

## Junior Cycle issues pursued

In November 2015 the ASTI undertook a consultation with members in schools and at branch level on the Junior Cycle reform proposals, in order to identify the reasons why members rejected the proposals.

Following this consultation, an ASTI delegation consisting of the ASTI President, General Secretary, General Secretary Designate, Vice President and Immediate Past President met with the Department of Education and Skills and relayed the outstanding concerns.

These included:

- Increased workload/bureaucratic pressure on teachers
- The Impact of the proposals on teaching time
- The feasibility of timetabling Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings; including the holding of these meetings within school time
- Concern about whether 200 hours is adequate time for subjects
- The lack of ordinary and higher level options for most subjects
- The impact of Classroom Based Assessments on teaching and learning time
- The lack of options for assessing oral competence in Classroom Based Assessments
- The lack of examination conditions for the Assessment Task process
- The requirement for Classroom Based Assessments / Assessment Tasks in subjects which already have a practical component and folio (and where the practical component will continue to be marked by the State Exams Commission e.g. Materials, Technology (Wood))
- The lack of clarity regarding the percentage of the final State Exams Commission grade which is assigned to the Assessment Task
- The maximum length of final written exams
- The absence of State certified oral exams in Gaeilge and modern European languages
- The lack of clarity in relation to the proposed new subject area “Wellbeing”

Following the meeting between the Department and the ASTI, the Department gave a number of clarifications (*see page 2-4*).

### Standing Committee considers Department response

At its meeting on December 11th 2015 ASTI Standing Committee considered the Department’s clarifications and a statement from the Department that issues of contention and interpretation could be addressed via an “Implementation Committee” as part of the ongoing implementation of the Junior Cycle Proposals. Standing Committee stated that as ASTI members rejected these proposals, the union therefore cannot be party to an Implementation Committee.

The ASTI Directive remains in place, *see page 4*.

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Further updates are available at [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie)

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The Directive on Junior Cycle remains in place, *see page 4*

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## Teachers of English

Teachers of first and second year English are required to teach the Framework for Junior Cycle English Specification. The ASTI Directive does not prohibit the teaching of this. However, the Directive does prohibit attendance at Framework for Junior Cycle CPD for teachers of English.

It also prohibits teachers of English from engaging in activities relating to School Based Assessment for the purpose of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). This includes any engagement in activities relating to Classroom Based Assessments and Assessment Tasks.

Further information for English teachers is available at [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie)

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### The ASTI Directive does not prohibit the teaching of the Junior Cycle English specification

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In a ballot of ASTI members in September 2015, members voted to reject the document entitled *Junior Cycle Reform – Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation (including Appendix)* by 55% to 45%.

Members also voted to continue industrial action up to and including strike action by 70% to 30%.

## Department's response to ASTI concerns

The following are key extracts from clarifications issued by the Department following meetings between the ASTI and the Department

Please note: The full text of the clarifications is available on the ASTI website [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie)

### ***ASTI concern: Lack of ordinary and higher level options for most subjects***

**Department response:** "The subject specifications will be designed to cater for the needs of students of a range of abilities. It should also be remembered that there are PLUs available for students with special educational needs. The requirement will be to ensure that the more able student is appropriately challenged while allowing students of all abilities to demonstrate their particular achievement. . . . As the specifications are developed in each subject over time, the approach to developing common level specifications will be kept under review with the NCCA and SEC."

### ***ASTI concern: The feasibility of timetabling Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings (including required attendance at such meetings outside normal school hours and potential impact on extra-curricular activities)***

**Department response:** "It is noted that SLAR meetings will be a relatively infrequent occurrence for an individual teacher over the course of a year, given that they are limited to a maximum of two per subject per academic year.

"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 Department has agreed that JCT will be asked to develop an elective workshop on timetabling in 2016 and that they will develop exemplar timetabling approaches as part of this."

### ***ASTI concern: Impact of Classroom Based Assessments on teaching and learning time/ increased workload for teachers***

**Department response:** "In overall terms, all junior cycle subject specifications are being designed to be manageable in the time available. The CBAs are not an add-on to the specifications; they are an integral part of normal teaching and learning processes.

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### Common level subjects

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### Timetabling of Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings

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### Impact on teaching

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“ . . . The provision of additional professional time within timetable for each teacher (amounting to 22 hours or 40 minutes a week for a full time teacher) has been agreed to ensure that teachers do not have any additional workload as a result of the changes to curriculum and assessment arrangements.”

