



JMB Submission to the NCCA on the Review of Senior Cycle

Introduction

JMB/AMCSS is grateful to NCCA for inviting this organisation to make a submission on behalf of our members in respect of this highly significant debate. A framework for Leaving Certificate education in the Republic of Ireland has been in place since 1924 and, it may be argued that a time-travelling student from that era would have little difficulty in recognising the overarching schooling experience within a contemporary school. A renewal of senior cycle is thus very timely as there can be little doubt but that social, economic and technological changes impacting on Irish society have been both pervasive and deep. The argument for radical educational change at senior cycle is not, however, unassailable. For all its faults, the system suits many students, their families, the ‘shape’ of our schools and, of course, the higher education system. What is arguable, however, is whether such a monolithic system is inclusive of all, aligns with our culture and human spirit or develops the critical democratic citizenry contemporary states such as ours desperately need if we are to be economically, socially and morally progressive. The emphasis on individualisation at the expense of social learning and global engagement should concern everyone, and this is but one facet of the discussion politicians, policymakers, practitioners and people must have in the current debate.

That said, it is not the purpose of this submission to respond to each of the concerns at stake across this consultation spectrum. JMB/AMCSS, an organisation at the forefront of post-primary educational delivery, is focussed on the experience and outcomes of *schooling* and the role that school life must play within the broader education landscape of the young person. We nonetheless view the present renewal debate as an opportunity not merely to ‘catch-up’ with postmodern societal realities but also as an opportunity to lead and frame the direction in which the lives of this and future generations will be lived. The medical profession is not alone in having a direct impact on peoples’ health, wellbeing and future – in education, lives are at stake here too.

The present consultation phase, now drawing to a close, has explored a spectrum of thinking around pedagogy, assessment, the needs of 21st century young people and the requirements of

civic society on our system. Emerging themes from consultation to date (November 2019) resonate with feedback from voluntary secondary school management:

The scale of change is challenging but many significant educational and curricular shifts have occurred during times of economic restraint, for example the introduction of free secondary education for all in 1967 and, indeed, the development of the current Leaving Certificate programme itself while the modern Irish State was itself just emerging.

The scope for differentiated provision across schools, while demanding attention to equity issues, nonetheless represents an exciting opportunity for universal learning themes to be given authenticity by becoming grounded in the local context.

‘All schools together’ articulates a very important value-in-action in that no school should either be left behind or choose to stay behind as the nation’s 15 to 18-year olds are liberated from some of the more limiting and stifling characteristics of the current paradigm.

That feedback indicates there is much to retain in the existing senior cycle is heartening. This is not a conservative or reactionary voice but an acknowledgement that there exists a long tradition of school communities busily adapting curricula, within its limits, to suit the specific cohort of the young people they serve.

The phrases ‘empowerment’ and ‘sense of ownership’ represent a call for educational democracy. We see both as ‘enablement’ wherein school and the wider communities can have confidence in both the processes and outcomes impacting on the country’s most precious resource.

The themes of connections, bridging and transitions emerge from our consultation. It is self-evident to identify renewed early childhood and primary curriculums as providing an urgent impetus for coherence with, and change in, post primary but it must be acknowledged that the continuing renewal of junior cycle is acting as a catalyst for significant change, if not infectious renewal, at upper secondary level.

The Points System is universally unloved by educators as it enshrines superficial ‘equality’ at the expense of true equity. Education is not a preparation for life – it *is* life. While the points system may impose a backwards pressure resisting change, the long-term impact of successful renewal at lower secondary, could finally bring about a freeing of post primary education from its colonisation by the matriculation process:

..... I would urge that the Irish school system of the future should give freedom - freedom to the individual school, freedom to the individual teacher, freedom as far as may be to the individual pupil. Without freedom there can be no right growth; and education is properly the fostering of right growth’. P.H. Pearse, January 1916

That the existing terminal examination system is not appropriate for a contemporary senior cycle is virtually beyond argument. It is time we took courageous decisions around assessment for and of learning while trusting in the professionalism and instinctive fairness of our teachers.

