding the recommendations that we have made, the advantage in comparison to the L1 and L2 model is that it would be open to every student. There would be no division between Irish-medium secondary schools and other schools. As we know, there are many places around the country where there are no Irish-medium secondary schools. The specifications we have recommended would be open – whether it be option 1 or option 2 – to all students in all schools if they wished to undertake it.'*

187. Ms Uí Uiginn also stated *'It seems that the NCCA has templates for different subjects and it follows those templates. Learning outcomes are provided, and Irish language teachers are concerned that there is not enough information in them. The learning outcomes are not deep or informative. ...it is not clear what teachers are supposed to teach and students are supposed to learn. They are not specific enough. There are specifications but they are not specific. It is a general approach.'*

188. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Mr. Neil McDonnell noted *'that despite the fact that Irish is an official EU language, Ireland is struggling to fulfil its quota of translators for the translation of EU law, directives and regulations.'*

## LITERATURE

189. The Gael Linn submission asked that a draft list of literature be made available alongside the draft specifications published by the NCCA, to give teachers the opportunity to evaluate the recommended texts. It also asked for sufficient information on what style of question pupils will be expected to answer.

190. Gael Linn stated that there are *'too many texts to cover at Junior Cycle'*<sup>11</sup>. It proposed that more time is allocated to ensure teachers and students can cover all the texts.

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<sup>11</sup> [Tuairisc-Suirbhe-an-Ghreasain-Dreachtsonraiochtaí-1.pdf \(angreasan.ie\)](#)

191. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Mr Pádraig Ó Beaglaoich stated that *'it is strongly recommended that a specific and target-based programme be established to place Irish language young adult literature on a more secure footing, in order to ensure that contemporary literary works of a high standard are available in the various genres for inclusion on prescribed reading lists for both Junior and Senior Cycles.'*

192. Mr Ó Beaglaoich also stated that *'as you all will be aware, the repository of literature in an Irish language context is not comparable to the repository of literature in an English language context. The desire is to get young people engaged with literature and contemporary work and to find contemporary work which will appeal to them. The Deputy asked me who has responsibility for this. Foras na Gaeilge have an Irish language book programme (Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge) and some of the books aimed at teenagers could be published through that programme. COGG have statutory duties in relation to teaching and learning resources. We do not currently have a specific programme for adolescent literature, but it could be possible to look at this on an inter-organisational basis, or COGG could do this by itself, but that would require putting appropriate funding and staff in place in order to progress this.'*

193. Ms Uí Uiginn referred to the proposed extra subject of *Saíocht agus Litríocht na Gaeilge*. She opined that *'It was recommended that something akin to this be introduced ten years ago when the Leaving Certificate was reformed, because, in all seriousness, when you think of Gaeltacht students and those in Irish-medium secondary schools and the study they undertake at higher level of English texts - six different poets, a vast number of poems and then a Shakespearean play, plus other plays and novels - they are only studying small snippets of literature in Irish. In the long term this is impoverishing the language.'*

*It is important, and I believe that Gaeltacht students and those in Irish-medium secondary schools would be interested in taking a subject like this. Perhaps*

*the demand for it will not be as broad as it would be if Advanced Level were offered. This is problematic and, as a former school principal, I understand the difficulties associated with awarding bonus points for subjects. It is not easy to balance all of this.'*

## ASSESSMENT

194. In its submission, an Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) stated that *'it is evident that major problems exist due to the predictability of the questions in the final Irish examination, particularly in the case of the oral exam.'* COGG suggested that *'the exam is not credible or valid because candidates have up to two years to learn the content for the exam off by heart and despite the Leaving Certificate Irish Chief Examiners reporting this, no efforts have been made to address this problem to date.'*

COGG further stated that *'as 40% of the total marks are awarded for a pre-prepared oral examination which only lasts 15 minutes, this distorts the Leaving Certificate results for Irish.'* Additionally, *'the number of Higher Level H1 grades awarded in the Leaving Certificate Irish examination has increased by 120% in two years even though it is widely acknowledged that students have a very low standard leaving school.'*

195. COGG also noted that *'in Irish, the oral exam is a common exam, therefore, no distinction is made between Higher level and Ordinary Level applicants. This results in Ordinary Level candidates being discriminated against in terms of CAO points, as they receive up to 40% of 60 points while Higher level candidates receive up to 40% of 100 points.'*

196. In its submission, Gaeloideachas noted that *'there is a misunderstanding in public debates about the difference between bonus marks and bonus points.'* It explained that *'the reason for the existence of bonus marks for students who take certain subjects through Irish in the exams is to compensate them for the additional burden of studying subjects in a minority language for which there*

*are only a very limited number of teaching and learning resources available in comparison with English.’ They stated that ‘there is not yet a level playing field in terms of teaching and learning resources for students who take subjects through Irish and until there is the same standard and provision, compensation for the extra effort will be required.’*

