

**ClassHub: Inspiring learning after the bell goes.**

**Our whitepaper**

**Times are changing: ClassHub, the app disrupting the tutor and extra-curricular market of Dublin**

Finding private tutors, after-school extra-curricular classes or wider learning opportunities for children has long been a struggle for parents. And in turn, tutors and activity providers don’t have a safe, secure and convenient platform to promote their services and manage listings in one place.

A new, pioneering app, initially launching in the D15 area of Dublin, aims to connect Dublin’s enthusiastic community of tutors and activity providers with parents and students - encouraging hidden talents to flourish and creating confident and determined achievers.

This whitepaper will discuss the need for the app, the reasons behind it and the benefits that it will bring to Dublin’s children, tutors and activity providers.

**Problem statement**

Confidence building, developing social skills, taking on responsibility and learning new information are all essential aspects of growing up. It is the unfortunate truth, however, that not all children are lucky enough to have the right sort of support with their development and wellbeing, and so their education and personal development suffers.

The fact is that fewer females than males study the STEM subjects, the rise of anxiety levels of school children, high childcare costs, the lack of after school and holiday clubs, poor child fitness and health - and all this contributes to the skills shortage that Ireland is currently facing.

The following document will discuss this and provide evidence to support the introduction of an app to Dublin’s youngsters, tutors and activity providers which will seek to address these issues and in turn improve Ireland’s education and economy.

**Background**

A skills shortage blights the Irish economy and it is sending employers abroad to recruit for staff. CIPD, the professional body for Human Resources and People Development, announced that 81% [1] of companies across all industries in Ireland say they are suffering from skills shortages. A number of factors are contributing to this skills shortage, those which ClassHub aims to address.

Learning to communicate with others begins from an early age, and it is important for parents to be able to know how to access community groups, classes for toddlers and meet ups with other parents and their children to help support their child in their social and mental development.

Strong social skills give children confidence to make friends, navigate friendships and avoid distress and victimisation. Recent research[2] shows that it is essential for children to learn to manage friendships from a young age to equip them with the tools required throughout their personal and work life.

The research, which was conducted in a deprived area of Dublin, shows that good communication skills is key when it comes to preparing children for school such as reading and writing and being able to pay attention to teachers and follow the rules.

It is also key that throughout their school career, a child is encouraged and their abilities developed no matter their gender. A 2015 Accenture report[3] of 1,500 girls between the ages of 11 and 18 and 2,500 women aged 19-23 in the UK and Ireland found 30 per cent felt STEM subjects were better fitted to boys’ brains, personalities and hobbies.

In 2017, an additional Accenture report[4] states that ‘Ireland should be a leader in the provision of STEM education’ and that ‘providing STEM education of the highest quality is essential if Ireland is to become an innovation leader at the forefront of technological and scientific change’.

The report emphasises that creative thinking, problem-solving skills, in particular their ability to think critically and develop solutions, will be critical for students’ prospects in life.

Accenture finds that many companies will not be able to compete on the international stage without sufficient numbers of STEM-skilled people, and that ‘together, industry, government, parents and teachers must act now to ensure the gender gap does not pose a major economic programme for Ireland or create a skills deficit that hinders progress for future generations of women in Ireland’.

Several initiatives, such as Back to School for STEM, Science Foundation Ireland’s Smart Futures, Seek Engineering, are going some way to inspire and encourage pupils to consider committing to STEM educational pathways and potential careers, and Ireland’s only astronaut in training, Dr Norah Patten, is involved with the Back to School for STEM schools outreach programme.

In addition, Ireland’s ‘I Wish’ annual conferences[5], which have already reached out to 17,000 students, are aimed at motivating young female students to pursue careers in STEM subjects through a series of interactive exhibitions, workshops and engaging and inspirational talks by women and men who have had the opportunity for a great career in STEM.

With the emphasis on gender imbalance at school comes gender imbalance in the workplace. The Irish economy is thriving and female employment has risen, but mainly in low paid jobs, health and education. Women earn 18% less than men[6], however the Irish government is putting steps in place with its Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019 to make it mandatory for organisations to report on the means and median average pay for men and women.

The European Institute for Gender Equality found that more women than men were taking part time jobs so that they were able to provide childcare for their children. 75% of STEM jobs are filled by men, and research by the Higher Education Authority highlights that in 2017 just 51% of lecturers were female and only 24% of professor posts were filled by women.

At the launch of the Gender Equality Action Plan for Higher Education Institutions 2018-2020 in Dublin in November 2018, Mary Mitchell O’Connor, Minister for Higher Education, said that the lack of female representation at the highest level of third-level education is not good enough and gives ‘a really bad message for our young people and our girls’.

