



**1 November 2019**

**Re: Senior Cycle Review - Arts Council Submission**

The Arts Council welcomes the review of Senior Cycle, and the opportunity to contribute to this process.

We are supportive of the vision for Senior Cycle which is emerging from the review process to date. We feel there is scope to explore further and more flexible pathways for young people who wish to develop a career in the arts and creative industries. We also believe there is potential to place greater focus on young people's wellbeing throughout Senior Cycle, and on the development of the range of skills that will enable young people to succeed in learning and in life. We believe the arts have an important role to play in this regard.

We agree that the value placed on the current exam-focussed Leaving Cert Established above other pathways needs to be addressed. We note the concerns raised by review participants regarding the negative effects that come from over-emphasis on high stakes examinations. One of these effects is a fall-off in participation in extra-curricular activities, such as the arts. Our analysis of data available through the Growing Up in Ireland Longitudinal Study confirms the range of positive child outcomes that are related to arts and cultural participation – in particular with regard to structured cultural activities, and reading for pleasure. We are currently analysing the data at age 17, and it is already clear that while Transition Year has a positive impact on young people's participation in arts and cultural activities, overall there is a stark decline between ages 13 and 17 - with participation at its lowest among those in Leaving Certificate Year, or who have left school. It is of concern that the patterns developed in Senior Cycle may contribute to patterns for future engagement in creative and cultural activities. In addition to supporting learners to lead balanced and happy lives, these activities develop a range of creative, collaborative and communication skills, which will also benefit them across a range of career choices.

We would recommend that across all areas of learning, consideration should be given to ensuring young people have opportunities to participate in arts and cultural activities alongside other specific

academic goals. Recognition of student skills development and achievements outside of exam-based frameworks, together with provision for time to be spent on such activities, would encourage this.

While we believe that achieving a balance between exam preparation and practice-based learning is relevant for all learners, we note that the current Leaving Certificate Established is particularly challenging for those who wish to develop a career in areas for which pathways at Senior Cycle are not available at their school - for example in dance. For these young people, Senior Cycle, as currently structured, can be a particularly challenging time.

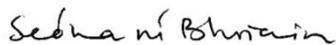
Facilitating and encouraging pathways that combine practical and applied courses with academic courses in Senior Cycle would be valuable, and could build on the strengths of the LCA and LCV, without imposing a hierarchy. Involving professionals and third-level providers in the arts and creative industries in the development of these courses could add to their real and perceived value, and ensure smoother progression to further specialised study, traineeships, and employment.

The Arts Council would welcome the opportunity to support the NCCA in the process of developing Senior Cycle provision in arts-related areas that might be further expanded, arising from the review, whether in film, animation, dance, theatre, or other areas. We were happy to contribute to the NCCA development group for both Junior and Senior Cycle Art, and would equally welcome collaboration in other relevant areas.

Some of the arts organisations the Arts Council supports have developed partnerships with their local Education and Training Boards to offer Local Training Initiatives, and we believe that the development of further partnerships such as these could potentially be further explored.

We welcome the excellent work of the NCCA to date in conducting the review of Senior Cycle, and would be happy to contribute further to the development of arts-related areas in the next stages of this evolving process.

Sincerely,



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