

# HISTORY AND STRUCTURE OF THE IRISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

## SAMPLE PAPERS



**The History and Structure of the  
Irish Education System**

**ONLINE Aptitude Test – 8 April 2023**

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

An additional 30-minute discretionary time will also be available for all candidates due to the test being run on-line.

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) John Marcus O’Sullivan stated in 1928 that the Irish education system was a mixture of voluntary effort and state support. Does this comment suitably account for the historical development of the **governance** and **management** of post-primary schools in Ireland since 1922?

OR

(2) Since the early 1960s, various governments introduced significant new initiatives in second level education. Evaluate the development of any two **structural or policy reforms** in Irish post-primary education introduced during or after the 1960s. Clearly identify the two chosen reforms. Indicate how the two chosen elements have impacted on post-primary education in Ireland today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) W.T. Cosgrave commented on a new post-primary programme in 1925 that rigidity has been replaced by freedom. How valid is Cosgrave’s assertion when applied to the development of the **curriculum** at post-primary level since 1922?

(2)

OR

(3) “Since 1922, the public examinations have exercised a huge influence on second-level education.” (Coolahan). Critically assess the historical dominance of summative **assessment** at post-primary level in Ireland and consider how recent reforms have led to a diversification in assessment practices at both Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

An additional 30-minute discretionary time will also be available for all candidates due to the test being run on-line.

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) “The educational system ... was dominated by private interests, notably the Catholic and Protestant churches, while the state made little attempt to develop a new policy approach.” (Walsh). How true was this statement of the Irish post-Primary school system during the period from 1922 to 1959?

OR

(2) Patrick Hillery (Minister for Education from 1959 to 1966) “transformed Irish education when he accepted official advice and exposed the education system to OECD scrutiny and international influence” (McManus). Select any two substantive transformations that took place in the **management and structure** of Irish post-primary education during or after the 1960s. Clearly identify these transformations. Suggest how they have impacted on post-primary education in Ireland today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) “The world of today and tomorrow will give scant attention to the uneducated and those lacking education.” (Donogh O’Malley, Minister for Education, 1966). Critically consider the major **curricular** changes introduced at post-primary level since 1966 set out to address this deficit. You may illustrate your answer in part by reference to a particular subject or subjects.

OR

(2) Critically assess the historical dominance of terminal examinations at post-primary level in Ireland and consider how recent reforms have contributed to a broadening in assessment practices at both Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

An additional 30-minute discretionary time will also be available for all candidates due to the test being run on-line.

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions.

One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) Sean MacGearailt, a civil servant, stated in 1961 that an “independent international board” such as the OECD was “necessary to validate the case for reform of Irish education”. Evaluate the development of any two **structural or policy reforms** in Irish post-primary education that were introduced during or after the 1960s. Clearly identify your two chosen reforms. Indicate how these reforms have influenced post-primary education today.

OR

(2) “It is wonderful to see the power that you have in education. You have the Department of Education Department in the hollow of your hands” (An English observer, commenting on the independence of Irish voluntary secondary schools, 1949). Select any two important changes that took place in the **management and governance** of Irish post-primary education after 1950. Evaluate their impact on post-primary education today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) W.T. Cosgrave commented on a new post-primary programme in 1925: “The old programmes, narrow and formal, have been superseded by thoroughly modern and elastic programmes”. How valid is this assertion when applied to the development of the **curriculum** at post-primary level since 1922? You may illustrate your answer in part by reference to a particular subject or subjects.

OR

(2) Account for the historical dominance of terminal **examinations** at post-primary level in Ireland. Indicate how a reappraisal of **assessment** strategies at Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle has led to a diversification in assessment practices.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

An additional 30-minute discretionary time will also be available for all candidates due to the test being run on-line.

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) John Marcus O’Sullivan described the Irish education system in 1928 as a “mixture of co-operation, of voluntary effort and state support”. To what extent does this comment explain the historical development of the **governance** and management of post-primary schools in Ireland since 1922? Indicate in your answer how these developments have influenced post primary education in a significant manner today.

