

TEACHERS' VOICE IS HEARD

The Minister has listened to the unified opposition from teachers to her plans for English and Irish paper 1.



In February the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, announced the deferral of her plans for students to sit Leaving Certificate Paper 1 in English and Irish at the end of 5th year. This latest announcement followed a joint ASTI/TUI campaign of opposition to the plans.

The proposal to move the two exams to the end of 5th year for students entering 5th year this September was described as regressive and educationally unsound by the two teacher unions.

The ASTI and TUI had jointly presented the concerns of teachers to the Department of Education, including:

- increased stress for Senior Cycle students due to high-stakes examinations in 5th year as well as 6th year
- the syllabi were developed to be examined following two years of learning
- the option for students to change levels before their final exam would be severely curtailed
- other subjects would be impacted by students prioritising their high-stakes 5th year exams in English and Irish, and
- extracurricular and other activities would be impacted by students prioritising their high-stakes 5th year exams in English and Irish.

The ASTI and TUI also met with the English teachers' subject association INOTE and the Irish teachers' subject association An Gréasán. A joint press statement from the two unions and the two subject associations, setting out their objections, was issued in January.

Student representatives had also voiced their opposition to the proposal.

Minister defers plan

On Tuesday, February 28, a joint ASTI/TUI statement welcomed the Minister's decision to defer plans to move English and Irish paper 1 to the end of 5th year from 2024:

"At all times we had stated this was an educationally regressive move that would have increased pressure on students, who would have faced a high-stakes examination in both 5th and 6th year. To make matters worse, those

who entered 5th year directly from third year – around 25% of the cohort – would have had three concurrent years of State examinations under the plan". The statement also said the Minister's decision "demonstrates the importance of meaningful engagement and consultation, which recognises and acknowledges that the voice of the practitioners is required to ensure that future Senior Cycle change is educationally sound and, crucially, does not increase pressure on students".

Senior Cycle campaign set to continue

The Minister for Education announced plans for the redevelopment of Senior Cycle in March 2022. The standout measure is the proposal to change the final assessment procedure to significantly reduce reliance on final examinations and introduce teacher-based assessment components.

The ASTI believes that Senior Cycle change must protect the integrity of the examinations and any changes must be built upon fairness for students and trust in the system. It is longstanding ASTI policy that State examinations for certification purposes are entirely externally assessed, and this must be retained in all aspects of the development of the Leaving Certificate.

The ASTI has undertaken a number of actions as part of its campaign on Senior Cycle. These have included consultation with members via the ASTI branch network, the development of policy in response to the Minister's March 2022 announcement, and collaborative activities with colleague union the TUI.

The ASTI Education Conference held in March explored the wider paradigm for curriculum change and the need to enhance the voice of the teaching profession (see ASTI Education Conference report on pages 12/13).

ASTI Annual Convention in April will debate a number of motions on Senior Cycle change, including motions relating to the Minister's March 2022 announcement. The lack of consultation with teacher unions prior to the Minister's announcement, the need for external assessment for State certification, and the need for depth of treatment in subject specification development will be debated.

Keep up with the ASTI's Senior Cycle campaign at www.asti.ie