Consultation on the Senior Cycle Review

Response #12953189

Participation Details

Started on: 30/08/2019 12:15:00 pm
Last updated on: 30/08/2019 1:25:10 pm
Duration: 70:10 min
Collector: Anonymous
IP address: Anonymous

I am responding as a:

- Primary teacher
- Principal/Deputy Principal (Post-primary)
- Principal/Deputy Principal (Primary)
- Second level student
- Third level student
- Parent/Guardian
- Teacher educator
- Third level lecturer/researcher
- Member of Industry
- A Further Education teacher/lecturer
- Post primary teacher
- Recent school leaver

✓ Dyslexia Association of Ireland (NGO representative Organisation)
School type (if applicable)

- Voluntary secondary school
- Community school
- Comprehensive school
- ETB
- Community College
- Other (please specify)

I am responding on behalf of . . . (for example, an organisation. Please use only if applicable)

Dyslexia Association of Ireland (NGO representative Organisation)

Can we list your organisation as one that has responded to our survey in the report? We will not associate any other data in the report with your organisation.

✓ Yes

- No

1. To what extent do you agree with the purpose for senior cycle emerging from the review?

Agree

2. Is there too much or too little emphasis on particular aspects?

N/A

3. Is there anything you would like to see added to the conversation about the purpose of senior cycle?

Increase self-sufficiency, encourage independent learning and thinking, active learning, project work, technology being integrated into all aspects of the senior cycle as it is in society and the workplace.

4. To what extent do you agree that these are the skills and qualities students should develop during senior cycle as they engage with knowledge across a range of disciplines?

Agree
5. Is there too much or too little emphasis on particular aspects?

N/A

6. Is there anything you would like to see added to the conversation about the knowledge, skills and qualities students should develop throughout senior cycle?

Increase of presentation skills, different means of teaching and assessment methodologies, project type assignment and CA should be majority weighted – again in line with society and the reality of workplace expectations. The overall aim of Senior Cycle should be to create independent self-sufficient learners and thinkers.

7. To what extent do you agree with the vision for teaching and learning emerging from the review?

It is our particular concern that students with additional learning needs are fully enabled to participate in all aspects of their chosen curriculum subjects, through meaningful differentiation of teaching and assessment.

8. Is there too much or too little emphasis on particular aspects?

We feel that there needs to be a greater focus on students with additional needs (diagnosed or undiagnosed). If we get it right for them, we get it right for everyone.

9. Is there anything you would like to see added to the conversation about teaching and learning at senior cycle?

We need to have a strong focus on inclusion of neurodiverse learners. The principles of universal design for learning (and assessment) should underpin all elements of the senior cycle.

We need to move away from a one size fits all for exams and assessment, for example, the ability to chose between writing an essay, delivering a powerpoint or audio/visual presentation. A key principle of disability accommodation is the need to be flexible and adaptable to individuals differing needs.

CPD is critical – Teacher training at present is not adequate and fit for the modern world and the needs of learners. There needs to be a mandatory module on neurodiversity, including universal design, identification and in-class support available to all teachers to truly enable real inclusion.

Teachers can and should be trained to formally identify dyslexia, moving away from the medical model. Educational Psychologists should only be needed for complex cases and are not necessary for assessment/identification of Dyslexia. This moves us away from the inequitable medical model and builds capacity within the system and our teachers. DAI feel that having their Dyslexia identified and named is very important to students’ mental health, enabling them to understand their individual learning abilities, link with others and self-advocate. The UNCRPD acknowledges the right to have your disability identified and named to enable you to fully understand your needs and to be able to link with others with similar needs.

Everything needs to be underpinned with a belief that all students, with the correct support, can succeed. The research consistently shows how the expectations of teachers are strongly linked to outcomes for students. High expectations, proper recognition, appropriate accommodation will enable success for all learners.
10. To what extent do you agree with the proposed areas for development above?

We agree with getting rid of the ring-fencing of certain subjects. Students should have access to the widest possible range of subject options so that they can forge their educational path in line with their aptitude and skillset.