OR

- (2) Patrick Hillery “transformed Irish education when he accepted official advice and exposed the education system to OECD scrutiny and international influence” (McManus). Evaluate the development of any two **structural or policy reforms** in Irish post-primary education introduced during or after the 1960s. Clearly identify the two chosen reforms. Indicate how the two reforms have impacted on post-primary education in Ireland today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) W.T. Cosgrave commented on a new secondary programme in 1925: “Rigidity has been replaced by freedom. The old programmes, narrow and formal, have been superseded by thoroughly modern and elastic programmes”. How valid is Cosgrave’s assertion when applied to the development of the **curriculum** at post-primary level since 1922?

OR

- (2) **Assessment** is a key aspect of post-primary education in Ireland. Critically assess the historical dominance of summative examinations at post-primary level in Ireland and consider how recent reforms have contributed to a broadening in assessment practices at both Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle.

The History and Structure of the  
Irish Education System

**ONLINE** Aptitude Test – 9 July  
2022

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

An additional 30-minute discretionary time will also be available for all candidates due to the test being run on-line.

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) “In 1959 Seán Lemass, then Taoiseach, announced that an immediate policy of the government was to increase the facilities for post-primary education” (Coolahan). Critically consider the historical development of the role of the State in the **governance and management** of post-primary schools and discuss how these developments have influenced post primary education in a significant manner today.

OR

- (2) “Compared with previous decades, the period (since 1960) ... witnessed a dramatic increase in government and public interest in education.” Evaluate the historical development of any **two policy reforms** in post-primary education since 1960 and discuss how these two reforms have influenced post-primary education in Ireland today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) “Since 1922, the public examinations have exercised a huge influence on second-level education.” (Coolahan). Critically analyse the degree to which summative **examinations** have historically dominated post-primary education and consider how modern assessment reforms (including the Junior Cycle) have contributed to a diversification in assessment practices.

OR

- (2) W.T. Cosgrave commented on a new secondary programme in 1925: “Rigidity has been replaced by freedom. The old programmes, narrow and formal, have been superseded by thoroughly modern and elastic programmes”. How valid is Cosgrave’s assertion when applied to the historical development of the **curriculum** at post- primary level since 1922?

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

An additional 30-minute discretionary time will also be available for all candidates due to the test being run on-line.

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) Richard Mulcahy, Minister for Education, stated in 1956 that his role was “that of a dungaree man, the plumber who will ... streamline the forces and potentialities of the educational workers and educational management.” Critically consider the historical development of the growing engagement of the State in the **governance and management** of post-primary schools and discuss how these developments have influenced post primary education in a significant manner today.

OR

(2) Sean MacGearailt, a civil servant, stated in 1961 that an “independent international board” such as the OECD was “necessary to validate the case for reform of Irish education”. Evaluate the historical development of any two **structural or policy** reforms in Irish post- primary education introduced during or after the 1960s. Clearly indicate each of your two chosen areas. Suggest how the two chosen reforms have impacted on post-primary education in Ireland today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) “The world of today and tomorrow will give scant attention to the uneducated and those lacking education.” (Donogh O’Malley, Minister for Education, 1966). Critically consider the major **curricular** changes introduced at post-primary level since 1922 that addressed this deficit. Assess the impact of these changes on post-primary education in Ireland today.

OR

(2) **Assessment** is a key aspect of post-primary education in Ireland. Critically assess the historical dominance of summative examinations at post-primary level in Ireland. Consider how recent reforms have contributed to a broadening in assessment practices at both Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

**An additional 30-minute discretionary time will also be available for all candidates due to the test being run on-line.**

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) John Marcus O’Sullivan, Minister for Education between 1926 and 1932, described the Irish education system as a “mixture of co-operation, of voluntary effort and state support”. To what extent does this comment explain the tensions that are visible in the historical development of the governance and management of post- primary schools in Ireland since 1922? Indicate in your answer how these developments have influenced post primary education in a significant manner today.