197. The Gael Linn submission highlighted that there has been a significant increase in the number of students taking Higher Level since the introduction of 40% marks for the oral exam. It noted that the numbers rose from 32.34% in 2011, to 47.95% in 2019. It opined that *‘it is extremely positive that more students are choosing the Higher-Level exam.’* It also requested that there *‘should not be a reduction in marks allocated for the oral exam which might dissuade students from pursuing higher level.’*

198. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Mr Ó Beaglaoich stated *‘the decision to discontinue the offering of Foundation Level must be questioned, as such a decision could have a detrimental effect on the numbers seeking exemption from Irish in the future.’*

199. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Ms Uí Uiginn, echoed this statement saying *‘if there is no foundation level, there is a risk that the number of students seeking exemption from Irish in the Leaving Certificate will increase significantly. This number is a concern as it is currently.’*

200. The Gael Linn submission concurred with this statement saying that there is a significant risk of a major rise in the number of students seeking exemptions from Irish if there is no foundation level course offered going forward which would cause serious damage to Irish as a school subject. They opine that all students must be afforded the opportunity to study Irish at a level that is suitable for them.

201. Mr Ó Beaglaoich, further stated that *‘regarding Leaving Certificate Irish examinations run by the State Examinations Commission, it is clear that there*

*are major problems surrounding the predictability of questions on the final exam paper. This particularly holds true for the oral exam. The exam is not a reliable or valid indicator of learning because candidates have up to two years to learn exam material off by heart. In addition, 40% of the total marks are awarded for a prepared oral exam that lasts just 15 minutes and this results in Leaving Certificate Irish results being skewed. It is essential that an oral exam under the control of the State Examinations Commission remains part of the assessment of Irish in the Leaving Certificate with external examiners and a modified system. It is recommended that the oral exam be restructured so that it is no longer predictable and that it be based, along with the written assessment, on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the CEFR.*

*On the CEFR... it is hugely important that the Junior Cycle specifications be aligned, whatever form those specifications take, be that one specification or an additional course.'*

202. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Mr Julian de Spáinn, Ard-Rúnaí, Conradh na Gaeilge, stated that *'there is not a lot of information in the general community about CEFR at the moment. That said, this framework is being used more and more when language standards are referenced in job advertisements.*

*From speaking to the experts who are engaging with the framework at present, I am aware that Irish has the advantage, which does not apply to many other subjects in the education system, that one begins learning Irish in preschool and it is continued through primary school, secondary school and on to third level. We have an opportunity to assimilate it all together into a single system with specific steps. By virtue of their level in the framework, one could identify where people are in terms of their proficiency in spoken and written Irish. I believe that this will give students more confidence in their proficiency in Irish going forward. It would be based more on communicating in the language. With the framework,*

*one can cater to the native speaker or to the weaker speaker through the language profiles which are implemented.*

*When it comes to Irish, I think there is an opportunity to look at the language in its entirety from start to finish, rather than looking simply at the Leaving Certificate and the changes that are to be made to it. If a system is established examining Irish from pre-school level up to primary and secondary level and then on into third level, such a system will be able to take on any other modifications that might be made to the Leaving Certificate more generally, but it should recognise that we have a tremendous opportunity to have one single course or one single ladder.*

*If the framework was being used, for example, that would allow for the student who enters the system late to be catered to. Currently, they are told to sit at the back of the room and that they aren't going to be studying Irish. Why can't they start and achieve A1 on the framework? This is something they could take pride in. We were discussing this lifelong learning journey in relation to Irish. The weaker learner who has difficulty writing could sit the Leaving Cert Oral Exam only and earn points for that.'*

203. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Ms Uí Uiginn, stated that *'others mentioned the negative views often held by people regarding learning Irish. This comes about because these people feel that they failed to achieve a satisfactory standard in the language. The framework of reference would provide a positive model. Perhaps they will not get as far as B2 level at Higher Level but they will be able to build on that and go on to B1 and B2.'*

*Regarding how to link the framework of reference in to make it more effective. Firstly, the various grades from the curriculum must be aligned with those on the framework of reference. The... Common European Framework of Reference. It starts out at A1 and continues with A2, B1, B2 and so on. It would be necessary to look at the post-primary specifications, starting with the Junior Cycle, to ensure that each of those levels are aligned in a transparent manner and*

*correspond to the standards of the Framework of Reference. That is to say that A1 level would correspond to foundation level or ordinary level at Junior Cycle and that A2 and then B1 and B2 would go up to Leaving Certificate. There would also be an oral exam. Very high marks are allocated to the oral exam at present. The oral exam is structured to feature many series of pictures which have to be learned by rote by students. However, this is not building on the students' long-term communicative proficiency.*

*It has been recommended that 35% or 40% of the marks at Leaving Certificate should be allocated to the oral exam, but the oral exam needs to be restructured to ensure that communicative proficiency attains internationally recognised levels through the above-mentioned framework of reference, and that it is associated with certain standards and that students are not simply learning by rote for that exam. There needs to be a serious restructuring and review of that.'*

## TEACHING SUPPORTS

204. The Gael Linn submission stated that *'international best practice recommends additional support for extra-curricular activities through Irish be provided to enhance language learning/instruction.'*

205. Several submissions noted that the standard of Irish among teachers must be enhanced to ensure there is a sufficient number of post-primary teachers with a high standard of Irish available to teach all subjects curriculum through Irish.