***ASTI concern: Lack of options for assessing oral competence in Classroom Based Assessments.***

**Department response:** “The Department has, with the NCCA, further closely examined the four options provided for in the re-drafted assessment specifications provided by the NCCA. While open to further specific suggestions, we are satisfied that there is considerable scope in the four options that are presented for the delivery of the oral language CBA to accommodate a wide range of student interests, abilities and contexts and that the flexibility provided will avoid any particular problems that some forms of delivery may present for some students.”

***ASTI concerns: Concerns about the authenticity of the Assessment Task where it is carried out over more than a single class period in circumstances that would not replicate examination conditions. The question was also raised of what arrangements would be made for students who are absent when the Assessment Task is being carried out.***

**Department response:** “It is agreed that further guidance should be developed on how the task should be organised, taking account of the intended purpose of the task and the requirement that it be undertaken within class time.

“We believe that absent students should be accommodated in completing the task by local arrangements in schools. In the interests of the student, a school should make reasonable efforts to put alternative arrangements in place. This would be in line with current good practice for students in subjects with existing second components. The NCCA will provide guidance in relation to this as part of their assessment specifications.”

***ASTI concerns: Lack of clarity about the percentage of the final State Exams Commission grade which is assigned to the Assessment Task. In addition, a separate Assessment Task should not be required in those practical subjects where the second assessment component will continue to be assessed by the SEC.***

**Department response:** “It is intended that an initial value of 10% will be assigned to the Assessment Task within the initial specifications for English, Science and Business Studies. It is intended that the question of the value to be assigned should be kept under review in this context and the approach to the development of further subject specifications can be informed by the initial experience. It is further agreed that a separate Assessment Task should not be required in those practical subjects where the second assessment component will continue to be assessed by the SEC.”

***ASTI concern: The language and the number of performance bands\* to be used in descriptors for assessing performance in the Classroom Based Assessments.  
(\* Exceptional, Above expectations, In line with expectations, Yet to reach expectations)***

**Department response:** “It is considered that four levels allows for sufficient differentiation while avoiding over-complication. The Department and NCCA are open to suggestions in respect of the wording of the descriptors for each of the four levels.”

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**Oral Classroom Based Assessments**

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**Assessment Task - Lack of exam conditions**

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**Value devoted to Assessment Task grade**

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**Descriptors used to assess performance in Classroom Based Assessments**

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**New subject area  
“Wellbeing”**

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**Other examination issues**

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**Assessment specifications  
for English**

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**ASTI concern:** *Lack of clarity about the new subject area “Wellbeing”.*

**Department response:** “It is agreed that further development work is required in this area. This development work is already underway within the NCCA and will involve extensive opportunity for consultation with and input from teachers and their representatives. It is accepted that the visibility of individual subjects within the area of Wellbeing will need to be addressed to avoid a ‘hybrid subject’ approach.”

**ASTI concerns:** *The maximum length of final written examinations and the absence of State certified oral examinations in Gaelige and other modern European languages.*

**Department response:** “As regards the written examinations, courses will be designed so that some of the learning outcomes will be assessed by means of the final examination and some will be assessed by means of the CBAs and Assessment Task. In the case of oral examinations, even if was considered desirable it would not be realistic to contemplate their inclusion in light of the very real existing difficulties involved in maintaining Leaving Certificate oral examinations at present due to a lack of availability of examiners and substitute teachers.”

**ASTI concern:** *Concern about aspects of the NCCA Assessment Specifications for English that had been presented to the recent Council meeting including inconsistencies and the status of the document and nature of its circulation.*

**Department response:** “The Department undertook to impress the importance of these issues on the NCCA and to request that arrangements be made to allow the content issues concerned to be addressed in a revised version of the document. The Department has subsequently met with NCCA and confirmed their intention to make appropriate arrangements for this purpose.”

### DIRECTIVE TO MEMBERS

At its meeting on 25 September, 2015, ASTI Standing Committee decided to direct ASTI Members in all schools, including Junior Cycle Network Schools, to continue their withdrawal of co-operation with the introduction or implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework proposals as follows:

- 1** Not to attend CPD organised in connection with the Junior Cycle Framework Proposals.
- 2** Not to attend meetings associated with the Junior Cycle Framework Proposals.
- 3** Not to attend any planning or participate in any planning activities organised in connection with the Junior Cycle Framework Proposals.
- 4** Not to engage in any aspect of school based assessment for the purpose of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).
- 5** Not to engage in any development of or delivery of Junior Cycle Framework Short Courses.
- 6** Not to engage in any event or function related to points 1 to 5 above.



**SUPPORT ASTI'S JUNIOR CYCLE CAMPAIGN:  
For Standards, Quality, Equity and Fairness in Junior Cycle education**