

Oireachtas Joint Committee of Education and Youth

Curricular Reform at Senior Cycle

Opening Statement by ASTI General Secretary Kieran Christie

For the meeting of 22nd October 2025

Introduction:

ASTI is always positively disposed to meaningful curricular development. The current redevelopment of Senior Cycle has some welcome aspects but the implementation of the programme has been too rushed.

In late 2024/early 2025, ASTI and TUI called on Minister McEntee to pause the programme to enable an already stretched system to adequately prepare for a more orderly introduction of the first Tranche of nine subjects.

Unfortunately, Minister McEntee decided to drive on with implementation. In May 2025, ASTI and TUI balloted our members on a set of proposals included in the document “Senior Cycle Redevelopment – Implementation Support Measures”. While TUI accepted the terms set out in the document, ASTI did not consider the measures to be sufficiently comprehensive and rejected the proposals.

This matter is now being dealt with within the terms of the Dispute Resolution mechanisms of the Public Service Agreement 2024 – 2026.

ASTI members' concerns regarding Curricular Reform at Senior Cycle

ASTI members' concerns span a number of key areas. The former Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, prescribed that there should be a minimum 40% marking allocation for Additional Assessment Components in each subject. While this presents no difficulties in some subjects, for others it is problematic. For instance, it is the view of the ASTI, shared by a large body of opinion within the scientific community in Ireland, that the allocation of 40% of marks to the Additional Assessment Components in the science subjects is inappropriate and should be lowered to 20%. The Department of Education and Youth has also received extensive representations in that regard from the Irish Universities Association and the Irish Science Teachers' Association, to name just two.

Mathematics is another subject about which our members have a similar concern.

Another key concern remains regarding the revised Leaving Certificate Engineering specification with the removal of the day practical from assessment.

The former syllabus included three assessment components:

- The Design and Manufacture Project (previously 25%, now increased to 50%),
- The Written Examination, and
- The Day Practical (a full-day, hands-on test in which students were required to accurately manufacture a component from working drawings).

The new specification reduces assessment to only two components, the Design and Manufacture Project and the Written Examination, with the day practical omitted. Many ASTI members are deeply disappointed by this decision, as the day practical provided a vital opportunity to assess students' precision, problem-solving, and practical hand skills, which are fundamental to Engineering education.

Resources

Biology, Chemistry and Physics are included in the first tranche of subjects that were rolled out for the redeveloped Leaving Certificate in September 2025. In many cases, ASTI members advise us that their school is ill-prepared to accommodate the enlarged requirement of engagement in practical work associated with the new syllabi. Laboratory facilities are insufficient and sub-standard in many schools and the Department of Education and Youth neglected to carry out an audit of facilities nationwide prior to the introduction of these revised subjects. Funding has been provided for consumables but capital funding where necessary, has not been made available.

Unlike the practice across many other OECD countries, laboratory technicians and other support staff are not employed in schools, adding further frustration to the roll out.

Moreover, ASTI is unaware of any risk assessment procedures being implemented in schools regarding this enormous growth in practical activity in science laboratories. Indeed, the current safety guidelines for laboratories are also quite old and in need of updating.

Training/CPD

In 2023, ASTI Annual Convention and TUI Congress adopted a motion that asked that for all future Leaving Certificate syllabi (specifications), the *Department of Education, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and State Examinations Commission* publish the full range of syllabus documentation concurrently and not less than 12 months prior to implementation of the syllabus. The syllabus documentation should include a detailed syllabus, comprehensive teacher guidelines, sample examination papers and sample marking schemes.

While we acknowledged that this material has issued for the tranche of subjects that commenced in September, it was piecemeal and the last element was issued just last month.

The training plan for teachers of the new revised subjects spans four years. However, tranche 1 new/revised subjects were rolled out in September, meaning two sets of Leaving Certificate students will complete these subjects before teachers are fully trained. This is concerning for our members.

Teacher and Student Workload

Teachers and students will have extra workload and new time-consuming work practices imposed on them in the implementation of the new subjects. This includes materials preparation, storage, compilation, and uploading of material for SEC examination purposes.

The Department of Education and Youth has not produced adequate proposals regarding the additional time required by teachers to sufficiently support students regarding the Additional Assessment Components.

Generative Artificial Intelligence

There are no comprehensive guidelines available to teachers on the use of AI in the production of materials by students for assessment, save for a general acknowledgement that students will be permitted to use generative AI tools when completing their AACs and a requirement that students will need to reference the use of AI tools. The big concerns for teachers were well captured earlier this year when the State's AI advisory council stated in a report that efforts to detect students who pass off work generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) as their own "will not" succeed because of the technology's sophistication.

The report noted that “It is now clear that detection methods do not and will not work”.

ASTI is aware that the Department of Education and Youth is setting up a task force to focus on the appropriate use of AI in Senior Cycle Redevelopment and Assessment. The State Examinations Commission is also commissioning research.

It beggars belief that the new Senior Cycle redevelopment programme is up and running - teachers are grappling with this new reality in all our lives - and the Department of Education and Youth and the State Examinations Commission are doing no more than setting up task forces and commissioning studies. It further underlines our earlier submission that the whole programme is too rushed and should have been paused.

Authentication

The Leaving Certificate has long been respected for its validity, reliability, and fairness. Its external assessment structure ensures that all candidates are assessed under the same standardised conditions.

The emergence of generative AI and insufficient guidelines on its use and misuse mean it may be practically impossible for teachers to fully authenticate the work of each student. The Department of Education or the State Examination Commission have not provided adequate guidance and support in that regard to address the legitimate concerns that have been expressed.

Teachers have concerns regarding the extent of their indemnity when acting in complete good faith, against actions taken by students who may be unhappy with the authentication process.

Equity

ASTI believes that the award of 40% of overall marks for the Additional Assessment Components will create additional inequality at Senior Cycle, widening the social divide. Benefit will accrue to those with access to well-equipped school laboratories, computer facilities, laboratory technicians etc and advanced generative AI tools. ASTI believes that no group of candidates should enjoy unfair advantage over others arising from the nature of the test or the manner of its implementation.

Student Wellbeing

The Department of Education and Youth portrays the redevelopment of Senior Cycle as something that will diminish student stress. ASTI believes that there will be an extra burden on students, enormous pressure associated with a constant cycle of deadlines and as such will add to students suffering stress.

Conclusion

Senior Cycle redevelopment provides an important opportunity to modernise Irish education, but reform must strengthen—rather than weaken—the core principles that underpin public confidence in the Leaving Certificate. There are real and present concerns that the rushed implementation that is taking place may

- Increase student stress and anxiety,
- Potentially compromise authenticity,
- Exacerbate inequalities in resources between schools, and
- Undermine the validity, fairness, and integrity of assessment outcomes.

ASTI urges the Department of Education and Youth and other lead stakeholders to engage meaningfully with teachers and students and deliver a Senior Cycle that is fair, valid, and truly supportive of all learners.