206. In his submission, Professor Ó Duibhir stated that *'whatever decision is taken regarding specifications or an extra subject, issues regarding assessment and having positive background supports in place must be addressed.'* He contended that *'the current examination rewards rote learning and this is at odds with the core principles of communicative language learning.'*

207. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Mr Ó Beaglaoich stated that *'in the context of the reforms that are predicted for Senior Cycle, it would be vitally*

*important that Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools are given the same opportunities in terms of resources and teachers and also in terms of subject choice. Some progress has been made already. Fiona Uí Uiginn mentioned the Policy on Gaeltacht Education. Regarding primary schools, there is the online learning.*

*The Physics course at Leaving Cert Level was provided in virtual form. COGG welcomes the announcement that a second subject will be implemented as part of primary school. This is part of the policy on Gaeltacht Education, but there are supply problems in Irish-medium secondary schools who are struggling to find teachers for some specialised subject areas. This is often an issue at Leaving Cert level.'*

*Mr Ó Beaglaoidh, continued 'the student attending a Gaeltacht post-primary school, or an Irish-medium secondary school does not have the same choice which exists across the board in English-medium schools. In addition to this, difficulties exist, which I mentioned earlier, regarding the provision of textbooks. Text books, for example, could be provided, but one of the complaints of teachers and of schools also is that, in the case of English, maybe the person could have their choice of four or five text books, but because the text book scheme as it applies to Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools is subsidised, there is only a single option for a subject. This, in itself, creates difficulties.*

*Regarding the issue raised by the Vice Chairman in relation to remote and rural schools, there is no doubt but that the hubschool or the e-school model is only in its infancy really. The initial efforts were successful, and a second subject is to be introduced, but this issue needs to be looked at more closely and more comprehensively so that, as Caoimhín Ó hEaghra mentioned there, Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools will have an even playing field.'*

208. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Mr de Spáinn stated that 'Wales has set down a target that 40% of their schools will be Welsh-medium schools in the future. We have no such target here in the south of Ireland. Where would

*we be now if we had had such a target in place since the 1970's for example? Maybe we would be doing better than the Welsh and would have surpassed 50% or 60%. The biggest shortcoming is that no plan is in existence stating that there are X number of Gaelscoileanna currently, therefore X number of Irish-medium post-primary schools will be required and that we are going to provide the resources to bring this about.'*

209. Mr de Spáinn also referred to Irish-medium units within English-medium schools and noted that *'The biggest problem with the units is that there is no certainty that all subjects will be available through Irish. Students will not receive the same experience of immersion in terms of language among the students, if they are in a school in which they are also surrounded by English. What we have seen in terms of the success of Irish-medium education is that it performs much better when the schools are independent and able to operate on their own.'*

210. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, in relation to which subjects pose the most challenges in terms of availability of teachers or textbooks, Ms Uí Uiginn stated that *'the Sciences... and Home Economics in particular. I suppose every principal in Ireland is looking for a Home Economics teacher by now.'*

*We recommended that every institution which provides initial teacher education should provide the modules for teaching through the medium of Irish. I know that there are more openings now for training as a teacher through the medium of Irish with the course in Galway, but the University of Limerick and the other universities should be required to ensure that the teachers complete a course in teaching through Irish as part of the training they are undertaking. I know such a course has been initiated by Trinity College, Dublin, and I think that they were requiring a B2 standard for entry to the course. What I mean is that the course would be available in every institution that provides initial teacher education - in Limerick, in Cork and everywhere.'*

## ACCESS

211. In its submission, Conradh na Gaeilge proposed that the use of the CEFR would help with student access, equality and wellbeing given that the system could be extremely flexible in the following ways:

- The framework could cater to students who arrive later into the system, e.g. a student starting in the Irish school system for the first time in third year of secondary school could do the A1 level Irish course and he/she could be awarded CAO points based on that level; and
- The framework could cater to students with learning difficulties, e.g. a student who experiences difficulties with writing could focus on spoken Irish only through the framework and they could be awarded CAO points based on that level.