Confidence in Certification represents a requirement of civic society that cannot be diluted. There is, however, no contradiction between the validity and reliability demanded of a certification system and its methodologies – i.e. we do not need to persist with this externally corrected, academic, largely written, stress-filled, terminal Leaving Certificate for the nation’s young people – we can do better than this.

Bespoke Qualifications at Senior Cycle? *Why not?* We have successfully implemented specifications and assessment modalities for Levels 1, 2 and 3 in our schools and so greater alignment of the system with the person has already begun. Level 5 outcomes in terms of knowledge, competencies and skills may be demarcated in a wide variety of frameworks and, while a plethora of bewildering subordinate awards is unnecessary, an imaginative approach to, for example credit-based certification, can nonetheless offer acceptable outcomes to stakeholders and society as a whole.

Teaching and Learning – our core project. We are engaging here in nothing less than the re-professionalisation of our educators and a re-shaping of the expectations of students, parents and the wider community. We must stop ‘filling-up the empty vessels’ and acknowledge both the multiplicity and plasticity of intelligence and accept the existence of a staggering amount of pre-existing knowledge and skill in the brain of a modern young person. We must re-frame our task as teachers and finally abandon the factory model of ‘schooling’.

Who we are

The JMB (Joint Managerial Body) was founded in 1972 to represent the interests of all voluntary secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland. It is the main decision-making and negotiating body for the management authorities of over 370 voluntary secondary schools.

JMB represents the voluntary secondary schools in negotiations on all issues at national level which affect the management of schools. The JMB has 24 members:

- The President
- 20 members of the Council of AMCSS (Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools), i.e., Two elected representatives from each of ten AMCSS Regions
- 3 representatives of ISA (the Irish School Heads' Association) representing Protestant Schools in the State.

The Irish School Heads' Association (ISA) was founded in 1869 as an Association of Headmasters of Protestant Schools in Ireland.

The Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (AMCSS) was established in 1987. Organised on a Regional level with 10 regions, it now forms the basis of the Council of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (CMCSS) which has been in existence since the 1960's.

The Board of Management of each member school is represented by its Chairperson and Secretary (who is also the Principal) at the Regional Meetings of AMCSS.

The present submission therefore has emerged from a consultation process within these component organisations, as well as with our voluntary secondary colleagues in Educate Together and an Foras Patrúnachta and reflects a clear management perspective on post-primary education characterised and informed by the characteristic spirit of our schools.

What we stand for

AMCSS Mission Statement

The mission of the AMCSS is to promote, represent and support the work of the Boards of Management and Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools in Ireland in living the ideal of the Catholic school. Inspired by the vision and life of Jesus Christ, our schools strive, in a spirit of partnership, to create and develop communities of faith in which the development of the whole person is paramount.

While they share many characteristics with other schools in offering a public service, faith schools seek to reflect a distinctive vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education. The Gospel sees the world in which we live as a creation of God who came among us so that, in his own words, we might ‘have life and have it in all its fullness’ (John 10:10).

We see this challenge as a call to authentic holism. This not only applies to the development of the individual in providing for pastoral care, an appropriate balanced curriculum and attention to body, mind and spirit but also to the school as a living community in itself. An emerging framework for senior cycle should therefore focus on the holistic needs of both the young people in our care and to enhancing the hitherto neglected, in curricular terms, social fabric of the daily life at upper secondary. The individualistic nature of, particularly, senior cycle, fails to reflect either the integrated realities of family and community life or the often-articulated demands of the modern workplace where emotional, social and team-building skills are in greater demand than technicist knowledge alone.

The submission framework which follows is founded on the following set of values:

We aim to -

Provide an integral quality education:

Young people get a single chance at education in their teen years. Attention to holism and excellence cannot be left to chance and an emerging curricular framework must seek to cause to be delivered a consistently high standard of appropriate learning for young people up to, and beyond, the middle of the current century.