Better career guidance is essential and should be about exploring the full range of third-level options for students, including further education, higher education, apprenticeships, and work and study combination courses.

Students needs in education should be paramount in determining the options available to them. Vested interests who do not want to see change should not be given priority over the voices and needs of students, and we welcome in particular that the NCCA has given students the opportunity to voice their opinions throughout this process.

The use of assistive technology (in both teaching and assessment), and the potential for online classes is greatly welcomed by the DAI.

We should aim to create a school environment where students have good opportunity to self-advocate and where they are listened to in a meaningful way throughout their education.

11. Is there too much or too little emphasis on particular aspects?

We believe that a lot of these changes have the potential to support the mental health and well-being of students. However, it is important that before decisions are taken which impact students, the impact on their mental health and well-being is considered and is paramount. Students must be fully included from the onset in decision making which impacts upon them.

12. Is there anything you would like to see added to the conversation about pathways and programmes in senior cycle?

It is important that the full implications of each of the different pathways are mapped out and taken into consideration by the student prior to making a decision about a pathway that is going to have an impact on the available progression routes. While LCA is a very good decision for some people, it does limit choices and makes it more difficult to go onto Higher Ed. This is another argument for removing the ‘ring fencing’, and giving all students an equal opportunity to progress to the widest range of post-second-level options possible.

Access to Transition Year should not be linked to perceived academic ability. The holistic benefits for all students of Transition Year should be noted, and therefore, all students should have an equal opportunity of participating in Transition Year, if they so chose.

13. To what extent do you agree with the proposed areas for development above?

It is important that a wide range of subjects is available to all students, and that those subjects are not dependent on the socio-economic area, patron body, or gendered nature of a school. Where students have additional needs, they should be supported to pursue subjects that are of interest to them and in line with their aptitude.

Full subjects and shorter courses provide the potential for students to maximize their points in full subjects in line with their likely progression routes, and to potentially fulfil certain compulsory requirement via shorter school-based courses.
14. What solutions do you envisage for addressing problems relating to curriculum overload?

Having functional literacy and functional numeracy (non-graded) would free up time and allow some children to reduce the curriculum load who have significant difficulties with these subjects currently. For example, a student with dyslexia who has an aptitude for STEM could do as many maths and science-based subjects as possible, while doing literacy as a functional proficiency module. This model would also support further and higher education providers in selecting those students with the best aptitude for individual courses.

Giving a realistic expectation of the day to day coursework would mean that young people are not arriving into college unprepared for the reality of the course they have chosen.

In relation to the challenges of providing a wide range of subjects and modules, brave decisions in student best interests may need to be made in e.g. co-location and mergers.

15. What curriculum components, if any, do you think should be compulsory in senior cycle?

For exam subjects, students should be able to have the widest choice possible of subjects in line with the needs of their likely progression routes and in line with their strengths. Functional proficiency skills should be compulsory, however, this could be obtained via the shorter course format.

Having short courses in functional literacy and numeracy should still be compulsory (in line with international practice), but not linked to CAO points.

We envisage that full subjects are linked to CAO points and third-level courses. The shorter courses may be needed for broad entrance criteria (functional proficiencies). Therefore, maximizing a student's ability to perform in the subjects of strength, as well as completing subjects relevant to their likely third level course.

16. Is there anything you would like to see added to the conversation about curriculum components in senior cycle?

All subjects should be viewed and respected equally. The historic perception of certain subjects perceived to be of higher standard while others are seen to be ‘easier’, is not always bounded in reality. With this in mind, the aim should be to have more equal respect for all subjects and the choices students make in relation to subjects which they have an aptitude for.

Bonus points – The arbitrary decision to award bonus points to selected subjects can be counter products to students who do not have an aptitude for that subject, and can cause huge stress and anxiety for that student, pressuring them to do a subject at a particular level. Where bonus points could be used constructively, is if they are linked with giving weighting to certain subjects which are connected to a college course. E.g. getting bonus points for a science-related subject if one is applying for a science-related course.
17. To what extent do you agree with the proposed areas for development above?