212. In oral evidence, on 23 November 2021, Ms Sorcha Ní Chéilleachair, Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta, stated that there is a *'scheme being developed by Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta in conjunction with Teachta Aniar, the group up in Dublin. It is a learning programme for Transition Year. It is a Gaeltacht leadership course based on ecology, and on the Irish language and the Gaeltacht and the connection between both of these and the present day ecological crisis. This crisis and its connection to the Gaeltacht and Irish language crisis is of interest to many young people, if I may say. We are presently developing this and in talks with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. They are very interested in it and we are also talking to the Department of Education.'*

213. Mr de Spáinn, stated that there are a *'number of students who are studying another language besides Irish, even though they have obtained an exemption from studying Irish.'*

*The most basic measure which we talked about earlier regarding the use, for example, of the Common European Framework of Reference, would be to implement this in the schools, and this would greatly help with this issue. This*

*could cater for students who enter the system late or students who have learning difficulties. The easiest example relevant to this is that the Leaving Certificate could be sat for the Oral Exam only, if the student has a significant difficulty in writing.*

*Instead of this, the present system is avoiding the problem and creating an exemption system which does not exist in other countries, as far as we know. When you speak to the experts in Ireland, they could say that perhaps there is a case for 2% or 3% of the cases. They introduced a system based on 10% of the percentile in all abilities. This was far too wide, and this issue should be looked at again.'*

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

21. The Department of Education, in liaison with the NCCA, should complete a comprehensive review of the Junior Cycle Irish curriculum in tandem with reform of the Irish Senior Cycle curriculum. To this end, the proposed L1 and L2 Specifications in Irish at Senior Cycle should be reviewed further with a view to aligning it with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).
22. All changes to the Irish Curriculum should be in line with Polasaí don Ghaeilge sa Chóras Oideachais ón Réamhscoil go dtí an Tríú Leibhéal.
23. Foundation level Irish should be retained to ensure that weaker students study the subject. The curriculum at foundation level should be reviewed to ensure that the language is taught in an engaging way with emphasis on communication.
24. Primary School Teachers and Secondary School Teachers of Irish should be offered Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in Advanced Irish to include immersion in a Gaeltacht area.

25. Fluent Irish Speakers should be encouraged to take up places in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching courses where Irish is required. To this end, bonus marks should be awarded to applicants for the Master of Education Degree (MED), who studied Irish in their undergraduate degree. In addition, the Bachelor of Education Degree (BED), taught through the medium of the Irish language, should be introduced in all Teacher Training Colleges.
26. The Department of Education should develop and publish a National Programme for Irish Medium Education to increase provision of Primary and Secondary Irish Medium Education, by end of 2022. The Programme should outline supports to be made available, including financial incentives in the form of allowances, to teachers in Irish-medium schools.
27. The Department of Education should issue a Circular to all Primary and Secondary Schools regarding the provision of additional support for extra-curricular activities through Irish. This is recognised internationally as a Model of Best Practice in language immersion.
28. The Department of Education, in liaison with the Teacher Training Colleges, should put in place a Programme to ensure there are enough post-primary teachers available to teach all curriculum subjects through Irish.



*opportunities to progress to work and high quality further and higher vocational and academic qualifications.'*

216. In oral evidence, on 28 September 2021, Mr John Curtis, General Secretary, JMB, stated that *'One of our schools in the south of the country has developed an apprenticeship pathway programme for senior-cycle students. They have developed links with Generation Apprenticeship and SOLAS, and this has supported the development of their project. Students from transition year through to Leaving Certificate have engaged. Local employers have been central to the programme's development, as they have offered apprenticeship pathways for students at the school. Such models of collaboration in local communities integrate the best of the educational curricular provision offered at school with the opportunity for purposeful practice in a workplace setting.'*

217. The NCCA Submission states that *'It is clear from the review that this phase of education needs to be more than a perceived selection mechanism for higher education and that this phase of education should adequately prepare students for transition to further, adult and higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and the world of work. Senior cycle redevelopment will necessitate the development of proposals for a range of diverse learning pathways that encompass opportunities arising from concurrent developments in further and higher education. Emerging pathways will be explored with schools to consider how best to implement new and improved flexible pathways that emerge from the redevelopment.'*

218. In oral evidence, on 19 October 2021, Mr Ken Whyte, Director of Further Education and Training, Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board, representing Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), noted the need for apprenticeships to be *'planned for two to two and half years in. If we want an electrical workshop put in somewhere, we need to think one to one and a half years ahead. While we are certainly trying to go through an emergency response at the moment, that will not kick in until next summer. If we are predicting greater numbers down the road, we need to invest now to*

*have the provision in two and a half or three years' time, and then have continuous investment.'*

219. In oral evidence, on 19 October 2021, Dr Joseph Ryan, CEO, Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), stated that *'Our society is a complex organism, and it needs lots of different skills. There is a question, however, about valuing all those skills equally. We had the old apprenticeships, and we have the new apprenticeships, but we still call them apprenticeships. In the public mind, people do not necessarily distinguish between these things. I believe they may have an old-fashioned sense around this. It may have something to do with the marketing of this. There is also something about lifelong learning and earn and learn. We especially need to look at the funding through the national training fund if employers are being taxed up to a certain percentage at this stage. It seems we have to have more conversation about that perception piece.'*

