



# JMB

JOINT MANAGERIAL BODY  
For Voluntary Secondary Schools

## **JMB Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, on the topic 'Reform of Senior Cycle'**

In preparation for our submission to the NCCA on the review of Senior Cycle, JMB undertook an extensive consultation process with voluntary secondary school management across the country. This process identified a range of important themes which we referenced in our original submission to this Committee, and we also identified some of the school-level conditions essential for the development of a new Framework for Senior Cycle.

In this Opening Statement, I now address some of the specific areas the Committee sought our views on.

### **1. Assessment Options**

Assessment, reporting and transition to other pathways are all closely aligned. At each stage of the Senior Cycle Review teachers, students and parents identified the importance of the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment approaches experienced by students at Junior Cycle and those that could be in place at Senior Cycle.

Participants also identified the variety of assessment approaches currently used in Transition Year as possibilities. They cited school-based projects, portfolio-based assessment, end-of-year interviews and modular, credit-based assessment as offering rich experiences in the assessment and reporting on students' learning.

Over the course of the Review, students suggested that continuous assessment by way of assignments, tasks and interviews promotes their independent learning and offers them better preparation for further education. Our experience around assessment at Leaving Certificate over the past two years has given us much to reflect on in this regard and opens-up possibilities some may never have thought possible.

### **2. Key Subject Areas and Digital Learning**

Taking the very best elements of Transition Year, LCA and LCVP offers the opportunity to build on students' learning and create significant foundations for further progression. In addition, the wide range of second components already assessed for state examinations represents good news, in that we are not starting from scratch, and we can build on what currently exists in the system.

Take for example, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), which was introduced in 1994 and which offers both a curricular experience and an assessment schedule that reflects different learning modes, opportunities, and achievement criteria. Coursework, a Case Study and Reflection on Practice in Work Experience are all central elements of the

programme. The opportunity for practice in the world of work is offered alongside the taught curriculum, and this could well be replicated in future.

Likewise, the best elements of Leaving Certificate Applied can be integrated into a new senior cycle. Inspectors' reports recognise that LCA reflects students' personal and social development during lessons and through their vocational education. Students are offered the opportunity to enhance their literacy, reflective skills, and personal and social development. They state that there is clear evidence that cross-curricular planning takes place in the completion of students' tasks and that genuinely active learning, structured group work and assessment of and for learning is prioritised.

Digital Literacy is now intrinsic to teaching and learning activity. But if the past 18 months have taught us anything, it is that a high-quality digital infrastructure is essential – not an add on, or an expensive luxury. The digital divide is very real. Infrastructure investment and ongoing professional learning support are essential prerequisites to a reconfigured senior cycle.

### **3. Higher and Further Education Requirements, Vocational Options and Career Paths**

One of our schools in the south of the country has developed an Apprenticeship Pathway Programme for Senior Cycle Students. They have developed links with Generation Apprenticeship and Solas for instance, and this has supported the development of their project. Students from Transition Year through to Leaving Certificate have engaged. Local employers have been central to the programme's development, as they have offered apprenticeship pathways for students at the school. Such models of collaboration in local communities integrate the best of the educational curricular provision offered at school with the opportunity for purposeful practice in a workplace setting.

There are significant synergies between the current national FET Strategy and the work undertaken in the Review of Senior Cycle. Both consider learning opportunities for senior cycle students and look at pathways from school to further education and training. The learning pathways as described in the project in our school in Cork align completely with the aims of the Strategy. Is there learning for us all in considering the FET strategy in conjunction with the development our Senior Cycle at 2<sup>nd</sup> Level?

Could there be greater collaboration between post primary schools and FET colleges?

Could we consider recognition of prior learning and links between Levels 1 to 4 on the National Qualifications Framework with programmes offered at Senior Cycle at Post Primary School? Currently, there is no dedicated progression to senior cycle for students engaging the Level 2 Learning Programmes at junior cycle. This gap needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency, even in advance of the broader senior cycle review.

These are just some of the possibilities we can explore, and I look forward to our shared conversation on this important national project.

**John Curtis, JMB/AMCSS General Secretary,**

**24<sup>th</sup> September 2021**