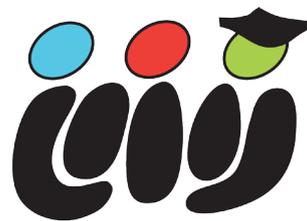


# Leaving Certificate Reform

NPCPP Survey Report  
November 2021



**NATIONAL PARENTS COUNCIL**  
**Post Primary**

COMHAIRLE NÁISIÚNTA TUISMITHOIRÍ  
Iarbhuideochais

This NPCPP survey on “Leaving Certificate Reform” was undertaken following discussions and consultations in recent years. These engagements included all stakeholders in post-primary education in Ireland.

The resulting comments and anecdotal observations of local and national reflections relating to the Leaving Certificate, its purpose, usefulness and suitability as a measure of a post-primary students knowledge and achievements at the end of the school senior cycle has seen general agreement that the Leaving Certificate, in its current form, is not satisfactory and needs to be changed, updated and made relevant in today’s educational journey and career pathways.

*“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire”*

William Butler Yeats 1865 - 1939

This survey issued ahead of, and during the early days of, the current consultations with educational stakeholders which are discussing reflections on the value of the current ‘traditional’ Leaving Certificate (last re-vamped over 50 years ago) in today’s Ireland and world and how it might be changed or updated.

The survey was conducted using the NPCPP database of post-primary parents and post-primary school parent bodies to ascertain their observations and broad attitude to the ‘traditional’ Leaving Certificate curriculum and process of assessment.

The NPCPP database represents parents from a geographical spread throughout Ireland with representation reflective of the traditional school sectors in percentage terms along with the more recent diversity in post-primary education.

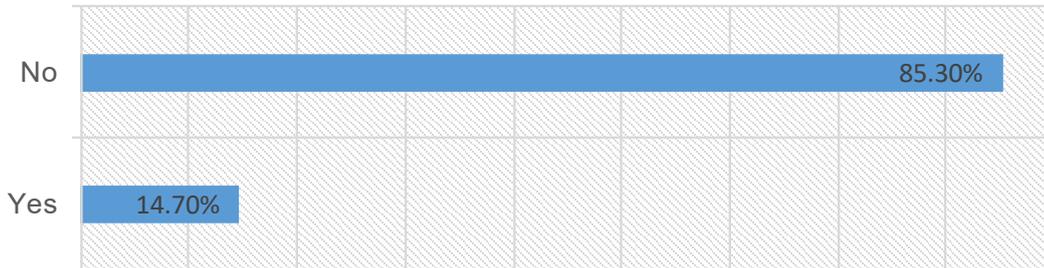
Responses received from over 2000 parents show that the completion rate on the survey was 100%, therefore all data is fully representative of the respondents’ views across the topics presented.

Such engagement demonstrates the serious concern that parents have in relation to the requirement for reform of the Leaving Certificate curriculum, method of assessment and the processes surrounding it.

Further surveys and studies will be undertaken by NPCPP as the consultations on the required reforms progress.

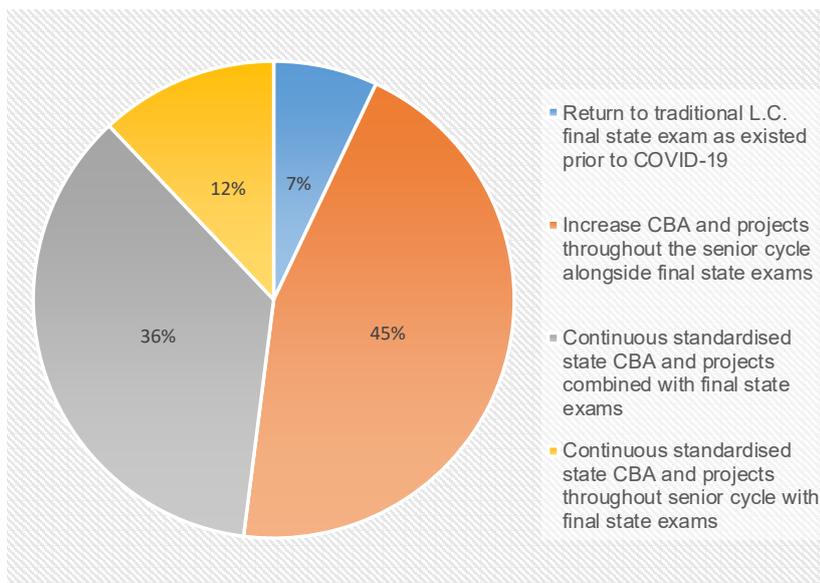
NPCPP thank all parents who participated in this survey. Engagement between NPCPP, parents and post-primary parent bodies is critical to inform policy and debate which, in turn, ensures accurate reflection and proper representation of post-primary parent views.