220. In oral evidence, on 19 October 2021, Professor Diarmuid Hegarty, Chair, Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA), referred to levels of funding and noted that *'We must look at what we are investing in the various streams. If a student is doing four years in university or any higher education institution now, then typically we are talking about investing approximately €11,000, on average, for each year, depending on the specific course undertaken. The student pays about €3,000 of that cost, or a little more on occasion. The State, then, is investing about €8,000 a year and approximately €32,000 over the duration of a higher education course. If the State wants to promote apprenticeships, then it must invest more in them.'*

221. In oral evidence, on 1 March 2022, Mr Andrew Brownlee, CEO, SOLAS, proposed that *'the State should pay for the day that apprenticeship students spend in education each week because employers get no benefit from their employees on that day. It would also be possible to argue that employers are getting limited benefit from their apprentices in that first year and the State should also consider a subvention of the cost of apprenticeships in that first*

*year, bearing in mind that employers are making a four-year commitment. There is a need for the State to balance the investment being made in different streams of education and to consider supporting apprenticeships financially.'*

222. In oral evidence, on 19 October 2021, Mr Jim Miley, Director General, Irish Universities Association (IUA) emphasised that *'we also must broaden our understanding of what apprenticeships are. The perception of apprenticeships is often very traditional.'* He explained that in the University of Limerick, an immersive software programme was launched in 2020, which is a four-year programme consisting of two years in full-time in college and then two years working in industry. He continued *'ten or twelve of the leading technology companies have signed up to take part in that programme. The students on that course work on-site in those companies more or less full time. The programme is not called an apprenticeship, but it is an apprenticeship model to all intents and purposes. Therefore, we must broaden our understanding of apprenticeships in that way. The questions raised by Professor Hegarty concerning the funding model involved in apprenticeships, who pays the costs involved and how to get employers engaged in these programmes highlight some of the critical issues to be addressed in this area.'*

223. He further stated that *'There are significant synergies between the current national further education and training strategy, FET, and the work undertaken in the review of senior cycle. Both consider learning opportunities for senior-cycle students and look at pathways from school to further education and training. The learning pathways as described in the project in our school in Cork align completely with the aims of the strategy. Is there learning for us all in considering the FET strategy in conjunction with the development of senior cycle at second level?'*

224. In oral evidence, on 28 September 2021, Mr Paddy Flood, Head of Schools, Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), stated that *'It is really about us as a society giving value to those pathways. It is possible today to become an accountant using the*

*apprenticeship route. It is possible to follow the new apprenticeships into all sorts of areas, but we still probably have an over-fascination with leaving certificate points, the CAO and particular courses. Any reform of the leaving certificate into senior cycle must value knowledge and the skills, as referred to by Mr. Curtis. If there is a vocational pathway, for example, it needs to be of equal value and treated and seen as such by all institutions across the State.'*

225. In oral evidence, on 28 September 2021, Mr John Irwin also stated that *'Apprenticeships have been undervalued as a form of further learning in this society. The media are probably the worst proponents of this view in many cases. They look at schools and create these so-called league tables. A student who progresses to an apprenticeship and who undertakes that form of learning is not valued. That apprenticeship is not considered further learning. That is a societal reflection on a valid and excellent form of learning. Our society is losing out from not having enough people entering the myriad different apprenticeships available.'*

226. In oral evidence, on 18 October 2021, Professor Diarmuid Hegarty stated that *'On higher and further education requirements in respect of vocational options and career paths, [... should] focus on future potential career roles with support from regional skills forums, SOLAS, Intreo and the expert group on future skills needs.'*

227. In oral evidence, on 2 November 2021, Mr Simon Harris, TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, stated that *every 'leaving certificate student will be able to log on to the [CAO] website and see the button for the traditional CAO options but, for the first time ever, they will also see a button for the further education and training options and a button that they can click to find out lots more information about apprenticeships and the supports and the pathways there as well. Why hide these issues and not talk to people about apprenticeships at a younger age? Why not look at allowing people the opportunities to sample and experience apprenticeships in our secondary school system and perhaps even earlier?'*

228. In oral evidence, on 30 November 2021, Ms Maebh Costello told the Committee that *'The introduction of employer-led apprenticeships in key industry areas, such as cybersecurity, finance and accounting, has really transformed the apprenticeship offering in Ireland. However, we really need to boost the perception of apprenticeships for key stakeholders, including parents, guidance counsellors and students themselves, to create a narrative around apprenticeships that actually shows their true offering. We need to highlight that the apprenticeship is an alternative model of learning that crosses the boundary from further to higher education. There are opportunities to earn while you learn, develop a lifelong career and earn qualifications up to level 10.'*

229. Ms Costello further stated *'there is also a number of fundamental issues around apprenticeships, which we hope the new national action plan will address to engage employers in the apprenticeship system and, therefore, engage more apprenticeships. We need to address issues such as the cutting of the red tape, which sometimes prohibits employers engaging; making it cost friendly; and raising the profile of apprenticeships among employers for some who are not aware there are opportunities with respect to finance, accounting and cybersecurity.'*

