

Dear School Steward,

The Department of Education and Skills have recently issued Circular Letter 0017/2020 to schools in which they address the matter of scheduling of Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings in schools.

In this circular, a series of four options are specified, one of which must be chosen by each school, by consensus, to decide how such meetings will be scheduled in the school.

I have appended the relevant extract of the circular for your information. (Appendix A)

ASTI Standing Committee met recently and considered this matter. It concluded that none of the options contained in the circular letter are acceptable as a means to resolve the on-going difficulty in scheduling Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings in schools.

It is clear that the options are not compliant with the terms of the *Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation (May 2015) and Appendix to the Joint Statement (July 2015)* and as such are unacceptable to ASTI.

Indeed, if Option D set out in the circular were to be implemented it would constitute a reduction in investment in the operation of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* in schools, with consequent damage for the employment of teachers and security of tenure for the most vulnerable of our members.

In particular, it can also be seen that options available to schools are clearly at variance with the *Appendix to the Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation* paragraph 5.6 which provides as follows:

“5.6. It is agreed that the reforms will not impose additional workload and time demands on teachers. It is also acknowledged that teachers’ professional practice will adapt and develop significantly as a result of these reforms.”

Moreover, all the options are considerably out of line with the following extract from a letter containing clarification relating to SLAR meetings which was provided by the Department of Education and Skills to ASTI in December 2015.

It stated as follows:

“The Department confirms that any attempt to impose the organisation of SLAR meetings entirely outside school hours would contravene the agreement. The intention is that SLAR meetings will be scheduled to commence within the timetable, involving the inclusion of a normal timetabled period. However, given the required duration [approximately two hours per meeting], flexibility to run beyond the normal school day for some of the duration of the meeting is required.”

The intention within the circular letter is that staff will make a decision, by consensus, regarding which option would be adopted by individual schools.

ASTI advises all members **to vote against all of the options** set out in the circular letter.

In that context, there will be a failure to reach consensus in most schools. It will then fall to the Board of Management to make the decision.

Members will be aware that ASTI recently issued the following directive:

“In the context of section 9.7 of the Appendix to Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation on Junior Cycle Reform, ASTI members are hereby directed to only attend Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings on the basis that they must be scheduled to start and end within normal school tuition hours, and only a limited number may run beyond school tuition hours for some of the duration of the meeting.”

Standing Committee decided that this directive remains in force. Irrespective of what decision is made within a school regarding the options in the circular referred above, or indeed how it is made, ASTI members are required to adhere to this directive.

Further guidance will be issued as required.

Best regards,



Kieran Christie
General Secretary

28th February 2020

APPENDIX A – Extract from Circular Letter 0017/2020

6. Options for scheduling the SLAR process and meetings

Each school **must** opt for **one** of the following arrangements (Option A, or Option B, or Option C or Option D) for the holding of all of its SLAR meetings. A decision on which option to be used will be made as described in section 5.9 above.

Option A

- Schools may choose to maintain or implement a timetable having four long days and one shorter day.
- This timetable will facilitate SLAR and other meetings relating to Junior Cycle to be held in the period following the conclusion of tuition on the shorter day, or at another time that does not impinge on student tuition time.
- Schools will be required to maintain the currently defined levels of student tuition time, i.e. 28 hours per week.
- Schools must not incur any additional costs through Substitution.
- Substitution and Supervision must not be used in facilitating SLAR meetings.
- A SLAR meeting will be a single meeting of approximately 2 hours duration.

Option B

- An agreement is reached at school level between teachers and management that SLAR meetings will be held at a time suitable to the teachers in the subject groups without impinging on tuition time.
- Should circumstances allow, a meeting, or portion thereof, may take place within normal school tuition hours.
- Schools will be required to maintain the currently defined levels of student tuition time, i.e. 28 hours per week.
- Schools must not incur any additional costs through Substitution.
- Substitution and Supervision must not be used in facilitating SLAR meetings.
- A SLAR meeting will be a single meeting of approximately 2 hours duration.

Option C

- The SLAR process will constitute 40 minutes of preparation time from within a teacher's professional time, and a collaborative portion of a minimum of 80 minutes' duration, the latter to be held as a single meeting.

- Once students have completed their CBA, their subject class teacher will carry out a provisional assessment of the students' learning as developed and evidenced by the CBA process, based on the Features of Quality. These provisional assessments may be modified in light of the discussions that take place at the SLAR meeting.
- In preparation for the collaborative portion of the SLAR process, each teacher will identify one sample of students' work for each descriptor, where feasible, for discussion at the meeting. Each teacher will submit his/her samples to the Facilitator, together with a brief note on each sample of students' work showing their reasons for their provisional assessment of the students' work. This will support all relevant teachers in reviewing the samples of students' work in the preparatory phase.
- The Facilitator will assemble and make available the appropriate examples of student work and attached notes supplied by the subject teachers some days prior to the commencement of the collaborative portion of the SLAR process.
- Teachers will use 40 minutes of their professional time to access this material, examine the samples and attached notes, and familiarise themselves with their content.
- The balance of the SLAR process (a meeting of a minimum 80 minutes' duration) will be held at a time suitable to the teachers in the subject group, without impinging on student tuition time and without the use of any substitution.
- Schools will be required to maintain the currently defined levels of student contact time, i.e. 28 hours per week.
- Schools must not incur any additional costs through Substitution.
- Supervision and Substitution must not be used in facilitating SLAR meetings.

Option D

- SLAR meetings are held entirely during normal school tuition hours and the teacher allocation for professional time to the school is reduced to remove the equivalent of 8 hours of professional time per full time teacher (and pro-rata amounts for part-time teachers).
- Additional paid substitution is provided to facilitate attendance of teachers at SLAR meetings.
- Supervision and Substitution must not be used in facilitating SLAR meetings.
- The reduction in teacher allocation to the school may result in the loss of teaching posts in the school. Normal teacher re-deployment arrangements will apply in situations where the number of teachers working in a school exceeds the approved teacher allocation for that school.
- The allocation to individual teachers of teacher professional time available to the school may be prioritised by giving professional time to teachers of Junior Cycle only.
- A SLAR meeting will be a single meeting of approximately 2 hours duration.