Educate for adaptation and change:

That change is the only constant has been axiomatic since the latter half of the 20th century. The pace of change however is clearly accelerating, and the flexibility needed by citizens of the 21st century must be reflected in their formative structures, of which schooling forms one of the greatest elements. The Darwinian imperative of ‘adapt or move or die’ is even more

restrictive in these times as globalisation is pervasive and there is nowhere unchanged to move to.

Educate for formation in faith:

From earliest times, human beings have sought ‘gateways to the sacred’ and our commitment to Gospel values, permeating every single aspect of school life reflects an acknowledgement of the true human condition. Advances in religious education as a subject in recent years have been both welcome and successful and NCCA is to be commended for its developmental work in this area. In the present debate, we look forward to supporting further efforts at enshrining authentic human values into any emerging senior cycle framework and to finding space for true growth and hope for our young people.

Educate in a family spirit:

Faith school management often considers its schools to resemble large families rather than small-to-medium academic organisations. Schools are safe places for young people to make mistakes as the Christian message tells us we are loved and forgiven. We do not want our children and young people to become old before their time, yet the overcrowded current curriculum leaves little space for creativity, for play and for recapturing the joy of learning and living. We must develop a new framework conscious of the vital role of pastoral care and remediation in our school life and take a stand against vested interests invading the sacred space of child and young adulthood.

Educate for service, justice and peace:

The current dialogue is taking place against a backdrop of serious social flux and anxiety. Individuals, families and indeed entire countries can be seen to be reverting to a fear-driven bunkerisation in the face of real and perceived threat. School management is working harder than ever, with fewer supports than ever, to preserve calm, optimistic and happy atmospheres in their schools. While current pressures, such as policy overwhelm, may cause educators to cry ‘pause, please’ there nonetheless remains an imperative to look to a less fraught future and begin immediately to invest in the mind-set of future leaders and followers with curricular space for global perspectives, environmental awareness, social justice and reconciliation.

Where school communities are at

Students

Virtually every schematic representation of educational provision puts the student at the centre. While their cognitive-content requirements have been more than met by current and past curricula, there exists a growing demand for student involvement in determining what is learned and how it is taught. Our goal is to achieve *engagement* on the part of the student – engagement with self-identity, with schoolwork, with peers, teachers and ultimately with the

future and to seek to ensure equity between boys and girls in terms of learning outcomes. It is time to acknowledge the innate intelligences and adaptability of young people and to make genuine efforts at incorporating pupil-voice into our deliberations. To do anything less will condemn us to repeating the now inappropriate models and paradigms of the past.

Parents

Though our daily work centres on their sons and daughters, our constitutional and moral contract is with parents. Schools have responsibilities toward parents, guardians and ultimately toward whole families. Central to the contract between school and home is trust. This trust can only be enhanced by engagement – the closer the parent is to education and schooling, the greater the impact will be on the young person’s educational achievement. Contrived partnership is no longer sufficient. There can exist a yawning gap in the relationship between parents and schools. The present debate represents a once in a generation opportunity to listen openly, to invite collaboration and to establish a level of respect and trust around practices and attitudes on both sides of the child-centred equation.

Teachers

Teachers report that they are ‘rushed, crunched, isolated, distrusted and undervalued’ - this, at a time when our society, more than ever, needs teachers to act as moral agents. It might perhaps be seen by many to be unrealistic to expect teachers to generate wholehearted engagement with yet another change-process and yet it is precisely because of their instinctive moral change-agency that frontline educators will, in fact, eventually drive this process. To restrict their structured and formal engagement to the curricular framework and implementation phases of the project is to relegate teachers to the role of delivery – a sterile and, as we have seen with junior cycle reform, ultimately divisive strategy.

Management

The vision most school principals and Boards of Management have for themselves centres on doing their job as developers of a learning culture in their schools.