230. In oral evidence, on 7 December 2021, Mr. Hugh Ahern stated that *'A module could be offered in transition year to encourage apprenticeships at junior certificate level because I do not see space for them.'*

231. In oral evidence, on 25 January 2021, Mr Dalton Tattan stated that *'we have a very close connection with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. I am conscious that these two sets of issues cut across both Departments. We want to ensure there is alignment and continuity across the experience that students have. Apprenticeships are one area the State has put real effort into, both to encourage development of new apprenticeships in new areas in recent years and to encourage take-up of*

*traditional apprenticeship of course. We are on a journey in terms of the prestige mentioned earlier by another contributor. A good deal of work and investment has been put in to ensure these are being seen as real opportunities and real options for students.'*

232. Ms Evelyn O'Connor, Principal Officer, Department of Education, noted that *'We recently established a national policy group to put in place a guidance strategy, a continuum, a whole-of-guidance strategy right across the system, including to the areas of further and higher education and the world of work. We will be looking at all kinds of guidance issues in that respect over the next year or two, depending on how long it takes to get it all together.'*

233. In oral evidence, on 25 January 2021, Mr Dalton Tattan, when asked if he believed there was any benefit in decoupling the leaving certificate from admissions to third level, stated that *'there probably are, and I think the Deputy [Mr Jim O'Callaghan, TD] has touched on some of the arguments. There are arguments both ways on this one. On the one hand, there is a huge convenience in having a simple set of exams, which is a route through to things like higher education if that is where one wants to be. The leaving certificate is obviously not that and should not be viewed as that. I am not saying that the Deputy is saying that, though for many it is, in effect, a passport to higher education. Often that is where the pressure is created. Much of the commentary is about the pressure, particularly in the context of high-demand courses and that back flows into the leaving certificate and, therefore, the Senior Cycle experience too.'*

*At one level, one might say if we were to decouple this would that be a way to ease that sort of pressure. However, I would not be too sure of that for a couple of reasons. One is that, presumably, if it were not there, something else would have to replace it in terms of higher education admissions. Although this means that that would then become where the pressure point is. That situation could be worse for students in many ways because unless we were to ditch the leaving certificate, they would have a leaving certificate but it might be far less regarded*

*than it currently is whereby it might just be seen as something that has to be gone through. Really, however, the focus, if a person wants to go on into higher education, is whatever the process is there.*

*Interestingly, some countries, especially the US, are questioning quite significantly their current admissions systems. So, things like the standard assessment tests, SATs, which were regarded as tried and tested methods of admission in the US, are now being questioned much more seriously.*

*Potentially, there is something there. I think, perhaps, through keeping the integration there. Is there a way for us to make it more holistic? Should the final assessment someone gets at the end of the Senior Cycle experience be as narrow as a set of grades in a set of subject or could we make it broader than that? Maybe things like transition year might offer opportunities around that, which might help to broaden it out and that it would be more than simply a set of marks.'*

234. In its submission, Aontas noted that consideration must be given to changing *'Higher Education Links Scheme (HELs) scoring of FET awards for accessing higher education. The NFQ Level 5/6 qualifications do not have the same weighting as the Leaving Certificate. The maximum of 120 credits for these awards results in a total of 390 points. This needs to be rectified for fairness.'*

235. In its submission, the National College of Ireland (NCI) noted that *'in November 2018, An Taoiseach, the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced the launch of the P-TECH School Initiative for three schools in Dublin's North East Inner City. The project is an adaptation of P-TECH (Pathways in Technology), an innovative model of education-industry collaboration that was first developed in 2011 in the USA by IBM and local educators.*

*In Ireland, P-TECH is a collaboration between the schools (St Joseph's CBS, Marino College and Larkin Community College), business partners (IBM, Cisco,*

*Virgin Media, Irish Water, Irish Life), National College of Ireland and the Department of Education and Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC). The aim of P-TECH is to provide post-primary students in the NEIC area with an innovative and highly relevant education programme that enables them to earn third-level credits.*

*Transitions between all levels of education is a critical time for a student and an initiative such as P-TECH highlights how it can ease the transition for the student between second level education and 1) the world of work 2) further education or 3) higher education.'*

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

29. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should establish *A Task Force on Entry to Higher Education* to consider the future entry level requirements to third level education. The Central Applications Office (CAO) should be an integral part of the Task Force and be mandated to consider reforming the CAO System to accommodate future changes. The Task Force should consider, as an urgent priority, the feasibility of decoupling Higher-Level Entry Requirements from the Senior Cycle.

30. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should liaise with Irish Universities Association (IUA), Technological Higher Universities Association (THEA) and the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) with a view to reducing the number of undergraduate courses and increasing the number of postgraduate specialist courses and places in existing postgraduate courses and developing new post graduate courses.

