

When the stakes are high, we stand up for education

The stakes are high in any education reform. Some of the Minister's proposals for the redevelopment of Senior Cycle are welcome. However, others will undermine education standards, exacerbate inequalities, and cause additional stress for students and teachers. For this reason, ASTI members will protest outside their schools at lunchtime on Tuesday, November 19. We have serious concerns about a number of Senior Cycle Tranche 1 subject specifications, which are due to be taught in all schools from next September. We are calling on the Minister to pause the rushed implementation of these specifications and address teachers' concerns.

'One size fits all' spells disaster

If implemented in September 2025, Tranche 1 subject specifications will see a 'one size fits all' approach introduced for all Leaving Cert additional assessment components (AACs). The problem is that this approach ignores the advice and expertise of teachers of Biology, Chemistry and Physics, who say a blanket 40% minimum grade weighting for AACs is not appropriate for these subjects. Teachers believe this approach will lead to an over-focus on the AACs, which will detract from overall teaching and learning. It will also increase workload and stress for students, as well as their teachers, and inequalities in schools with less than adequate resources.

In my own subject – engineering (a Tranche 2 subject due for introduction in September 2026) – teachers favour a 50% weighting for two additional components: an engineering practical (25%) and project work (25%). What this demonstrates is that teachers support AACs, but believe the weighting must be appropriate to the subject.

Another major concern is the extra workload and stress for students facing multiple AACs across subjects. The impact AACs will have on student workload is outlined on page 16 of this *ASTIR*. Students get one chance at second-level education. We must ensure that changes to the Senior Cycle improve students' experience and maintain standards.

ASTI surveys

In the coming months, the ASTI will issue two important questionnaires to members by email. The first questionnaire, which will be issued in late November, relates to teachers' experiences of compiling, storing and submitting examination materials to the State Exams Commission. The findings will be used as part of our Senior Cycle campaign. The second survey relates to psychosocial hazards for teachers. The findings of this survey will be used in our ongoing campaign to protect teachers' safety, health and welfare. Both questionnaires will take a few minutes to fill out and will provide valuable data for the ASTI. Make sure your voice is heard.



Donal Cremin

ASTI President

Blanket 40% assessment component cap is unsound

How long does it take for a good idea to become a bad idea in post-primary education? A brand new subject specification in Leaving Certificate Agricultural Science was introduced in September 2019. There are two assessment components at both higher and ordinary levels. The written component is awarded 75% and the coursework component is worth 25%. Fast forward to March 29, 2022, and the announcement of Minister Foley's Senior Cycle redevelopment plan. All changed and changed utterly. What seemed like a good idea a few years earlier was no longer regarded as viable, to the point that an outright ban was announced, preventing any additional assessment components of less than a 40% weighting in all Leaving Cert subjects going forward. The answer to my opening question: just shy of 31 months it seems!

What were they thinking back in September 2019 that they all failed to rail against the vicissitude that was being unleashed upon post-primary education? Not a murmur. Why were ministerial advisors, the Inspectorate, the NCCA, the SEC, dare I say the ASTI, not up in arms that such an educationally unsound measure was being visited upon the system? I jest, of course, but it does beg an obvious question. It is unthinkable that, if it was known in September 2019 that a 25% additional assessment component was so abhorrent that it would be worthy of an outright ban, the great and good in Irish post-primary education would not have shouted stop. So why the insistence by the Minister on this provision? What oracle of wisdom had the Minister's ear? I am not aware of any major academic studies between the two dates in question that mandated such a *volte face*.

I have asked for a more coherent rationale and explanation for this outright ban on less than 40% of the marks for additional assessment components, beyond being told that it was in the Minister's announcement in March 2022 and as such appears to be beyond question. I await a response.

To be clear, the ASTI has consistently argued that the subject development groups contain the expertise and are best placed to advise on the optimum assessment arrangements for their subject, and the percentage weightings for additional assessment components that are most appropriate. We have already learned that for some, a 40% weighting or greater for additional assessment components works fine but for other subjects a weighting of no more than 20% is deemed necessary. There has been no movement by the Minister for Education on this to date. Leaving Certificate subject specifications are being redeveloped for introduction to the system at a rate of knots, itself a worrying situation. It is all a bit rushed. There will be a whole new line-up in place by 2029. This stubborn unwillingness to revisit what is obviously a flight of fancy, risks enormous damage to the teaching and learning of some subjects for many years to come.



Kieran Christie

ASTI General Secretary