Anxiety in Irish schools is one of the biggest problems facing principal teachers – statistics show that one in 5 primary school pupils suffer from anxiety[7]. Research from Super Troopers[8], Ireland’s first ‘health homework programme’ which encourages children and their parents to live happier and more healthy lifestyles, aims to get children doing 60 minutes of exercise a day – and they regard this as important as regular school homework.

The Department of Education and Skills carried out a study into wellbeing[9] and it was found that the wellbeing of Irish secondary school students decreases from first year through to sixth with girls suffering more of a decline than boys. The stress of school exams, the pressure students feel to get into university and get a job. The study found that children and young people *‘learn more effectively if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves and feel supported’* and that wellbeing in schools is imperative to avoid demotivation, demoralisation and despondency.

In the document, the Department of Education and Skills sets out a vision which states that by 2023 ‘the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education’ and that ‘Ireland will be recognised as a leader in this area’.

A number of schools are doing their bit to promote fitness and self-esteem in a bid to support the wellbeing of their pupils. Scoil Mhuire Gan Smal in Inchicore starts the day with a 15 minute run around the local park and sports grounds, and St Wolstan’s Community School in Celbridge has set up a wellbeing committee whose initiatives include dancing and walking.

Irish parents pay some of the highest childcare costs in Europe, and organising activities for children during school holidays and after school is a real headache for parents. After the recession, more parents than ever are now working so it is very difficult to find children care that isn’t expensive.

Parents are concerned that their child will waste their entire holidays and many students find themselves getting bored during the long summer break. Many holiday camps on offer only run for a few hours a day or only for 5 days out of the eight week long school summer holidays. It is difficult to find out what is available and to coordinate all of the various activities signed up to, as well as taking care of payment.

**Solution**

ClassHub is a community based two sided platform connecting parents and students with local teachers who offer after school activities and classes.

On one side, the platform enables activity providers, tutors and students to list their classes and earn extra income in the form of class fees. On the other, ClassHub enables parents and students to find, book, read reviews and pay for classes and courses that local teachers offer. The platform is primarily aimed at the ‘after school activity and school holiday market’.

In general, the tone of voice, message and colour pallet of the words ‘education, learning, teaching, study, books’ can be very boring, mundane and unappealing. Parish community halls, school classrooms for study groups, the idea of tutoring in the evenings and at weekends can have very little or no appeal.

ClassHub aims to inspire, motivate and excite, essential factors in encouraging children to get involved in activities and support their physical and mental wellbeing. It is user friendly with instant bookings, online payments and a messaging service, all from one app. Gone are the days of money in an envelope and trawling through website upon website to find the perfect tutor / course / activity.

ClassHub’s tools include:

* An easy process of listing a class.
* An availability calendar and booking system.
* An efficient payment provider.
* a dashboard to keep track of various metrics.
* Online video call ability.

ClassHub aims to draw more focus on to after school activities and entice parents and students alike to get involved with them. It also aims to attract tutors to set up an account, offer their services and earn some money. With the ClassHub app taking care of bookings, and payments, and allowing communication between the tutor and parent, it is really a one stop shop for after school activities and tutoring.

ClassHub has a searchable database of local classes which makes it easy for parents to see what is available in their locality. It includes reviews of tutors and activity providers which provides parents and students with a quality assurance.

Their “Trusted Provider” status puts parents at ease in relation to who is teaching their children. It helps parents find quick needed solutions for their children at any point on the go.

For tutors and activity providers, the visibility ClassHub offers them online means less printing of flyers and other printed promotional material, assurance of receiving payments rather than chasing for cash, and the availability calendar makes it easy for them to manage their schedule.

**Conclusion**

Research demonstrates just how important it is for students to have positive emotions and be led away from threats of depression and anxiety. To create moments in their everyday life, not just over weekends, which allows them to have some carefree fun is an essential aspect of being a child.

ClassHub will not only support Dublin’s parents as they search for a tutor or an extra-curricular activity for their child, by listing all available activities on offer it will help to support the child’s development and mental and physical wellbeing.

The tutors and activities in Dublin will also be supported by the introduction of this app, and they will be able to advertise their services with confidence that they are going to be advertising to the correct audience and will not have worries about missed payments.

[1] CIPD, HR Practices in Ireland 2018 Survey

[2] Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Dr Christine O’Farrelly

[3] Accenture, Girls in STEM, 2015

[4] Accenture, Girls in STEM, 2017

[5] www.iwish.ie

[6] European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2017: Ireland, 26 September 2018

[7] Irish Primary Principals Network survey, January 2017

[8] [www.supertroopers.ie](http://www.supertroopers.ie)

[9] Department of Education and Skills, Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, 2019