Administrative, legislative and resourcing workloads have, however, conspired to rob leaders-of-learning of the time and creative energies needed to re-culture their schools and carry out their primary role and function. That this is virtually a universal phenomenon does not release our government from its obligation to facilitate the creation of true learning cultures in our schools. Meanwhile, the opposite has been happening. The middle management structures in our schools remain inadequate in terms of scope and scale, funding and staffing have suffered un-reversed cuts, intolerable workloads and emotionally draining challenges ranging from the emergence of a new class of poor, to being frequently caught in the middle between unions and state have all had a corrosive effect on school management and principals in particular.

Yet, like our teachers, school leaders want positive change. The fear is that we will move too far too quickly, in spite of the importance of the mission. We already operate ‘Christmas tree schools’ festooned with a myriad of initiatives, checklists and ‘best practice’ models. The

holy grail of worthwhile curricular innovation is coherence and the price of grounded change at senior cycle will be to pay as much attention to the re-professionalisation of both teachers and management as to the development of the pedagogy itself.

Our Consultation Process

JMB interacts with its members on educational issues using a range of strategies. Central to this engagement is a set of National Advisory Groups, each having regional representation, expert advisory members and secretarial support. Along with groups focussed on SEN, ICT and DEIS Education, our overarching National Curriculum Advisory Group (NCAG) works to bridge the policy-practitioner divide in terms of curriculum reform.

Activities undertaken in the current consultation project included a bi-lateral meeting with NCCA executive staff, dissemination of the briefing documents to school leaders, promotion of engagement with the NCCA consultation website, discussion at JMB Council level, itemising senior cycle on the agenda of Regional meetings in 2019 and the establishment of a representative plenary forum to frame the debate as it emerged from the wider membership. In addition, JMB/AMCSS is represented on relevant NCCA structures such as subject development groups, the Boards for Junior and Senior Cycle and Council itself. JMB is grateful to the officers of NCCA for their wholehearted and unequivocal support with this process.

An overarching theme emerging from our internal consultation process with school leaders has been an acknowledgement of the adult, or young adult, character of learning and therefore of the learner-teacher-curriculum axis, that must characterise a future upper secondary experience.

We have therefore framed our thinking, and this submission, under the principles of andragogy as a natural progression from the pedagogy more appropriate to the child and adolescent. Young adult learning is based upon comprehension, organization and synthesis of knowledge rather than rote memory. There are seven such principles and this contribution sets out some core ideas, narrative feedback and system possibilities from our consultation in respect of each:

- 1. Young adults must want to learn**
- 2. Young adults will learn only what they feel they need to learn**
- 3. Young adults learn by doing**
- 4. Young adult learning focuses on problem solving**
- 5. Experience affects young adult learning**
- 6. Young adults learn best in an informal situation**
- 7. Young adults want guidance and consideration as equal partners in the process**

Consultation Outcomes and Ideas

1. Young adults must want to learn

Young adults learn effectively only when they are free to direct their own learning and have a strong inner and excited motivation to develop a new skill or acquire a particular type of knowledge, which can sustain their learning. We are already breaking significant ground at junior cycle with developing student voice and the negotiated curriculum. A renewed senior cycle should present even wider opportunities for young adults to shape their own fields of learning and align better with their individual learning styles.

Think about the opposite – students having to learn what they don't want or need to learn! We've been doing this for generations. It is absolutely accepted that in order to sustain the broad, liberal education programme that has served our society so well, some 'hard choices' must be faced, particularly in light of the poor PTR and legacy factory-model schooling we have inherited, but we can surely do better in terms of course components and pathways. Policymakers, politicians, practitioners and indeed parents, do not have a monopoly of wisdom in terms of what should be core curriculum or one-track pathway or what defines broad-liberal or how to cope with change-of-mind – young adults themselves have far greater insight and agency were they to have the flexibility and freedom to choose and be supported and advised but ultimately trusted in their decisions.

