

Leaving Certificate Reform



Opening Statement

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

Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)

5th October 2021

Introduction

- 1.1 The Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) has engaged extensively in the Senior Cycle review process with the NCCA, SEC, OECD and our members (some 20,000 of them).
- 1.2 The review of Senior Cycle is an opportunity for the political system to respond positively to TUI's call for an adequately funded, high quality public education system that caters for the needs of a very diverse student body.

Assessment Options

- 2.1 TUI's position is clear and unambiguous – State (i.e. SEC) certification enjoys public trust. TUI members are fundamentally opposed to assessing their own students for State certification. External assessment by the SEC must be retained.
- 2.2 Changes to assessment models must be based on sound educational principles rather than the unreliable weathervane of populist commentary. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, teachers have demonstrated professional commitment by engaging with emergency

assessment processes - on a strictly 'without precedent' basis - so that final year students could progress to the next stage of their lives.

- 2.3 'Continuous Assessment (CA)' is sought by some commentators. Our schools already use such assessment. Formative assessment, by its nature, is continuous and enhances teaching and learning.
- 2.4 Moving to a CA model for State certification purposes, however, would be counterproductive. It would increase – not reduce – stress for students and teachers, inevitably lead to over-assessment, compromise objective standards and undermine public trust. Furthermore, it would fundamentally and negatively change the pupil-teacher relationship, possibly removing the emphasis on the supportive aspect of the relationship.
- 2.5 The excessive focus on CAO points is not a product of the Leaving Certificate itself. The CAO runs a separate process that allots places in Higher Education and that is superimposed on the Leaving Certificate. The CAO 'points race' is a reflection of a media obsession with progression to third level and with 'high points' courses. The points race leads to invalid and unfair comparisons. Changing Leaving Certificate assessment modes to tackle the CAO 'points race' would be to base change on a misdiagnosis of the real problem.
- 2.6 Senior Cycle subjects are continually evolving. Most already have an additional component of assessment, involving project, oral or practical work - set, administered and examined by the SEC.
- 2.7 The TUI has called for some second component assessments to take place during fifth year, thereby reducing the pressure in sixth year.

Key Subject Areas and Digital Learning

- 3.1 Every subject and programme has intrinsic value. Senior Cycle should continue to be broad-based as this best prepares learners for life and active citizenship, best anticipates an ever-changing society where complex challenges, global and personal, abound.

- 3.2 From time to time, certain disciplines may be considered especially important – by governments or employers. However, such perceived hierarchies are often transient.
- 3.3 Reform of Senior Cycle must be inclusive and cater for all students and their varied talents.
- 3.4 Therefore the ‘ringfencing’ of LCA must be removed so that students can undertake a mix of subjects that would enable them to move directly into an apprenticeship.
- 3.5 Equally, the vocational subject groupings associated with the LCVP need to be amended or abolished.
- 3.6 Given relentless developments in technology, ongoing review of the government’s strategy is critical to facilitating appropriate integration of new technologies as supports for teaching and learning for 21st century competences. Significant investment is urgently needed.

Access, Equality and Well Being Supports

- 4.1 Schools rely on support agencies, especially when working with students experiencing crisis. However, schools often find it difficult to access support, as the agencies themselves are under pressure.
- 4.2 Most schools make every effort to create an inclusive environment for all learners, regardless of background or aptitudes. Targeted investment - especially more teachers to reduce class size - would greatly assist this effort.
- 4.3 The depletion of middle management posts (since 2009) has resulted in a damaging reduction in supports for students.
- 4.4 The extra teachers provided to schools during the COVID-19 crisis should be retained to enable schools to provide subject and programme choice at the appropriate levels and to ensure student well-being.

- 4.5 Meaningful curricular provision must be made for students with SEN/AEN who took Level 1 or Level 2 learning programmes for Junior Cycle and who wish to proceed to Senior Cycle education.

Irish Language and Irish Medium Education

- 5.1 In terms of Leaving Certificate Irish, the TUI has believes that:

- foundation Level must be retained
- the oral and aural components should retain their existing proportion of marks
- the draft learning outcomes require significant development and
- if a T1/T2 approach is to be introduced and especially if bonus points are contemplated every school must be assisted to provide T1. Otherwise, a new layer of disadvantage will be created.

Concluding Comments

- 6.1 Before concluding, I wish to thank you for listening to our views – the views of the profession. In our full submission to the Committee, the TUI has set out its position in regard to Senior Cycle reform more extensively and has included a set of recommendations for your consideration.

Thank you.