

Dear Caritas Co-ordinators,

Thank you very much for the messages that you have sent us over the last few days. It is so heartening to see that so many of you still wish to enrol for Caritas despite the challenges posed by the current situation. Thank you very much for giving us a comprehensive view of the kind of restrictions you are facing. Clearly there are some differences from authority to authority and then, within that, from school to school. This underlines how valuable it is for us when schools keep in touch and let us know what challenges – and successes – they have. However, it also makes us very difficult for us to come up with solutions to challenges that will suit everyone.

There are, however, some common threads in many of the messages we have received.

1) Faith Witness - Hours

By far the biggest issue in the messages we have received is around the challenges schools would face in arranging and recording the usual 40 hours of school/parish/place of worship based faith witness. Clearly, current restrictions faced by schools, parishes and places of worship will make this difficult if not impossible, especially in schools that have a larger number of candidates. In addition, many of the types of activity traditionally undertaken will simply not be possible with current restrictions and, added to this, we must be aware that extra restrictions may have to be imposed with very short notice.

Therefore, given concerns raised by teachers, for the current cohort the faith witness time requirement will be reduced to a notional 30 hours. Instead of the usual 20/20 split across school and parish, these hours can be comprised of faith witness and Christian outreach in school, in parish/place of worship and wider community. This will mean that pupils could include within their faith witness any work that they do within their community which is motivated by their faith and perhaps linked to helping others within their own community in a way that is not directly run through the school or parish, but which does allow them to demonstrate the spirit of Caritas, and which provides them with an experience of loving their neighbour that can feed into their reflection on the impact of their actions on those they serve, as well as the impact their on their own faith and values. However, it is to be expected that there will be within their submission some element of school/parish/place of worship witness.

The time is described as “notional” because it has never been in the spirit of Caritas to say that the *number* of hours is the most important thing; the number serves as a reflection of a serious ongoing commitment to helping and loving others. If it were to be the case that, given current circumstances, a specific pupil may have faced difficulties that meant they were a little short on 30hours, but that their submission showed genuine and detailed reflection, we would be willing to look on a case-by-case basis and be guided by teacher discretion on that young person’s commitment to the spirit of the programme.

Schools are also reminded that pupils can record and reflect upon faith witness activities that were carried out in S5 and, for this year group, during lockdown itself. In addition, as always, the success criteria can be met with pupil pledges to carry out faith witness activities after 28th February deadline, For example, it can often happen that, having spent the year reflecting on their faith and actions, candidates are more willing to be involved in Lenten activities, but these are always going to happen after the submission date. Again, we would be willing to be guided by teacher discretion on this; if the teacher believes that the young person will honour that pledge, then that time will be credited.

2) Faith Witness – Nature of Activities

Although pupils can now include faith witness works within the wider community, the spirit of Caritas is still that it is a school-based faith award which looks to help young people build their relationship with God and others, especially through their links with their parish/place of worship. There is still an expectation that the majority of faith witness hours should be carried out within these contexts where this is possible. It would not be envisaged that a candidate would be proposed for verification and successful completion if they had not done anything that could be described as witness within their school, for example. We know that faith witness activities are often communal and relational and that this year there will be more 'creative' ways to love others, such as creating prayer resources for on line, sanitising the Church or preparing and/or delivering parish newsletters to those without the internet.

Part of this "creative" approach may involve candidates and teachers turning to online resources for talks, services, etc. While these would certainly be of value, it should be remembered that there is an element to "witness" that requires an element of relational action and Christian outreach. Therefore accessing talks, services, etc in and of itself would not necessarily constitute faith witness, unless the candidate then transferred that learning experience into action; e.g. if they were then able to share their learning with others through giving a talk/presentation to the Caritas group/other pupils or write up an article for the parish bulletin/school website. They would also have to show evidence of their reflection on these sources in their faith Witness Log.

We also know that for staff and parishes it is the accompanying of pupils that makes Caritas such a unique experience, and that this will be severely limited as pupils will not necessarily be in school all year, or be in for limited time.

