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for children



**ISSU**  
IRISH SECOND-LEVEL  
STUDENTS' UNION

# Guide to the Irish Education System



# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

Many children and parents can find the Irish Education System hard to understand. This is often difficult for children and parents who arrive to Ireland. To help newly arrived children and parents the Irish Second-Level Students Union (ISSU) has created this resource. The resource aims to give all the information that children and parents may need in one place so they can better understand the Irish Education System and make informed choices.

The resource

- Is an easy to understand guide that describes the structure and the key stages within the Irish Education System.
- Gives details on early childcare and pre-school education, Primary school, Secondary school and ways into Third level education in Ireland.
- Gives information on resources that children and parents can access on supporting their children's study, on everything from transport to school and mental health supports for children who are struggling.

## About the ISSU

The Irish Second-Level Students Union (ISSU) is the national representative body for second-level students in the Republic of Ireland.

The ISSU recognises and values all second-level students within the education system and strives to uplift, represent and defend their voice in all aspects of their education.

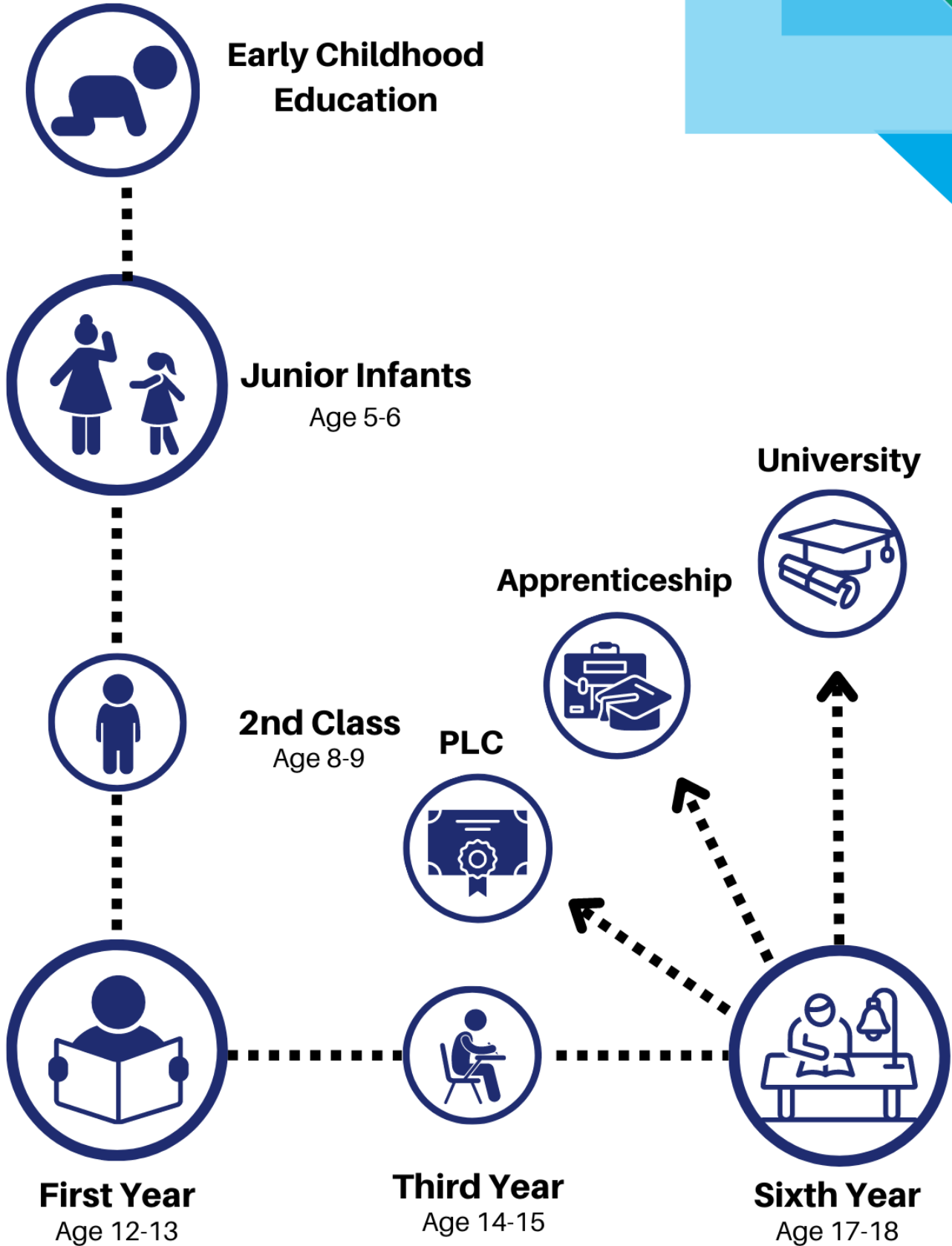
Founded in 2008, the ISSU is the national representative body for second-level students in the Republic of Ireland. The ISSU is led by students, for students with 49 democratically elected student officers and 580+ member student councils.

- To provide an accessible, transparent, democratic and reliable organisation.
- To provide a collective voice for second-level students and represent second-level students as stakeholders in their education and in society; locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to continually develop a transparent, fair and modern education system.
- To promote equal access to education and to strive for the abolition of all forms of discrimination and injustice within the Irish education system.
- To empower student councils to be democratic and effective representative bodies within their school communities.