Soundings from the consultation

- Bring OALs – other areas of learning – into senior cycle, as they are now part of the system at junior cycle and are even more important for senior cycle success.
- Have a structured life-skills programme which will support students to be autonomous into their early twenties with finance, cookery, health, digital safety, conflict management, surviving work/college etc.
- Some things are taught, but the best things are caught. The problem is these are difficult to measure and report. We need to care less about measurement.
- Ireland is a vulnerable open society and economy – its future citizens require global awareness in terms of geography and society (e.g. politics).
- Teachers should enjoy their careers and feel energised by teaching the subjects they love. Update and review curricular more frequently.
- As well as being knowledgeable, our aim should be to produce resilient, autonomous self-reliant young adults.

System possibilities

- Retain some core learning but beyond this, provide for modular courses, even on a phased, initial basis

- Maintain a five-year review model for all senior cycle specifications.
- Reduce reliance on textbooks in designing curricula – teachers can be really creative in terms of developing bespoke teaching, learning and assessment materials. Give them guidance on this and resource them.
- Migrate the junior cycle idea of short courses to senior cycle.
- Develop a credit-based accreditation system which allows for transferability, specialisation, love-of-learning fields and brings parity of esteem to all domains and pathways.

2. Young adults will learn only what they feel they need to learn

Young adults are practical in their approach to learning; they want to know, ‘How is this going to help me right now, and down the road? – Is it relevant (content, connection and application) and does it meet my targeted goals?’

Why do so many LC exam candidates walk out of the centre and thank their lucky stars they ‘won’t have to remember any of that awful [insert subject here] again’? Part of the answer is not that human beings are soullessly pragmatic, but we *are* profoundly teleological – we are end or goal oriented, fully aware (even as teenagers) that a rich and full life needs the arts and history as much as it does languages and the sciences.

Soundings from the consultation

- We have RPL - recognition of prior learning - embedded in Further and Adult Education. Can this not be incorporated into the senior cycle pathway?
- We urgently need a clear, relevant vocational pathway through senior cycle. We are too hung-up on the academic and are excluding significant numbers of young people.
- Embed transition year type learning across the three years of senior cycle.

System possibilities

- The LCVP subject combinations currently acceptable to DES are no longer fit for purpose. We do not need to wait – this unnecessary anomaly could be opened-up at the stroke of a pen.
- A modular, credit-based system would allow for students who wish or need-to, to forge a vocational pathway which could allow for transfer to apprenticeships after two years. NCCA should explore such models in greater detail and open some proposals to consultation, without prejudice to the existing framework.
- The transition year experience varies greatly from school to school. We could adopt and adapt the best of TY-type engagement and outcomes and develop stand-alone

modules which could be engaged-with across senior cycle, whether it's two years for some or three years for others.

3. Young adults learn by doing

Children and adolescents also learn by doing, but emerging adults learn best through active practice and participation. This helps in integrating component skills into a coherent whole.

We, as a society and as a system, have consciously and subconsciously denigrated skills as somehow 'lesser' than the so-called 'higher' cognitive functions. This is simply a culturally inherited prejudice, with no foundation in neurology, philosophy or anthropology yet it persists and mutates into norms that produce the shocking outcome of a generation of young people whose entire education culminates in a three-digit number – and, if we ask them, they say that's all they and their parents care about.

We can do better than this.

Soundings from the consultation

- Have an Erasmus style provision within senior cycle.
- We have so much to learn from LCA – it's a neglected resource.
- The President's Award could be embedded into senior cycle for all students.
- We can no longer have (old) FETAC type courses which disadvantages some students.
- Renew the entire LCA programme, remove the ring-fencing for admission and allow more schools to provide it.
- Schools should be supported in providing quality workplace experience for at least some students across their senior cycle – not just in TY.
- We need to develop a course in psychology.
- The CAO points system is crippling upper secondary experience and outcomes.

System possibilities

- Identify the most engaging, effective and productive elements of Leaving Cert Applied and consider how such creative provision could be extended across the wider senior cycle landscape.
- Explore the possibility of formalising the Gaisce Award across the three years of senior cycle – bronze in fourth year, silver in fifth and gold in sixth.

