

Submission 4.23 [Cork Alliance Centre](#)

The Cork Alliance Centre was established as a charity in 2003. The Centre works with both men and women on release from prison. With the overarching view of desistance from crime, the Centre facilitates the process of personal recovery and empowerment as people seek to become better equipped to manage their lives more positively. Our service is based in the community with in-reach work in the prisons. 'To desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves', within this building self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-respect and self-determination is fundamental to our work. Therein we strive to facilitate people who use our services, to restore positive relationships with their family, friends, community, society and most importantly with themselves. Those who choose to access the services of the Centre do so voluntarily. The Centre's core funding is from the Department of Justice and Equality through the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service.

Education in the lives of the people we work with is often a fundamental agent of change. It helps people to connect with their true identity, and distances them from the past chaos of harms done and experienced. Education can give opportunities for people to be recognised as more than the sum of their convictions. Education, in all its forms, when it is accessible, plays an important part in recognising that people have changed and are valued members society.

No child is born bad, it is our society, our community and our family that form us. Often many of the people we work with in the Cork Alliance Centre, for a myriad of reasons, have not had access to or been fully able to avail of education the first time around. Most did not complete secondary school, with many leaving the education system at the transition point between primary and secondary. Almost none have been to third level education. Those who have left education without the literacy and numeracy skills and confidence, have especially suffered a great disservice.

While life events can result in people doing bad things, so too can life events influence and change that for the positive. When we support people in our community, out of difficulties and challenges we support ourselves to live in a happier, more inclusive, and cohesive society. Access to education can play a fundamental role in peoples change processes. Together with access to education, supports to help sustain people in education are as essential and cannot be overlooked.

We appreciate that in the Cork Alliance Centre, we are in the enviable position of knowing people who want to, and who do, change their lives for the better, and for many, education is part of that. We know what work and effort that takes, we see people do this every day. We need an education system that can respond to and reflect the real needs and lives of people. A progressively coherent education system starts with the learner and their experience, where the focus is on what are the right conditions for each learner to succeed and striving to provide that rather than prejudging who will or will not succeed.

A strong and inclusive Higher Education Authority National Access Plan 2022-2026 will include provisions for

- Trauma informed and responsive educational environments.
- Culturally aware and responsive educational environments.
- Throughcare from prison education to community and mainstream education.

- Greater investment in higher education in the prison education environment.
 - More taster and experiential education experiences, including summer schools etc.
 - Pre-college preparation summer schools in literacy, numeracy, and computer summer etc.
 - Modularised flexible structures which allow for education awards to be built up over time.
 - Modularised flexible structures which allow for rolling access across the academic year.
 - Accessible tutoring supports for adult learners who discover pockets of missed learnings from their “first chance education”, e.g., practical trigonometry specifically for carpentry students, grammar tutors, etc.
 - Recognition that adult students have a significant ability to serve as a knowledgeable resource to tutors and peers as they have experience in work/life situations upon which parallels can be drawn within many learning curricula.
 - Educational pathways could involve skills-based learning that initially does not necessarily add up to four years, or even a degree in the traditional block learning model. In response to ever-changing demands of the workforce, we can embrace alternative educational models, as the “new” students - working adults - need education to be reframed to help them get where they want to go. A purpose learning ethos provides the foundation to learn how to learn (and how to educate) for a lifetime, where education blocks fit together over time and lifelong learning is available to all.
 - Mechanism for funded fees for part-time education
 - An “Education Credit Fund” being assigned to every citizen for 14 years of education, therein those who left school early can access education at other times in their life.
 - Provision to allow for BTEA/VTOS grant systems to allow for more than one FETAC level in different areas –
 - e.g. allowing someone to do a FETAC 5 in computers and the following year a FETAC 5 in gym instruction, rather than a blanket insistence of moving to a higher FETAC level each year.
 - Improvement to the SUSI grant process to hold the student and their education as central to the process -
 - o Where documents are no longer lost,
 - o where case managers are assigned to individual students to ensure proper follow up,
 - o where communication is respectful
 - o where the terms of the grants are realistic and responsive to the practicalities of real life. E.g. where adults are forced to live in their parents or family members home (rather than homeless services) their independence needs to be recognised, and their family income should not be included in their eligibility assessment for financial support for college fees etc
- If we continue to do what we have always done, we will continue to get the same results. The development of Higher Education Authority National Access Plan 2022-2026 provides an opportunity to ensure real practical changes can be put in place to ensure greater access and throughcare supports are afforded to all.