OR

- (2) Sean MacGearailt, a civil servant, stated in 1961 that an “independent international board” such as the OECD was “necessary to validate the case for reform of Irish education”. Evaluate the historical development of any two structural or policy reforms in Irish post-primary education introduced during or after the 1960s. Clearly indicate each of your two chosen areas. Suggest how the two chosen reforms have impacted on post-primary education in Ireland today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) W.T. Cosgrave commented on a new secondary programme in 1925: “Rigidity has been replaced by freedom. The old programmes, narrow and formal, have been superseded by thoroughly modern and elastic programmes”. How valid is Cosgrave’s assertion when applied to the historical development of the curriculum at post- primary level since 1922?

OR

- (2) Critically analyse the extent to which summative examinations have historically dominated post-primary education since 1922 and consider how a reappraisal of assessment strategies more recently has led to a diversification in assessment practices.





**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

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Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) On 29 October 1981 the Minister for Education, John Boland stated the following:

The present Examination System will be reformed to reduce the pressure on students caused by the Leaving Certificate Examination. The present points system for entry to university, while being fair and unbiased, is distorting second level education and having an adverse educational effect on school curricula.

*Seanad Éireann Debate Vol. 96 No.5*

To what extent has reform of the Leaving Certificate Examination been achieved? In your answer you should set out what you consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of the current system of assessment at Leaving Certificate level. You can, if you wish focus on one or two of your own teaching subjects.

OR

(2) Critically consider the strengths and weaknesses of the post primary curriculum in 1922 and evaluate the various efforts made to reform the post-primary curriculum from either (a) 1922- 1970 or (b) 1970 – present day. You can, if you wish, focus your answer on one or two of your own teaching subjects.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

(1) The Education Act (1998) provides a statutory basis for the whole education system and sets out rights and responsibilities for all involved in education: parents, principals, teachers, inspectorate, etc.

Identify **any two** stakeholders identified in the Education Act, and critically treat what rights and responsibilities the Act sets out for these.

OR

(2) Critically consider why the OECD *Review of Irish Education* (1991) was deemed so significant in the subsequent reform of Irish education. In your answer you should outline and evaluate what you judge to be the important reforms which followed on from the publication of this report.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

An additional 30-minute discretionary time will also be available for all candidates due to the test being run on-line.

The History and Structure of the Irish Education System Aptitude Test – November 2021

**Section A** – Answer either question (1) or (2)

(1) “The Department assumes the minimum possible responsibility for the secondary schools. The Church guarantees her own interests, in the first place, and provides almost a free education, of a special kind to a very large number.” (O’Meara). Consider the significant reforms in the **governance and management** of Ireland’s post-primary schools that have been implemented since this statement was made in 1958.

OR

(2) The “Second programme for Economic Expansion” (1963) identified educational expansion as a key national priority. Evaluate the development of any two **policy reforms** in Irish post- primary education introduced during or after the 1960s. Clearly identify each of your two chosen themes. Indicate how your two chosen reforms have significantly impacted on post- primary education in Ireland today.

**Section B** –Answer either question (1) or (2)

(1) “The world of today and tomorrow will give scant attention to the uneducated and those lacking education.” (Donogh O’Malley, Minister for Education, 1966). Critically consider the major **curricular** changes at post-primary level since 1922. Assess their impact on post-primary education in Ireland today.

OR

(2) Critically analyse the degree to which **summative examinations** have historically dominated post-primary education in Ireland. Consider how more-recent reforms have contributed to a diversification in assessment practices at both Junior Cycle and at Senior Cycle.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions.  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B (two-hour paper).

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Evaluate the historical development of any **two** structural or policy reforms in Irish post primary education and discuss how these two reforms impact post primary education in Ireland today.