**Q1** Do you believe that the Leaving Certificate in its current form is fit for purpose?



Overwhelming demonstration of the view that the Leaving Certificate cannot continue in its current form, must be addressed and changed to reflect the requirements of post-primary education in Ireland today.

**Q2** Please indicate your order of preference for Leaving Certificate assessment options in the future?



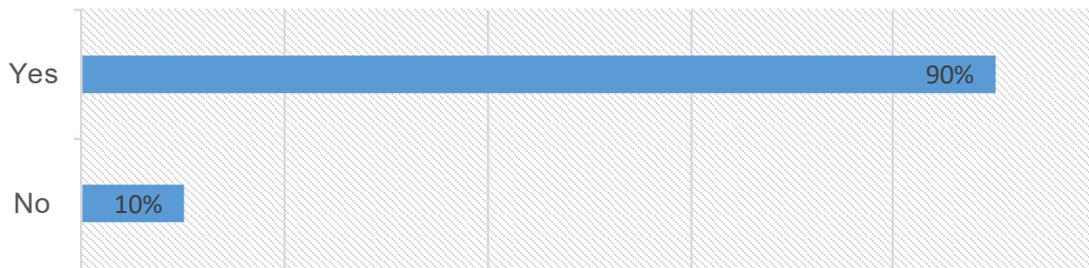
Comment on this strongly favours module-based assessments with ‘state standardised’ guidelines.

A considerable majority indicate a view that ongoing assessments should take place throughout the senior cycle and that all work or performance assessed during the course should count towards a final ‘result’.

Where a combination of ongoing assessments together with a final exam is preferred indications suggest that somewhere between 20% to 50% of ‘marks’ should emanate from ongoing assessment and should be combined then with ‘marks’ from any terminal seated exam to produce overall final exam results.

**Q3** The current Leaving Certificate Process requires students to choose one option; Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme or Leaving Certificate Applied.

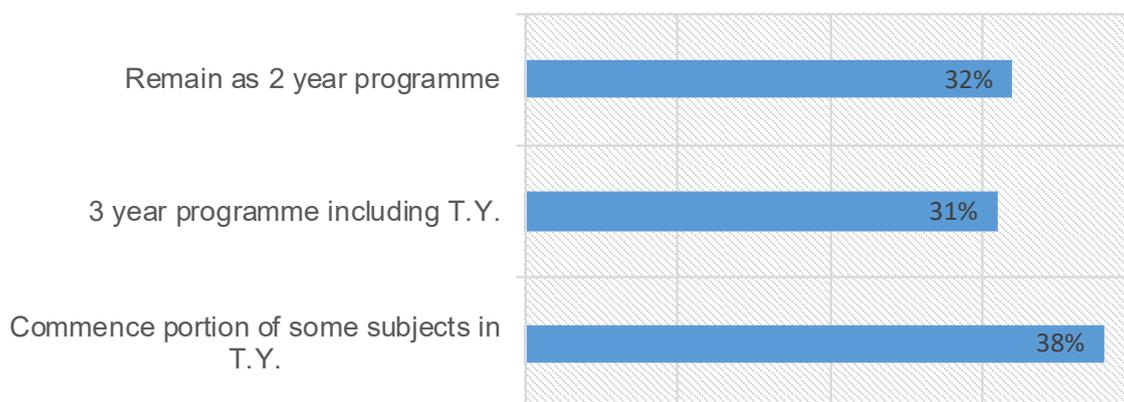
Would you be in favour of adjusting the system to allow some movement between the programmes to suit the educational needs of the student?



90% in favour of facilitating movement between current Leaving Certificate programmes demonstrates that the vast majority of respondents wish to see a greater focus on supporting each student to identify and pursue their talents, interests and strengths rather than a ‘one size fits all’ scenario.

Comments demonstrate a belief that such focus is more reflective of ‘real life’ in the ‘outside world’ and will maximise a student’s potential, enhance their understanding of their own value and bring maximum benefit to society, assist further study, employment or career after post primary school.