3) Faith Witness – Log

This year we have brought in a new Faith Witness Log Sheet. Pupils no longer have to complete different sheets for different contexts; one Log Sheet will cover all Faith Witness. This sheet is attached. Candidates should be directed to ensure that this sheet is not just a list of activities and times, but also carries a record of their reflections on the witness activities.

Some co-ordinators have expressed concerns about who will "sign off" of pupil faith witness activities, especially those that do not easily fall under the headings of "school" or "parish". Given the age and stage of the pupils involved, they will all be involved in various levels of independent learning throughout their studies. In looking at SQA guidelines, the criteria for SQA National 6 learning and attainment talks about learners working "*with non-directive supervision, i.e. learners will take responsibility for their own learning*", and taking "*some supervisory responsibility*", and it is reasonable to extend that way of thinking into Caritas. If the young people say that they have carried out a work of Faith witness, and can show their reflection on that and on its impact, and the teacher has no reason to disbelieve them, then the teacher can verify the log sheet.

4) Assessment & Verification

The change in the nature of the programme this year, with the reduction of faith witness activities, will accentuate the importance of the other elements of the pupil submission. One of the positives of the changes, unwelcome as they may be, will be that candidates may be able to focus more on the reflection on their learning and actions, rather than giving an account of everything they have done. There has perhaps been a temptation over the years to focus upon counting the hours of the faith witness, but it is important to remember the importance of the totality of the programme in the pupil experience. So much of the success of the programme is found in the Gathering Points, the journal tasks and the times of prayer and reflection. It may be a useful exercise to go through the 8 success criteria with pupils in the early stages and to emphasise the importance of reflection in the successful completion of the programme. Of those pupils who continue to the end of the programme, it is seldom the lack of hours that causes problems with passing their submission; it is far more common that if there is an issue it is to do with the depth of reflection or references to sources.

We will have to look at how the process of verification is going to work this year. As the situation stands at the moment it would not be advisable, even if it were possible, to send verifiers into schools and to find free areas for them when all spaces are at a premium. In addition, the majority of our verifiers are retired HTs/DHTs, and so are of an age where it would not be advisable for them to be moving from school to school. We are aware of this issue, and we are keeping it under review.

5) Resources

We have had a number of enquiries about whether journals will be available and whether there are any plans to move resources online. While we appreciate that there is certainly a case to be made in terms of sustainability to cut down on paper resources, there are perhaps enough changes to be made this session already. In addition, we know that many schools really like to use the journals, and there is evidence to suggest that, in schools where journals are used effectively, they support pupil performance. Over and above this, many pupils like to keep their journal as a keepsake of their S6 experience. So, for this year, journals will be issued as normal. As you know, our office is still closed and due to restrictions, we are unable to arrange for any collection of resources from the office. Journals will therefore be posted out. The Gathering Point resources remain available on the website, along with all the necessary documentation <https://sces.org.uk/caritas-award/> .

We also have to be aware that the situation in schools could change at any point in terms of possible closures, blended learning and numbers of pupils allowed in any given context. With this in mind, we are currently working on putting the Gathering Points online in a format to allow pupils easy access at home in case of further lockdowns or for those schools who used to offer Caritas as an after school activity but who now can't have access to the school after hours. It would be unfortunate to lose the "gathering", but it might be easier for schools to bring pupils together for a short gathering if the pupils have had the opportunity to prepare the content earlier.

The first of these can be seen here: <https://sway.office.com/U5W1KqRDy1edl4QX?ref=Link>

We hope that all of this will help and support schools to deliver the Caritas programme, and to let our young people have the best experience possible in their final year. For our part, SCES will strive to do everything we can to facilitate this. To this end, we would as ever welcome any ideas or feedback you have.

We do, however, recognise that this is a difficult year, with many challenges and that any school feels that the arrangements are impractical for staff, pupils or parishes, for whatever reason, then we absolutely understand that they may make a decision not to participate in the award this year.