**OR**

- (2) Critique the historical development of governance and management of post primary schools in Ireland and discuss how these developments influence post primary education today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Assessment is a key aspect of post-primary education in Ireland and primarily takes place through examinations. Critically discuss the historical development of assessment at post-primary level in Ireland.

**OR**

- (2) Analyse how the Junior Cycle is a major curricular change for post primary education in Ireland.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

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Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Evaluate the historical development of any **two** structural or policy reforms in Irish post-primary education and discuss how these two reforms impact on post-primary education in Ireland today.

OR

- (2) Critically consider the historical development of the governance and management of post-primary schools in Ireland and discuss how these developments influence post-primary education in a significant manner today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Critically analyse the degree to which summative examinations have historically dominated post-primary education and consider how modern assessment reforms (including the Junior Cycle) have contributed to a diversification in assessment practices.

OR

- (2) Critically examine the historical development of key curricular changes in post-primary education since the foundation of the Irish State in 1922 and identify their substantive impact on post-primary education today.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions.  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B (two-hour paper)

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Educate Together is the patron of a growing network of primary and post primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. The first Educate Together post primary school was opened in 2014. Currently there are 13 Educate Together post primary schools and a further 4 to be opened in 2019. The ethos of Educate Together is to guarantee equity of access and esteem to learners 'irrespective of their social, cultural or religious backgrounds'. The development of multid denominational education through Educate Together may be viewed as a recent development in Irish post primary education.

In light of the above, discuss how Educate Together marks a different development in Irish post primary education when compared to the historical development of post primary schools which are owned and managed by the various churches (including religious orders and communities) and their Trustees. In your answer you should explore how it came to be in the historical context that a large proportion of Irish post primary schools are currently owned and managed by the various churches (including religious orders and communities) and their Trustees and the impact that this may have on education today.

**OR**

- (2) Since the 1990s there have been various important developments in Irish education to foster greater accountability and partnership in education, for example the Education Act (1998), Education (Welfare) Act (2000), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2001), and the Teaching Council (2006).

Choose any initiative (or initiatives) developed since the 1990s (if you wish you can choose from the examples above, but this is not necessary) critically analyse how your chosen initiative (or initiatives) have enhanced education in Ireland in relation to fostering greater accountability and partnership in education. You may if you wish, draw on the impact of your chosen initiative (or initiatives) for you as a teacher.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) 1878 saw the introduction of summative post primary examinations in Ireland through the Intermediate Education Act and summative examinations at post primary level have continued since then.

Critically analyse if examinations have historically dominated post primary education and the reforms which have been taken to enhance assessment at post primary level. If you

wish you may comment on how any historical assessment practices and/or reforms may impact your practice as a teacher.

**OR**

- (2)** Critically examine progress made in the area of access to post primary education **and/or** inclusion in post primary education in the Republic of Ireland since the twentieth century.

In your answer you should explain how access **and/or** inclusion in post primary education has historically advanced, the impact that such advancement has made, and its significance for post primary education in Ireland today. You may refer to any insights from your teaching experiences if you wish.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions.  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B (two-hour paper)

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Critically discuss historical changes in the governance and management of schools in Ireland and the impact of such changes on education in Ireland today.

**OR**

- (2) Choose and critically analyse any **two** structural or policy reforms which you deem as being significant to Irish post-primary education today. In your answer you must name the two reforms, outline the main aspects of the reforms and critically analyse their significance to Irish post-primary education today.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) 'The overhaul of junior cycle is long overdue and much needed' and the new reform 'will put students, rather than exams, at the centre of the three-year cycle'. (Minister for Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn speaking in 2014).

The introduction of the Junior Cycle has brought about much change to assessment in post-primary education. In relation to the quotation above, critically analyse the historical development of assessment at post-primary level in Ireland to the present Junior Cycle.

