



I thank the Chairperson and members of the committee for the invitation to present here today. My name is Paul Crone and I am the Director of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD). NAPD is the professional association for post primary school leaders in Ireland and provides a united voice for principals and deputy principals on issues of common concern across all three post primary education sectors. I will speak briefly on the 4 issues outlined in the brief.

1. Assessment Options

Research undertaken in 2018 by NAPD found that 83% of students *claimed* that the Leaving Certificate examination in its traditional form was not the best way to assess their educational achievement. In the same survey 55% of parents were in favour of their children being assessed by their teacher and 65% of teachers were in favour of comprehensive reform of the Leaving Certificate. This research was undertaken pre pandemic and since then we have significantly more evidence and experience to inform our decision making in relation to student assessment.

We have learned that it is possible for teachers to assess their students. We have learned that entry to third level must be decoupled from terminal exam results. We have learned that students' anxiety and stress were significantly reduced when they had options. Students' voices were heard and they want flexibility.

Going forward, NAPD, advocates strongly for the student voice to continue to be heard. Give students a stronger say in their learning and assessment. We must recognise and embrace the professionalism of the teachers who have proven that they can impartially and fairly assess their students,

2. Key Subject Areas and Digital Learning

The provision of a comprehensive curriculum up to Junior Cycle places the student firmly at the centre of the learning and recognises the importance of providing a broad and balanced education as the basis for progression. As students mature, they become more self-aware, they become aware of their own strengths and passions, and as such they develop the ability to choose subjects that they like and subjects they are good at. This will in turn improve outcomes

and engagement. Continuing to offer this wide subject choice at senior cycle is of critical importance to keeping students engaged with their own learning.

In relation to digital learning, embracing the newly acquired confidence and competence in the digital space facilitates student independent learning, student autonomy and gives students the digital skills and competencies to access the curriculum in a digital format. Investment in infrastructure and professional development support for teachers will embed these skills in our schools.

3. Access and Equality

The recently published OECD report findings confirm the success of the DEIS (Delivering Equality in Schools) programme. The report states that 16% of Irish students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds performed at the lowest level in standardised tests compared to the OECD average of 29%. In addition, participation rates for 15 to 19 years old students in Irish schools are 94% compared to 84% for the OECD average.

These achievements are outstanding given that our spend on education as expressed as a percentage of GDP is much lower than many of our European counterparts as was highlighted in the same report by the OECD. However, the stigma associated with DEIS schools remains a significant issue for many students and parents. Indeed, many schools report that teachers will not apply to teach in a DEIS school. The current review of DEIS being undertaken by the Department of Education will need to address this issue.

And 4. Irish Language and Irish Medium Education

In 2021 only 58% of Leaving certificate students opted to sit the written paper in Irish, this is of course a cause for concern for a compulsory subject. At junior cycle, the new syllabi for L1 and L2 have yet to be evaluated, their impact on participation rates has not been given time to embed and in particular there has been no review done to see if there is a consequent impact on participation rates at senior cycle. Having said all of that though, the severe shortage of teachers to teach Irish and to teach other subjects through the medium of Irish may be the limiting factor in any future planning for the development of the Irish language and Irish medium schools.

Thank you very much and I am very happy to answer any questions you may have.

Paul Crone

Director

National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)