- Extend compulsory education to 17 years of age and offer progressive, interest-based, specialisation across the three years with an opt-out after year two.
- JC is at NFQ Level 3 and LC is at Level 5. We should explore the possibility of Level 4 learning both in terms of providing for students with additional needs as well as foundational experiences for those who wish to enter the workforce earlier.
- QQI is discouraging use of their validated programmes and awards at post primary, other than PLCs. NCCA should open a conversation with QQI and SOLAS around possibilities for a return of certain programmes and awards to post-primary schools as we have significant gaps in our provision through which we lose young people.
- HEIs should be given a mandatory timeframe to explore and develop a matriculation process which (a) reduces the backwash on post-primary (b) elicits the type of self-directed learner they need and (c) leads into broader first-year programmes with subsequent specialisation.

4. Young adult learning focuses on problem solving

Children and adolescents tend to learn skills sequentially. Emerging adults tend to start with a problem and then work to find a solution. A meaningful engagement, such as posing and answering realistic questions and problems is necessary for deeper learning. This leads to more elaborate, longer lasting, and stronger representations of the knowledge.

The siloing of our subject based model of schooling is simply an artefact of history. Other countries have models of schooling that allow for high-quality and rigorous cross curricular learning, interdisciplinary research, project work and high levels of socially mediated, collaborative learning.

Our senior cycle is choked by vested interests who will tolerate tinkering but not reform. The cry of ‘evolution not revolution’ is simply a proxy for fear – primarily of trade unions and the universities. We have gone beyond creeping incrementalism as national educational policy.

Soundings from the consultation

- Life is not a problem to be solved but sometimes presents as a succession of challenges which would benefit from a solution-mindset and skill base in a range of domains.
- Computer Science is very much about iterative, creative problem-solving, it’s not about computers. Applied maths is the same. These should be encouraged, particularly across the genders.
- Teach our young people about the value of faith and of living hopefully. *‘Hope is not blind optimism – it’s the certainty that something makes sense, no matter how it turns out’* – Václav Havel

- A key aim of our education system, particularly at senior cycle, should be the development of critical, engaged and empowered citizenship – otherwise populism and extremism will thrive.

System possibilities

- A syllabus specification on philosophy is long overdue. This could be developed long in advance of any major systemic changes in senior cycle. (We did it for computer science!)
- Take courageous decisions around our obsession with subjects as the sole mediators of learning. The system in Victoria provides for 128 ‘studies’ across a range of domains and vocational modules. Their assessment and matriculation systems merit serious scrutiny in terms of applicability here.

5. Experience affects young adult learning

Even young adults have more experience than children. This can be an asset and a liability – if prior knowledge is inaccurate, incomplete, or naive, it can interfere with or distort the integration of incoming information. Nonetheless, our curricular specifications are largely founded on behaviourist and cognitivist philosophies which, of course, will always have their place but are not the whole story in terms of experience.

There exists an opportunity for us now to expand the paradigm, retaining cognitivist and behaviourist approaches such as rote learning and memorisation but also emerging into the neglected domains of constructivism and connectivism with a new focus on discovery, self-guided learning, peer grading and review, spontaneous learning groups, finding ‘learning nodes’ (such as your grandmother!), sharing of content and resources etc. etc. – all the tools we need to lead rich and full adult lives in the home, workplace and society.

Soundings from the consultation

- Young people need support in recognising what they’re good at and where their interests lie – we cannot assume they know this innately.
- Self-directed learning is a set of skills which can be learned. Developing a meta-cognitive mind-set should be part of the curriculum.
- We need to build in time for reflection on learning – even at the expense of a modest reduction in content. Structured – not drift.
- L2LP students have nowhere to go after junior cycle

System possibilities

- The junior cycle reflective assessment task could be developed as an element of each new senior cycle specification.
- As a matter of urgency, NCCA should be directed to develop a blended Level 3 to 4 senior cycle programme for students who have completed Level 2 at junior cycle.
- Incentivise (e.g. with tax breaks) employers to provide high-quality work experience placements through the year.
- NCCA should be encouraged and resourced to continue its phase-alignment and transitions work to enable a system that has a coherent flow from early childhood to school-leaving.