**Q4** Thinking about the current time taken for the Leaving Certificate programmes and how that accommodates the different needs or intended pathways of students, please indicate your preferences for the term of the L.C. programmes below.



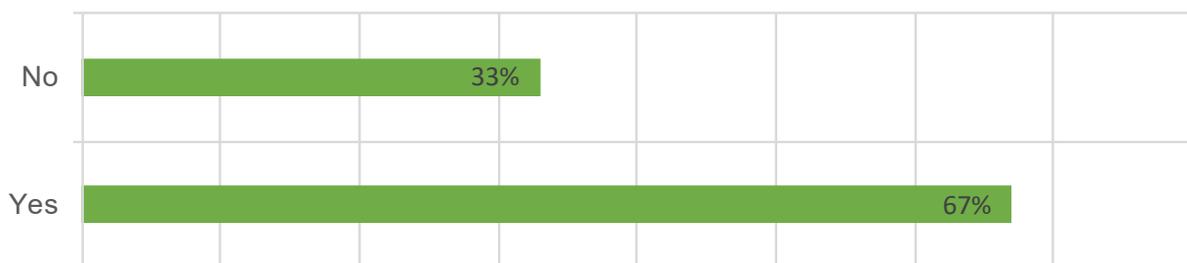
Comments refer to students differing abilities, strengths and levels of maturity during post primary school. The ability to extend some or all courses to a third year will enable a student to learn effectively at a pace that suits their capacity and to, therefore, achieve their best outcome in a subject or from a course. Close to 70% of parents want the Leaving Certificate course extended for more than the current two years possibly utilizing some portion of Transition Year appropriately.

**Q5** All pupils including those with Special Educational Needs should be entitled to receive national certification of their educational achievement.



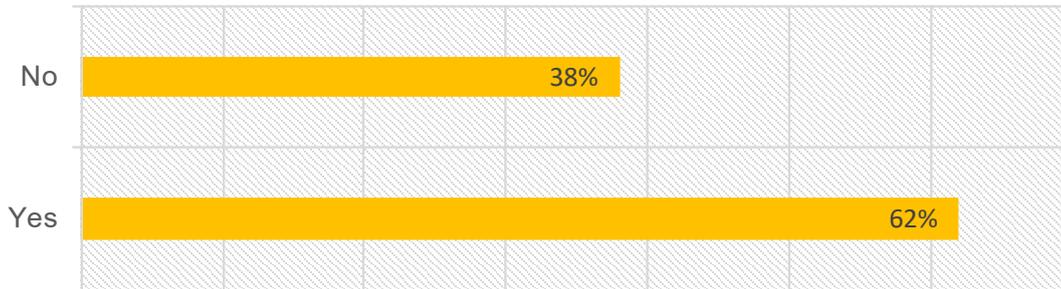
Unsurprisingly, virtually unanimous support for each individual to have their achievements properly recognised and certified. No student should be ‘left behind’ or have their effort and achievement go unacknowledged.

**Q6** Does your child receive Access, Equality & Wellbeing supports and resources that they need from their post primary school?

