

SENIOR CYCLE – ENSURING TEACHERS ARE INVOLVED

The ASTI aims to ensure that teachers are at the centre of changes to Senior Cycle.

The ASTI has begun a process of internal consultation on the Minister for Education's announcement in March of this year regarding changes to Senior Cycle education.

ASTI executive considers Minister's proposals

In October the ASTI Central Executive Council (CEC) was addressed by Áine Hyland, Emeritus Professor of Education, University College Cork, who provided a summary of second-level curriculum change in Ireland and spoke about the need for robust syllabus development, including depth of treatment.

While curriculum reform has moved towards learning outcomes in recent years, Prof. Hyland warned that over-reliance on learning outcomes is problematic, stating that they should only be one element of a syllabus description. "Learning outcomes describe what must be attained in order that the learner can pass. But alone they are not a sufficient description of a syllabus, especially an externally assessed syllabus," she said.

Quoting Andreas Schleicher, Director of Education and Skills for the OECD, Prof. Hyland said that unless syllabi are rigorously written and accompanied by additional information such as depth of treatment, teacher guidelines, and assessment details and criteria, a syllabus "consisting only of themes and learning outcomes can result in a dumbed down and superficial curriculum, lacking in depth".

Addresses were also given by ASTI President Miriam Duggan and Assistant General Secretary Moira Leydon. Miriam Duggan said that any Senior Cycle change must protect the integrity of the exams, fairness for students and trust in the system. She reaffirmed the ASTI's longstanding policy that State examinations for certification purposes are entirely externally assessed.

ASTI Senior Cycle policies

CEC debated and adopted a number of motions, which will contribute to the development of the ASTI's vision for Senior Cycle education. CEC will give further consideration to ASTI policy on Senior Cycle at its next meeting in January 2023.

Motions adopted by CEC

- The ASTI affirms that Transition Year must remain a standalone programme.
- That the ASTI demands the provision of a programme of initial teacher education and meaningful CPD prior to the introduction of new subjects, revised syllabi and specifications on the curriculum. Further, the ASTI demands that the full range of syllabus documentation (including sample examination papers, sample marking schemes and, if applicable, teachers' notes) should be officially published at the same time as the new syllabus.
- The ASTI emphatically rejects the proposal to hold Paper 1 in English and Irish at the end of fifth year.
- That the ASTI demands that the Easter and mid-term breaks and weekends are not used for the sitting of any part of the State examinations.



From left: Moira Leydon (ASTI Assistant General Secretary), Prof. Áine Hyland (Emeritus Professor of Education, University College Cork), and Miriam Duggan (ASTI President).

- That the ASTI demands substantial consultation on the selection criteria for and operation of network schools, and clarification on the exact nature and the role of students as co-constructors of the curriculum and assessment arrangements.

What happens next?

- ASTI and TUI representatives on NCCA structures will meet in November to explore a common approach to Senior Cycle redevelopment,
- a special Senior Cycle *Nuacht* will be issued,
- ASTI branches have been asked to discuss Senior Cycle redevelopment as an agenda item at upcoming meetings,
- the ASTI will host an education conference in early 2023 with Senior Cycle curriculum as the theme,
- CEC will further consider Senior Cycle redevelopment at its January 2023 meeting, and
- the ASTI webpage on Senior Cycle will be updated regularly to reflect the ASTI's work, policies and activities.

On March 29, 2022, the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, announced her plans for redevelopment of Senior Cycle. Key measures include:

- changes to the final assessment procedure to significantly reduce reliance on final examinations,
- introduction of teacher-based assessment components,
- updated subject curricula (including updated assessment models) in Chemistry, Physics, Biology and Business in 2024 and eventually across all subjects,
- for students entering fifth year in 2023, English Paper 1 and Irish Paper 1 will be sat at the end of fifth year, and
- oral and musical practical exams to take place during the first week of the Easter break from Easter 2023.