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## **NPCpp statement on Continuous Assessment for State Examinations**

The National Parents Council Post Primary (NPCpp) are grateful to the joint Committee for the opportunity to make this submission on behalf of students attending post-primary schools in Ireland and their parents.

NPCpp have previously engaged with the joint committee on related matters and whilst we acknowledge that the Leaving certificate examinations have served our young people well to date, we do advocate review and reform of the Leaving Certificate and the examination process currently in place in Post Primary education. We welcome efforts to evaluate and adjust current practices and examination methods within the education system to better reflect the talents and achievements of students and to better prepare them for further education and their future lives and careers.

While fully accepting that some method is required to assess the knowledge that a student gains through their post primary education the current system, primarily based on 'one-off testing' – namely Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations – reflects more as a memory test mostly suited to rote learning rather than genuinely assessing a student's learning, knowledge, ability or acumen for a subject.

Many studies and informed discussions suggest that on-going assessment has very significant value towards students learning and engagement while also being a better tool to establish the true depth of a student's knowledge.

Post Primary education would best serve our students attending it by enabling each to discover their own talents and areas of interest. Development of their strengths in areas of genuine interests would see real growth in their knowledge and ability to contribute towards these areas in their future lives. It would better prepare them and match the demands within 'areas of expertise' which they will experience after their post primary schooling.

Through nurturing a student's strengths and interests our education system can create self-motivated thinkers who learn and understand the benefits of discovery through research and evaluation. Assessment methods should enable and examine a student's true depth of knowledge, overall ability and critical thinking on an on-going basis.

NPCpp is also concerned that the current system of evaluation maximises stress on students who often memorise to regurgitate in a moment and then forget ! It does little for many towards assisting their learning or retained knowledge.

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Once-off examination can be brutal instruments undertaken at a particularly stressful time in most children's lives and does not sufficiently assess a student's overall performance and learning during their time at school.

From the calls received from parents and sometimes students themselves it would appear that exam anxiety is a very common reality in teenagers and to some students and their parents can be quite devastating. This was also highlighted during the NPCpp helpline last summer.

Significant stress in teenage students definitely occurs as a result of the anxiety caused by the current method of assessment and the pressurized study regime that derives from it. Educational or work opportunities associated with the outcome of the exam, the students' self-esteem with regards to their grades, judgements from friends, family and teachers in relation to their performance are amongst the main causes of stress in teenagers reported to us. Comparisons to friends and siblings based on once off exam results are also feared. Let us not forget that the stress the students are under can and does reflect on their families as well.

NPCpp acknowledge that some changes have already been made and that some subjects already utilise forms of continuous assessment and project works and believe that, where this is the case, there is wide acceptance of the benefits towards fairness and better evaluation.

NPCpp affirms that our curriculum and method of assessment should be evaluated on an on-going basis to ensure that our education system is fit for purpose and delivering fairly. Changes, when made in subjects, curriculum and assessment methods etc need to be regularly reviewed to ensure that they actually deliver the benefits as envisaged and will require constant updating to retain relevance in today's rapidly changing world and to ensure that Ireland remains to the fore in quality education.

In summary, NPCpp believes that the current examination method is not fully serving our children to their maximum potential and our education system, curriculum and methods of assessment must be reviewed and changed to incorporate increased levels of continuous assessment, to ensure that it is delivering what every child in our country deserves – A quality education that prepares them for their future lives. We also acknowledge the changes cannot happen overnight and that significant investment will have to be injected by Government in developing Continuous Assessment methods, teacher training whilst also ensuring the continuous assessments completed by students are free from plagiarism and are carried out in modern and fully equipped school environments. For continuous assessment to be successful further investment in education is necessary. We owe it to our young people to ensure that best practice is employed in our assessment methods of their learning which ultimately benefits all the people of Ireland and our nation and should be commence in earnest and will be supported by the NPCpp.

Geoffrey Browne (President NPCpp)

***NPCpp – Working towards a better education system for all***

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