6. Young adults learn best in an informal situation

Children and adolescents have to follow a curriculum. Often, young adults learn by taking responsibility, by the value and need of content they must understand, and the particular goals it will achieve. Being in an inviting, collaborative and networking environment as an active participant in the learning process makes it efficient and much more engaging.

The great irony of Irish post-primary life is that while the relationship between teacher and student generally moves into a much more adult and collaborative space after junior cycle, the curriculum and terminal examination cause instant and hard regression into a disciplinary framework of high-stakes, depersonalising, system-gaming and ultimately de-humanising final two years.

We can do better than this.

Soundings from the consultation

- Young people are inherently moral and connected. A future senior cycle should be less individualistic and incorporate a service orientation with elements of community and social action.
- Why are we relying on memorisation as the principal skill our young people are forced to develop?
- Junior cycle has begun to restore a balance between formative and summative assessment. Migrating this into senior cycle is absolutely possible – even necessary, if we are to avoid a collision of T&L paradigms for every student in the country for years to come.

- Our school year and day are medieval! They are based on an agrarian model in terms of the academic year and a factory model in terms of the school day/week. We can be more creative than this.
- Our PISA findings show we are ‘teaching to the centre’ and have neglected our high-achieving students. This imbalance must be systematically addressed in a reformed senior cycle.

System possibilities

- NCCA has already commissioned research on computer-based examinations. Similar work should be commissioned to explore the possibility of open-book examinations. The consequences in terms of liberating the teaching and learning process without loss of rigour could be enormous.
- Identify our key learnings from junior cycle in terms of assessment modalities and see how we could bring SEC accreditation to bear on examination nodes and components spread over the final two years of senior cycle.
- Have a 5th and 6th year assessment point for each subject which would reduce the all-or-nothing pressures which cause so much anxiety and distress.
- Explore the possibilities of summer provision. This is absolutely key for students with additional needs or who become disengaged through the long holiday. It would also open-up possibilities for extended work placement, brief internships, focussed remediation, gifted-student projects and other enriching possibilities.
- Why is the school day the same as the office/factory day? Young people are not at their most receptive in the early morning – can we explore piloting evening class provision and see how it works out?

7. Young adults want guidance and consideration as equal partners in the process

Young adults want information that will help them improve their situation. They do not want to be told what to do and they evaluate what helps and what doesn't. They want to choose options based on their individual needs and the meaningful impact a learning engagement could provide. Socialization is more important among adults.

Many aspects of our education system were significantly damaged by the recessionary-based cuts since 2010 but none more so than the shocking – and as yet unrestored – removal of an adequate guidance and counselling service in each school.

Add to this the demoralisation of the teaching force, overwhelmed by waves-without-troughs of externally mandated policy change (via a psychologically damaging 100 circulars per year across the school system) and we have a very barren landscape for yet more fundamental reform.

Teachers have a make-or-break role in curricular reform, so it makes sense to invest-in and appreciate this national resource and build a more positive, reciprocal and high-expectation relationship with the teaching profession and their representatives.

Soundings from the consultation

- Teacher motivation is key to any developments at senior cycle. Discover what it is that draws, not pushes, our educators into new professional spaces.
- Our teachers are our students' best advocates and their reluctance to change is often founded on protecting young people from the vagaries of political interference, as we have seen time and again with the junior cycle.
- We will need deep and meaningful CPD to motivate and embed any changes – you cannot teacher-proof the curriculum.
- Teachers urgently need planning time within their school week. Lose the Croke Park model and embed collaboration time within the working week.
- Teachers need to be re-energised – they should be affirmed more and provided with sabbaticals to renew their subject areas and/or qualify for new ones.