31. The Senior Cycle Curriculum should prepare students for Apprenticeships, Further Education and entering the Workplace, as a key national priority, with Guidance Counsellors playing a pivotal role in communicating these options to students.
32. The Ministers for Education and Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should develop a joint *Apprenticeship Communications Campaign* that can be rolled out to all Secondary Schools. The campaign should, *inter alia*, utilise social media to give information to students on craft and new generation apprenticeships and future careers.
33. The Ministers for Education and Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science should draw up a Joint Plan/Circular that supports Schools in organising *Apprenticeship Information Days* where Colleges, craft and new generation apprentices and qualified tradespeople visit and speak to the students on apprenticeship education, progression pathways and future careers. Whole School Inspections (WSE) should be used to track schools progress in promoting apprenticeships and organising Information Days and offer support to nonparticipating schools.

## CHAPTER 7 INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE AND BEST PRACTICE

236. Several submissions opined that the Leaving Certificate focuses solely on the academic side of education and disregards a holistic approach to education.

237. The ISSU Submission stated that *‘in the UK, students applying to a college through UCAS, must also write a personal statement and be interviewed. Candidates are encouraged to undertake extracurricular activities like gaining work experience in the relevant field, doing prior research about the course, and volunteering with an organisation of interest.’* It opined that *‘there is no such incentive for Ireland’s second-level students to engage in the same. It cited the greater variety of subjects available for students studying A-Level examinations eg criminology and psychology.’*

238. Some submissions referred to the International Baccalaureate (IB). In addition to external assessments, the IB offers an internal, teacher-based assessment process where oral work in languages, fieldwork in geography, laboratory work in sciences, investigations in mathematics and artistic performances are also assessed.

239. In her submission, Dr Áine Hyland stated *‘As regards “Key Subject Areas”, the International Baccalaureate is a good example of how senior cycle might be structured. At IB Diploma level (15 to 18 years of age) students take some subjects at higher level (HL) and some at standard level (SL) – usually three at each level. HL and SL courses differ in scope with students expected to demonstrate a greater body of knowledge, understanding and skills at higher level. They are also required to study Theory of Knowledge and to submit an extended essay (which is like a mini-thesis) on some subject which particularly interests them. Assessment is a mixture of internal assessment (which is moderated to ensure consistency of standards) and external assessment with at least 50% of the assessments completed before the end of the final year.’*

240. In oral evidence, on 19 October 2021, Professor Diarmuid Hegarty noted that *‘students need the skills to be successful, global and national citizens and to be agile to change. New curriculums should focus not only on knowledge but also on the skills, values, attitudes and interpersonal awareness that are required in the 21st century.’*

241. In its submission, Youthreach recommended examining *‘exemplary international models from countries like Austria, Germany, and Finland. These countries have developed assessment models aligned with global changes. They have developed an integrated VET [vocational and education training] system in their respective contexts by implementing assessment approaches that combine academic knowledge with interpersonal skills and practical coursework (Räkköläinen, 2011). Assessment should be framed within supportive, responsive structures that empower individuals, communities, and by extension, society. Alternative means of skills demonstration and assessment performance indicators should reflect the challenging times affecting education globally, such as the necessity for remote learning brought on by unexpected crises such as COVID-19.’*

242. In its submission, the IUA stated that *‘all students who sit an examination in at least one subject receive a Leaving Certificate, irrespective of their final grade in that subject or their average grade across a range of subjects. This is different to many European countries, where certain levels of achievement are required before a student is awarded a certificate showing satisfactory completion of post-primary education.’*

## APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

[Submissions can be found here.](#) Submissions were received from the following groups or people:

1. An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
2. An Foras Pátrúnachta
3. An Taisce
4. An tOllamh Pádraig Ó Duibhir, Institiúid Oideachais DCU
5. Aontas
6. AslAm
7. Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
8. Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)
9. Barnardos
10. Burren College of Art
11. Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association (CSSPA)
12. Chartered Accountants Ireland
13. Children's Rights Alliance
14. Citywise Education
15. Conradh na Gaeilge
16. Cork Life Centre
17. Department of Education
18. Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
19. Dr Áine Hyland, Professor Emeritus, University College Cork (UCC)
20. Drinkaware
21. Dyslexia Association Ireland (DAI)
22. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)
23. Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
24. Education and Training Boards Ireland Youthreach
25. Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN)
26. Foróige
27. Gael Linn
28. Gaeloideachas

