

## Tackling the big issues

A report from the Irish Universities Association outlines problems arising from the adoption of what it describes as a “learning outcomes only” approach to syllabus design in Ireland over the past decade. The report – a response to the Leaving Cert Biology, Chemistry and Physics draft specifications – warns of a lack of clarity for teachers on what subject content should be taught to students, and the depth to which content should be taught.

Last year, ASTI Annual Convention passed a motion demanding that all future Leaving Cert syllabi (specifications) be accompanied by detailed syllabus documentation, which embeds depth of treatment and includes comprehensive teacher guidelines. This issue will once again feature at this year's Convention, including a motion that all feedback received in public consultations on subject specification be shared with each member of the relevant National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Subject Development Group, so that a consensus report can be published. Teachers continue to have serious concerns about new subject specifications and their potential impact on teaching and learning. The ASTI will continue to highlight these concerns and demand sound redevelopment of Senior Cycle. No one wants a repeat of the mistakes made in the Framework for Junior Cycle development process.

### AI and education

The impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on teaching and learning will also be considered at Annual Convention. While AI brings many unknowns, one thing is clear: AI is evolving much faster than the education sector's ability to fully comprehend its impact on teaching, learning and education. The Department of Education must play a proactive role in ensuring that there is a plan in place for the development and use of AI in schools. This plan must include consideration of all potential consequences for students: their development as human beings, their right to safety and privacy, and more. The impact on teachers must also be prioritised including protecting the relational nature of teaching, workload and work intensity, access to quality CPD, the right to safety and privacy, and the safeguarding of intellectual property created by teachers for and in the classroom.

### Workload

A number of motions at this year's Annual Convention reflect teachers' concerns that workload and work intensity are impacting negatively on teaching and learning. The work of teachers has changed significantly over the past 15 years. The role and workload of the teacher has expanded. This has been exacerbated by initiative overload in education and by Government policies that tie teachers into bureaucratic processes, which do nothing to improve students' education. I look forward to meeting many ASTI activists at Annual Convention, and to discussing all of the above issues and many more. For members not attending Convention, I hope that you can follow the discussions and debates online and in the media over the three days.



**Geraldine O'Brien**

ASTI President

## Senior Cycle redevelopment

Senior Cycle redevelopment is now well underway. Important modifications to the original announcement by Minister Foley on March 29, 2022, have been achieved.

Strong campaigning by the ASTI led to an announcement by the Minister that she had asked the State Examinations Commission (SEC) to research the potential role and impact of generative artificial intelligence in teacher-based assessment. While this work is ongoing, she has decided to progress additional and practical components that will be externally assessed by the SEC. Prior to this development, the Minister took a decision to abandon her plans for students to sit Leaving Certificate Paper 1 in both English and Irish at the end of fifth year. Decisive and co-ordinated action works.

However, there has been no breakthrough regarding the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations. Following strong representations by the ASTI, the music practical performance exams were returned to within school term for Leaving Certificate 2023. It is regrettable that our demand that oral examinations also be returned to within school term has not been met. This is neither a sound educational nor logistical decision. Students will again be enormously stretched to perform across a range of subjects over a tight timeframe.

The ASTI was assured by the SEC that holding the oral examinations at Easter in 2023 did not indicate the timing of these tests in perpetuity. The SEC stated then that holding the exams at Easter would allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the arrangements outside of the context of Covid. Unfortunately, in December 2023, the ASTI was advised that while the SEC had intended to have all of the evaluation work completed at an earlier point in time, it had not been possible to complete the evaluation in a timeframe that would not have delayed important decisions on the 2024 examinations. Accordingly, the 2024 Leaving Certificate oral examinations will be undertaken during the first week of the Easter holidays. This is not good enough.

More generally, we have consistently stated that it is essential that the mistakes made in the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle, which sidelined the voice of teachers, must not be repeated.

Many subject specifications are currently being redeveloped. The ASTI has encouraged our members to engage with public consultations. Indeed, since Leaving Certificate redevelopment was announced, the ASTI has worked closely with the TUI and other stakeholders on a joint approach of opposition to elements of the proposals. A key element of this has been the joint hosting of seminars for activists and subject representatives. It is important that the two unions continue to collaborate on the wider ongoing programme for Senior Cycle change and advance the terms of the joint position adopted last year at both the ASTI Annual Convention and the TUI Annual Congress, which set out in detail our requirements regarding subject specifications and accompanying documentation that underpin the introduction of new/redeveloped syllabi.



**Kieran Christie**

ASTI General Secretary