



05th November 2021

Ref: JCES-I-2021- 685

To: education@oireachtas.ie

Dear Committee, Please see opening statement for Citywise Education.

How many CAO points did you get in your leaving certificate? It's a number you'll likely remember because at the time, it might have felt like it defined you. We all know that you, and certainly the young people that we work with, are more than that number.

To give some context, Citywise provides support to young people and to local schools, delivering programmes which see over 85% of our members going on to third level education. This is from a community which unfortunately has little history of such participation in post-secondary education. The last census found that 5% of people in the immediate area to Citywise, the area where I'm from, have a college degree.

Of course, this is a multi-faceted problem. But we have several insights; many of which we shared in our original submission that we would like to share based on our work, not only with regard to educational progression but also student wellbeing, and the role which community organisations can play going forward. Firstly, a decoupling of the leaving certificate and college admissions would go some way to addressing these issues. Assessment should have a purpose, and that purpose should not be to sum up 5 or 6 years of learning into a single number. It seems that the leaving certificate is considered an entrance exam to third level education, as opposed to a final exam for secondary school. The assessment process should accredit and the work of students, while also facilitating and fostering learning in its own right.

The current system puts teachers in a difficult position with regard to what they should teach and how they approach their classes. We shouldn't let an exam dictate what and how we teach and learn in the classroom. This is especially important when we consider 21st skills. A rigid system doesn't lend itself to the development of such skills - communication, collaboration, problem solving - the transferable skills we talk about regularly. We need to learn to trust our schools, we need to widen our consideration to subjects and educational pursuits, which we have traditionally been un-examined. When we speak to students, it's very often the experiences, the projects and the informal learning which seem the most impactful.



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Registered Charity Numbers CHY17653 and RCN: 20066130

Directors: Cody Preston, Marie Corr (Chair), Paul Whinnery (Vice-Chair), Brendan Cullen, Liam Molloy, Louise Donovan, Sean Preston, Azeez Abdullai



These worthwhile learning opportunities can be side-lined under the current system, in the name of the points race. They not only need to be protected, but they should be recognised and accredited. Whilst of course recognising the importance of numeracy, literacy and the skills and knowledge traditionally central to the leaving cert, it is important to include in these discussions, the 'other' learning that takes place in schools. Participation and the learning achieved in non-exam subjects, as well as outside of the classroom should be recognised in curriculum design and assessment. It's been said that 'what we measure, we value' and the failure to formally recognise the important 'non-academic' work of schools in this way has been a disservice to both students and teachers.

There is also another point to be discussed around the way in which we conceptualise schooling and learning. We often think of it as preparation for a career or for the future. In reality, students are in school now. And now, their wellbeing is suffering. We all know that the Leaving Cert has an impact on this. We have made suggestions including pacing over two years, a three-year curriculum, college interviews, postponing the college start date, among others. This review is an opportunity to put student wellbeing at the heart of our education system and to take innovative and novel approaches in the way the exam is conducted.

Finally, we ask that you consider the role community organisations such as ours can play in supporting senior cycle teaching and learning going forward. I've seen a community approach to education work for my local area. Work for me. We've been supporting 15 local schools for many years, offering the kind of informal learning opportunities I have already mentioned, while supporting student wellbeing and offering educational support. We can help.

To finish, I will leave you with this thought. No matter how many CAO points you got, it's time to give the leaving cert back to students.

Thank you,
Daire Hennessy
Chairperson of the Youth Steering Committee
Citywise Education



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