System possibilities

- The teacher contract requires updating and renewal. It should incorporate expectations and possibilities for career-long professional development and resources must be put in place to sustain this. Bolting-on instrumental in-service in an incoherent manner is no longer fit for purpose.
- Work on the negotiated curriculum (already well-developed by UL) should be explored to scope-out possibilities for such integration at senior level.
- Do not attempt to renew or reform senior cycle without first establishing a fit-for-purpose guidance and counselling service.

Next Steps

JMB/AMCSS is represented at both Board and Council level in the Senior Cycle renewal enterprise. We are aware that the eventual Report to the Minister will represent an end to this initial consultative phase of the project and we would encourage the maintenance of momentum in the process to avoid demoralisation around current provision or ongoing discontinuity between junior and senior cycles. The next phases will also involve consultation, but it is expected that the school site will once again emerge as a rich source of feedback as this major national project develops. Once again, JMB schools will be happy to participate in such development work and will have the support of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools in any such undertakings. We believe that the perspective of voluntary

secondary schools is of particular value in this discourse as the faith-centred characteristic spirit of these communities, affirmed in constitution, legislation and regulation, provides a rich tradition rooted in the fully human spirit, mind and body. Each voluntary secondary school, though part of a cohesive state provision and centred on the common good, nonetheless brings with it a sense of its own autonomy as an educational enterprise. The principle of subsidiarity from which our legislative and moral authority derives, allows a certain degree of freedom in terms of contextualisation and affirms our schools' significant rights and responsibilities in terms of the provision of locally relevant, engaging, holistic, pastorally aware, and high quality student-centred schooling.

Whether the next steps involve a steady-state approach, with incrementalism leading to enhanced versions of what we currently have (TY, LCE, LCA, LCVP) or a more fundamental reform aligning with the voices expressed in this submission, we will inevitably return to the question of resources.

Our school leaders paid explicit attention to the logistics of change, the CPD required, the operability or otherwise of implementation demands and, though we do not yet know the shape of what may eventually emerge in terms of policy, key considerations included:

- Clarity and cohesion of policy – not developed ‘on the hoof’ as occurred with junior cycle
- Leadership for learning prioritised – liberating the principal and senior management team to develop the core function of the school
- Fit-for-purpose DP, AP and administrative support for a contemporary, high-demand and high-functioning educational enterprise
- PTR reduced to expand the curriculum and reduce overcrowded classes of young adults. This is *the* key lever for sustainable change at senior cycle as no number of creative programmes or pathways can continue to be provided on a shoestring.
- Expanded and professionally developed guidance and counselling service
- Any emerging CPD programme must not disrupt and erode the life of the schools – be courageous around deploying school closure for this vital national enterprise
- Reform a system that removes teachers from schools at a critical time for second-component SEC examinations
- Develop multi-disciplinary teams and approaches in support of students with SEN. Most have complex needs which cannot be met by low-cost single approach methods.
- Junior cycle reform almost completely failed to engage parents – this cannot be allowed to happen for senior cycle
- The physical environment of the school is not aligned with contemporary needs. A programme of adaptation, refurbishment and additionality will be required to create

learning spaces which align with an integrated, holistic, high-wellbeing approach to upper secondary education.

- Voluntary secondary schools spend inordinate amounts of time fundraising. Our schools should be resourced equitably – the current situation is discriminatory.
- Digital technologies will inevitably be embedded in new programmes (as is the case, for example, with LC PE). Infrastructural and CPD bottlenecks must be removed in advance of any new developments at senior cycle.
- Boards of Management will require extensive CPD if they are to be answerable in terms of their statutory leadership for learning role.
- Provide the principal with the authority to make locally contextualised decisions around their school's senior cycle programme, deployment of adequate resources and some degree of liberation from the top-down, externally mandated curricular tramlines we have been shaped into for generations.

JMB/AMCSS now looks forward to engaging with NCCA and the other stakeholders involved in this important phase of the initiative and will ensure our members continue to have the 'school management voice' heard while continuing to contribute to the national discourse around the emerging Senior Cycle renewal process.

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