The DAI agree with using alternative means of assessment, for example, projects, presentations, and practicals, and that these should be given greater weight. This would allow students to perform in a way that is more reflective of real-life and the workplace, helping to develop real-world skills required by employers. In particular, for students with Dyslexia, where their difficulties are exacerbated under timed pressure, it is important that the emphasis and weighting of the final exam is minimized.

The idea of creating exams in both 5th Year and 6th Year is not welcome. This doubles the amount of stress and there is no benefit for any student. The anxiety and mental health impact of the current exam situation is well known, and we see no rationale for potentially doubling this. It also does not allow time for reflection, development of critical thinking and deeper analysis of subjects which is an agreed goal of the senior cycle.

Second chance, adult learners will also benefit from more projects, practical work, and continual assessment work, rather than the current focus on terminal exams.

Broadening assessment and exam approaches and giving students options in how they present project work is very welcome, for example, moving away from handwritten projects to allowing students to use technology, oral presentations, audio/visual recording, or other alternatives which meet their needs and enable them to demonstrate their knowledge and competencies.

18. Is there too much or too little emphasis on particular aspects?

There is too much emphasis on achievements in academic subjects, and not on the student's whole contribution to school life and personal development. The system needs to take a holistic approach to students and find ways to value and reward contributions, e.g. volunteering, student council, extra-curricular activities, and sports. This helps us to invest in students to enable them to become active and informed citizens who participate in society and the economy as they learn and make the transition to life beyond school.

19. Is there anything you would like to see added to the conversation about assessment in senior cycle?

Access to accommodations and arrangements for students with additional needs must be integrated in all assessment components throughout the senior cycle, and not just in exams. For example, assistive technology for projects, extra time, reader, and spelling and grammar waiver.

20. To what extent do you agree with the proposed areas for development above?

We agree in line with the above, that a wider focus to fully recognise the contribution of students beyond subjects is important, and is crucial to fostering good mental health.

21. Is there too much or too little emphasis on particular things?

N/A

22. Is there anything you would like to see added to the conversation about reporting in senior cycle?

Wider recognition of the non-exam subject elements. There is a need to look at students holistically and their achievements in non-exam subject areas, in order to equip them with the necessary skills for life after school.

23. Please rank the following in order of priority for senior cycle, first being the most important:
1. Exploration of assessment timing alternatives
2. Inclusion of broader curricular components such as life skills and lifelong learning
3. Development of flexible pathway through senior cycle
4. Removal of ring-fencing
5. Exploration of curriculum components
6. Exploration of provision of options in areas of technical, vocational, professional and creative learning
7. Development of knowledge, skills and qualities identified in the review
8. Exploration of broader reporting
9. Development of follow on L1/L2 programme

If you have selected other, please give details below.

24. How important are the following supports to facilitate a future senior cycle?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supports</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate CPD</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for collaboration and development</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term planning for change (systemic, leadership, local)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous monitoring and evaluation of change</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of schools as Professional Learning Communities</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop additional career guidance supports for students</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create supports for schools and Principals to manage change</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you have selected other, please give details below.

Meaningful and regular consultation with students and representatives organisations, such as those representing students with additional needs. The student’s experience and voice should be paramount.

25. Is there anything further you would like to see added to the conversation about priorities and supports?

Supporting students with additional needs within the classroom with access to reasonable accommodations is critical so that it is embedded throughout all of the senior cycle and not just in exams. The normal accommodations used on a day to day basis should be accepted and available to students for examinations, whether that be formal or informal assessment, continuous assessment, project work or timed exam. Supports and accommodations should be provided on a needs basis, verified by the teachers who are working on a daily basis with the student. Additional third party or school-based testing should not be needed to verify the obvious needs that teachers have identified and see on a day to day basis.

If you have any further comments or suggestions in relation to Senior Cycle Review, please outline them below.