

# A new kind of

# learning space

**"We don't like the word 'grinds' at the Learning Academy. What we want to do is provide an environment that enables students to express themselves and achieve their own educational goals"**

**"Through our platform we want to support students to reach their potential, whatever grade that might be"**

WHAT happens when you want to rent a building to start a business and the estate agent guy doesn't show up? You move the idea to the online world, of course.

That's what school teacher and entrepreneur Robbie Glynn did when he and some family members founded The Learning Academy, an online learning platform, around 2018.

The Learning Academy was set up initially to improve the experience for students getting grinds at existing schools. Robbie recalls that his brother's daughter was attending a grind school that was a two hour round trip by bus which she found very disruptive.

"The amount of time it was taking to get there, along with the cost, meant that she was missing out on sport and other things because it clashed. And, as a secondary teacher, I thought: 'there must be a better way to do this'."

The first idea was to hire a small building locally so that travel times would be reduced but when they turned up to view a possible space the estate agent failed to show. Two of Robbie's brothers are programmers and they decided to "think outside the box".

"My brother started programming from scratch. It became, and still is, Ireland's only dedicated online school," says Robbie. "We don't use Zoom so it's a full content management system that is predominantly built for education."

#### **A different experience**

While Zoom or Microsoft Teams are mainly conferencing sites, The Learning Academy is a purpose-built online classroom. The students attend anonymously and they can communicate with the teacher in three ways. Firstly, they can turn on their microphones and speak to the teacher directly. Secondly, they can

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direct message the teacher in real time or, finally, they can post a message that can be seen by the whole class.

Everything that the teacher puts on the whiteboard is downloaded at the end of the class to a pdf and sent to the student. So students have both the recording of the class and the written whiteboard notes that accompanied it.

In addition, students are also able to view previous lessons before the live class so that they can prepare or familiarise themselves with the topic being covered.

#### **Manageable classes**

When it comes to class sizes the issue of social responsibility is key, according to Robbie.

"We aim to keep classes to the minimum size with respect to costs. Every saving we make we push back to the students and parents to give them the most affordable grinds that we can possibly give. So we aim for 20 students in a class."

The only classes larger than 20 are the free career guidance classes offered where students get advice on things like the CAO applications process and interview preparation.

#### **Software as a service**

For the future, the Learning Academy is moving towards a Software As A Service (SAAS) model. The site is being rebuilt using the latest Microsoft Azure cloud computing service which will be also available as a subscription.

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Robbie Glynn and some family members set up the Learning Academy in 2018

for example, if we have a live class on Wednesday, we can upload a video on Monday laying out what the class will be covering and the students can use the resources online to prepare for the class."

#### **Teaching matters**

As a working teacher in maths, computer science and business, Robbie has used his connections to hire the teachers for the Learning Academy. "I deal with all the educational side of the business. All our teachers are currently employed as teachers and registered with the Teaching Council."

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"What the last two years have proven is that online education will never replace face-to-face learning. So that's why I say that we are an add-on to students who may need a more help in some areas."

The upside of the past two years of pandemic education is that many more students and parents have become familiar with online technology and the technical issues associated with the start-up of the Learning Academy have dissipated.

For more information about the Learning Academy online go to [www.thelearningacademy.ie](http://www.thelearningacademy.ie)

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