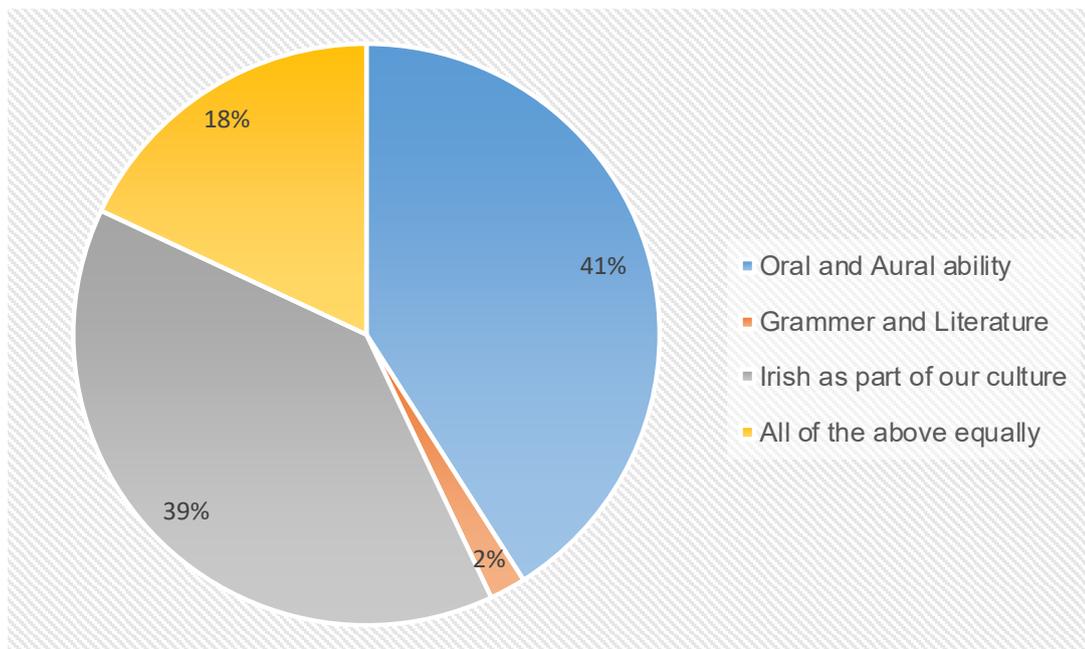


It is good to note that 67% of parents do feel that their child is supported by their school. It is however likely that the 33% who indicate that they lack support are those already most vulnerable. The system must ensure that all supports required to ensure fairness, equity and equality in post primary education is delivered and that no student is restricted in access or denied the opportunity that education offers them.

**Q7** Do you believe that the Irish language is an important part of our cultural heritage?



**Q8** Please indicate your opinion on the order of importance as to what aspects Irish language teaching should be focused on.



**Q.7 & Q.8** address Irish as a Leaving Certificate subject.

It is clear that the vast majority of respondents value and support the Irish language as a part of Irish culture.

Over 20% of the comments received on this indicate a desire for removal of Irish as a compulsory subject on the Leaving Certificate.

The majority of other comments suggest that changing teaching focus and methods to oral and aural aspects would enhance attraction to and engagement in the subject.

Further commentary response was extensive and informative:

75% of respondents fed further comment in response to Q9, which invited general reflection and comment on Leaving Certificate reform.

Almost all expressed the view that the current programme must be changed.

The majority reflected a view that the curriculum does not allow or encourage individual learning or development nor does it educate or meet the requirements for the future life of any students in further education, the workplace or society.

Most respondents highlighted the Leaving Certificate exams system as merely a test of memory and recitation feeding a CAO points system which just provides ease of selection for third level institutions and does not at all identify the suitability of a student for any college course or future career.

This points focussed method of assessment results in students studying subjects often of little or no value to them after post-primary school but in the pursuit of maximum points to gain college entry. That focus must be changed and does not reflect any students education rather just their ability to regurgitate from memory.

There is extensive comment indicating the opinion that the current curriculum is not broad enough to facilitate a student to discover and pursue their talents or strength but, rather, 'shoe-horns' all students into a 'one-size-fits-all' which is completely alien to modern day society, academia and commercial economy.

There are also a very significant number of comments relating to a lack of support by way of guidance and options available where a student does not 'fit the expected norm'. 'Norms' are becoming less identifiable in today's world and the education process must reflect and respond to that societal change.

The observations and suggestions indicate a belief from respondents that the post-primary curriculum and overall system must be overhauled significantly now, that much can be learned from the rapid responses and options utilised to facilitate COVID restrictions and that a significant opportunity to make effective changes exists at the moment.



## Quotations – taken from responses:

“The aim should be that the student has assimilated knowledge and also methods to apply what they have learned. Rote learning is not sufficient”.

“Fundamentally the question should be ‘what is the purpose of post-primary school’. Ultimately this should reflect on the needs of young people as they enter into the world as young adults. The L.C. is an exercise in remembering. It is not an exercise in displaying understanding, being able to critically think, solve problems, research or form an independent opinion. This is what we should want for our young people”

“As a lecturer in a university we see first hand the detrimental effect of the rote learning which continues to be a central tenet of the junior and senior cycles. We must move beyond this one track system of learning material off by heart. We must get back to education being more than an entry to university”.



A series of 20 horizontal blue lines for writing, spaced evenly down the page.





A series of 20 horizontal blue lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a template for writing.





NPCPP Survey - “Leaving Certificate Reform” Report November 2021.  
Compiled and produced by NPCPP. All rights reserved.