29. Gaisce
30. Gambling with Lives
31. Higher Education Authority (HEA)
32. Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA)
33. Home Education Network Ireland (HENI)
34. IDA Ireland
35. Inclusion Ireland
36. Institute of Guidance Counsellors
37. Irish Agricultural Science Teachers Association (IASTA)
38. Irish Business and Employment Confederation (IBEC)
39. Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
40. Irish Educational Publishers' Association (IEPA)
41. Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO)
42. Irish Research Council (IRC)
43. Irish Science Teachers Association (ISTA)
44. Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU)
45. Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME)
46. Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)
47. Irish Universities Association (IUA)
48. Jigsaw
49. Joint Managerial Board (JMB)
50. Library Association of Ireland School Libraries Group (LAI)
51. Localise Youth Volunteering
52. Mr Hugh Ahern, Student, Patrician Academy, Mallow, Cork
53. National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
54. National Association of Principals and Deputies (NAPD)
55. National College of Ireland (NCI)
56. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
57. National Parents Council Post Primary (NPCPP)
58. Ombudsman for Children's Office
59. Professor Sylvia Draper, Dean of Faculty of STEM, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, Trinity College Dublin
60. Prof. Diarmuid A. Hegarty, President, Griffith College

61. Professor Anne Looney, Executive Dean, School of Education, Dublin City University (DCU)
62. Professor Jim Gleeson, Adjunct Professor of Education, Dublin City University (DCU)
63. Professor Michael O'Leary, Centre for Assessment Research, Policy and Practice in Education, Dublin City University
64. Professor Tom Collins, former Professor of Education, Maynooth University and former Chair, TU Dublin
65. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
66. Rethink Ireland
67. Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)
68. SOLAS
69. State Examinations Commission (SEC)
70. The Citizens Assembly for Education (CAFE)
71. Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta
72. Union of Students in Ireland (USI)
73. Yellow Flag Programme

## APPENDIX 2: ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS

On 28 September 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr John Curtis, General Secretary, Joint Managerial Boards (JMB); Mr John Irwin, General Secretary, Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS); Mr Paddy Flood, Director of Schools (Cavan & Monaghan ETB), Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and Mr Paul Crone, Director, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD).

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 5 October 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr Eamonn Dennehy, President, Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI); Mr Frank Jones, General Secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU); Ms Máirín Ní Chéileachair, Assistant General Secretary for Education, Research and Learning, Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO); Ms Emer Neville, President, Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU); Mr Michael Gillespie, General Secretary, Teacher's Union of Ireland (TUI) and Ms Clare Austick, President, Union of Students Ireland (USI).

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 19 October 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr Jim Miley, Director General, Irish Universities Association (IUA); Dr. Jospheh Ryan, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Technological Higher Education Authority (THEA); Professor Diarmuid Hegarty, Chair, Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and Mr Ken Whyte, Director of Further Education and Training, Waterford & Wexford ETB, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI).

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 2 November 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr. Simon Harris TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; Dr John O'Connor, Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI); Mr Tim Conlon, Head of Policy & Strategic Planning, Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Mr Andrew Brownlee, Chief Executive Officer, SOLAS.

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 9 November 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Dr. Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children; Ms Suzanne Connolly, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Barnardos; Ms Tanya Ward, Chief Executive, Children's Right Alliance (CRA); Ms Beatrice Dooley, President, Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC); Ms Mai Fanning, President, National Parents Council Post Primary (NPCPP) and Mr Daire Hennessy, Chairman of the Youth Steering Committee at Citywise Education.

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 16 November 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Professor Anne Looney, Executive Dean, Institute of Education, Dublin City University (DCU); Professor Michael O'Leary, Prometric Chair in Assessment, Director of the Centre for Assessment Research, Policy and Practice in Education, Institute of Education, Dublin City University (DCU); Professor Jim Gleeson, Adjunct Professor, School of Policy and Practice, Dublin City University (DCU); Dr Áine Hyland, Professor Emeritus in Education, University College Cork (UCC); Professor Tom Collins, former President and Emeritus Professor of Education, National University of Ireland Maynooth and Professor Gordon Stobard, Emeritus Professor of Education, University College London.

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 23 November 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr Pádraig Ó Beaglaoich, Oifigeach Oideachais Iar-Bhunscoile, Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG); Ms Sorcha Ní Chéilleachair, Ceannasaí, Tuismitheoirí Na Gaeltachta; Mr Caoimhín Ó hEagra, An tArd-Runaí, An Foras Pátrúnachta; Mr Julian de Spáinn, Ard Runaí, Conradh na Gaeilge and Ms Fíona Uí Uiginn, Gaeloideachas.

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 30 November 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Dr. Emer Smyth, Research Professor with the Social Research Division, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Growing up in Ireland; Dr. Ruth Freeman, Director of Science for Society, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI); Ms Meadhbh Costello, Social Policy Executive, Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC); Mr Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive, Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME) and Mr Tony Donohoe, Chairperson, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN).

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 7 December 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Department of Education Officials.

[The debate can be accessed here](#)

On 7 December 2021, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Mr Ryan Sharpe, 6<sup>th</sup> year student, Cork Life Centre (CLC); Ms Amber Sheridan O'Callaghan, Past Student, Cork Life Centre (CLC) and Mr Hugh Ahern, Student, Patrician Academy, Mallow, County Cork.

[This debate can be accessed here](#)

On 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022, the Committee held a roundtable discussion with Officials from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

[This debate can be accessed here](#)



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