**OR**

- (2) Identify and critically examine the historical development of key curricular changes at post-primary education and their impact on post-primary education today.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

Candidates are required to answer **TWO** questions.  
One question from Section A **and** one question from Section B (two-hour paper)

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Currently the School Governance Section of the Department of Education and Skills supports the effective governance, management and operation of schools in Ireland.

Critically examine the historical development of governance and management of schools in Ireland and how such developments impact education today.

**OR**

- (2) Reform of structure and policy has been central to developments in Irish education since the 1990s. Identify and critically analyse any reform (from the 1990s or since the 1990s) which in your opinion has been paramount to the subsequent development of education in Ireland.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) In 2001 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established on a statutory basis. The NCCA brief as outlined in the Education Act (1998), is to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on matters relating to:

‘...the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools and the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum’.

Name and critically examine key curricular changes at post-primary education since the NCCA was established and discuss how these changes have an influence currently on post-primary education.

- (2) Discuss the assertion that examinations dominate post-primary education in Ireland and critically analyse the contributing historical factors which may have given rise to the dominance of examinations at post-primary education in Ireland.





**Test duration: 2 hours**

Candidates are required to answer TWO questions. One question from Section A and one question from Section B (two-hour paper)

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) A report of the Intermediate Board (1919) noted the chronic condition of post-primary education in Ireland. It stated:

‘The position is in our opinion extremely critical and threatens a very serious breakdown throughout the country if ameliorative steps are not immediately taken ... matters have been getting steadily worse in our schools, and a complete collapse seems to be not far distant.’

Discuss the accuracy of this statement and consider the various efforts made to reform the post-primary system between the years 1922 - 1972.

**OR**

- (2) In January 2017 the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, announced new plans aimed “at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities.”

The majority of post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland are owned and managed by the various churches (including religious orders and communities) or their Trustee Bodies. How and why did this legacy come to be and, in your opinion, is pluralism a realistic aspiration for post-primary education in Ireland? Give reasons for your answer.

**Section B – Answer either (1) or (2)**

- (1) Since the early 1990s a process of significant reform has been underway within the Irish education system. Identify and treat any **two reforms** implemented in the Irish education system since 1990 that you consider significant. Summarise key details of these reforms and outline their significance in terms of successfully effecting change within the broad educational landscape.

**OR**

- (2) In August 2017 Prof. Philip Nolan (Chair, Universities Task Force) called for significant reform in how Leaving Certificate students are assessed. He stated:

"We need much more innovation and diversity in the modes of assessment to encourage better student learning"

Critically appraise what you consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of the current assessment system at Leaving Certificate level. In your answer you should outline your view of what reforms you feel are necessary. You can if you wish focus on one or two of your own teaching subjects.

**Test duration: 2 hours**

Candidates are required to answer TWO questions. One question from Section A and one question from Section B (two-hour paper)

**Section A – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Critically analyse the historical legacy of governance and management of second level schools in Ireland which impact on education in Ireland today. In your answer you should provide the historical context, the challenges which have emerged and efforts to address these challenges.

**OR**

- (2) ***Charting Our Education Future- White Paper on Education (1995)*** sets out five underpinning policy principles: pluralism, equality, partnership, quality and accountability. Consider any policy document or Act which subsequently aimed to embody some or all of these principles. In your answer you should name and describe the aims of your chosen policy document or Act and critically evaluate its contribution to education in Ireland.

**Section B – Answer either question (1) or (2)**

- (1) Donogh O'Malley (Minister for Education 1966-1968) stated:

***'We will be judged by future generations on what we did for the children of our time'.***

Critically analyse how second level education in Ireland has developed since the introduction of free post primary education in 1967 and the significance of these developments for education today.

**OR**

- (2) The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) ***'reduces the focus on one externally assessed examination as a means of assessing students and increases the prominence given to classroom-based assessment and formative assessment'***.

Critically analyse the historical significance of this new approach to assessment at second level education in Ireland. In your answer you can, if you wish, focus on one or two of your teaching subjects.