

ISME is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Committee. Leaving Certificate Reform is not identified by our membership as a key lobbying priority, but it will impact the future labour force and SME hiring decisions.

Regarding the issues raised in the consultation:

1. Assessment Options

While the Leaving Certificate has come in for legitimate criticism for the “rote learning” issue, its fairness, objectivity, reliability and consistency were not in doubt. The very significant difficulties caused by obvious grade inflation in the accredited grades system in 2020 and in 2021 have explicitly demonstrated the failures of adopting an ad hoc approach to continuous assessment. This has damaged the credibility of our education system as a whole.

2. Key Subject Areas and Digital Learning

The PISA rankings¹ now include focus on digital literacy. However, ISME and our member companies have noted basic failings among graduate-level recruits in accomplishing relatively simple tasks such as the ability to formulate a cogent paragraph of text on a business-related topic, free of spelling or grammatical errors.

3. Access, Equality and Well Being Supports

We are not aware of specific issues around access, equality or well-being supports, however we have had anecdotal representations made to us about the quality of teaching available in certain schools in areas such as STEM and European languages.

4. Higher and Further Education Requirements, Vocational Options and Career Paths

Our determination to open ever more universities in Ireland, at the expense of education in technical disciplines, is worrying. Annual surveys of the best third-level institutions in the world consistently show three technology institutions in the Top 10,² with MIT in first place for the last five years.

¹ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/21st-century-readers_a83d84cb-en

² <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2022>

While accepting that university status does confer additional cachet and attractiveness upon any educational institution, it is essential, bearing in mind Ireland's relative attractiveness to foreign multinational companies, that we continually strive for excellence in technical education.

We have a significant density of high-tech foreign multinational employers here, and a diminishing ability to supply them with suitably qualified labour.³ Conversely, a study by the IZA Institute of Labour Economics⁴ concluded that Ireland had the highest rate of overeducation among employees in Europe. Overeducation was defined as *“the proportion of employees in employment whose ISCED [International Standard Classification of Education] level of schooling lies one level or more above the occupational mode.”* At the same time, the OECD Economic Survey Ireland 2020⁵ found that *“measured literacy skills of Irish adults remained close to the OECD average, and numeracy and problem-solving skills were significantly lower for all age cohorts.”* This suggests a very significant skills mismatch between the output of our education system, and inputs required by Irish business.

5. Irish Language and Irish Medium Education

We note that despite the fact that Irish is an official EU language, Ireland is struggling to fulfil its quota of translators for the translation of EU law, directives and regulations.

6. International Evidence and Best Practice

Despite our domestic views of our education system, the World Population Review⁶ puts our education ranking just ahead of the global average. The PISA rankings are now far more granular and useful in their ratings than they used to be, but Ireland is not class leading in any notable respect.

³ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/rise-in-irish-companies-hiring-foreign-workers-to-meet-skills-shortages-1.4189736>

⁴ [IZA: Overeducation in Europe](#)

⁵ [OECD Economic Survey Ireland 2020](#)

⁶ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/education-rankings-by-country>