- To work to end the disparity in student services based on socio-economic backgrounds.
- To fight for a fair education system that values each individual and allows them to reach their full potential.
- To actively support and empower individual students and student councils to take action.
- To actively address the challenges and worries faced by students on a local, regional, national and international level.
- To promote the Irish Language and work towards becoming a fully bilingual union.

Primary School

Third Level



Secondary School

# **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

## Pre-School Education

All children in Ireland can get two years of free pre-school under a programme called The Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE).

The programme is available to all children who have turned 2 years and 8 months of age before 31 August and who won't be more than 5 years and 6 months of age on, or before, June 30th of the programme year.

The programme provides three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks. If a child attends the childcare service for longer than this, then the parents will pay for that extra time. In Ireland, pre-school can be in privately-run crèches, play-schools and Montessori schools.

To get more information on the ECCE Scheme and where to apply for the service you can visit the [Citizens Information webpages](#)



# **PRIMARY EDUCATION**

## Primary Education

Most children in Ireland start primary school (also called national school) at 4 or 5 years of age.

Irish Law says that children can start primary school from the age of 4 upwards and must be enrolled in a primary school by the age of 6 years.

Children go to primary school for 8 years. The 8 years of primary school is made up of:

### Class Groups in Primary Schools:

| Class Group    | Age Group       |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Junior Infants | 4-6 years old   |
| Senior Infants | 5-7 years old   |
| First Class    | 6-8 years old   |
| Second Class   | 7-9 years old   |
| Third Class    | 8-10 years old  |
| Fourth Class   | 9-11 years old  |
| Fifth Class    | 10-12 years old |
| Sixth Class    | 11-13 years old |

There are different types of primary schools that children can go to including:

- **Denominational schools** (usually serving one church/religion)
- **Multi-denominational schools** (religious and non-religious backgrounds are equally respected and explored within the school)
- **Irish-speaking schools** (Irish-speaking schools which are also called Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí)
- **Special schools** (Special Educational Needs schools for children who have a diagnosed disability that makes them entitled to more education support)
- Private fee-paying primary schools.

Primary school in Ireland is free (unless you go to private fee-paying school.) Children can go to any primary school their parents or guardians choose if there is place available for them. If there aren't enough places in the school, the school gives places based on its own admissions policy. Usually you can find a school's admission policy on its website.

To register a child in primary school you should check the list of primary schools in your area. You should then contact the school of your choice to see if there is a place available. You can find a list of primary schools in your area on [School Days](#) website.

The school of your choice might not have a place or have a waiting list so you may need to contact other schools to find a place.

## Students in Primary School

An average, primary school day lasts for 5 hours and 40 minutes. This usually begins with registration of attendance (to make sure that all the children are there) or it could begin with assembly, where children get information about their school. Children get two breaks in the day, one in the morning around 11am where children can have a snack and play, and lunch break which is usually around 12.30pm. These times might be different in each school.

Primary schools usually have shorter school days for children in junior infants and senior infants (an hour less) but you should check with the school.

All schools must close for the months of July and August. Christmas, Easter and mid-term breaks are on the same days in both primary and secondary schools.

Some primary schools do not require the students to wear uniforms while many schools have set uniforms for all their students. You may be able to get financial help to buy school uniforms and shoes. You can check that on [Citizens Information](#).

The principal is responsible for running the school. Each class has a class teacher who teaches all subjects to their class.

In some smaller schools the teacher may have more than one class in their classroom.

There may be a language support teacher to help children learn English. You should ask the principal about this. Some schools may also be a

learning support teacher, who helps children that are having difficulties in some subjects. Schools have their own policy in relation to homework.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment are in charge of the subjects that children learn. In primary school children have one curriculum that is followed in every school. It is made up of several different subjects.

The primary school curriculum includes the following subjects:

- 1.** Language: Gaeilge (Irish) and English
- 2.** Mathematics
- 3.** Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE): history, geography and science
- 4.** Arts education: visual arts, music and drama
- 5.** Physical education
- 6.** Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
- 7.** Religious or ethical education (this depends on what type of school your child goes to)

Children starting school for the first time will be in the junior infant's class group. If a child has attended school before, the principal, the parent and the class teacher will decide together which class the child will join. Children can repeat a year for educational reasons and in special situations.

The school must provide reports for each child and the school must allow parents to have access to their child's school record. Schools usually hold a parent and teacher meeting during the year.

If a parent is concerned about their child's progress at any stage during the year, they can speak to the class teacher.

# **SECOND-LEVEL EDUCATION**

## Second-Level Education (Post - Primary)

The Irish secondary school (also known as post-primary) lasts for generally 5 or 6 years. Children begin their secondary school studies around the age of 12 or 13 and finish around the age of 18 or 19, the age that children start and finish is generally linked to the age that they started primary school. During secondary school children can sit two State exams, the Junior and Leaving Certificate.

The minimum school leaving age is 16 years or the completion of 3 years of post-primary education, whichever is later.

There are several types of secondary schools in Ireland:

- Privately owned and managed voluntary secondary schools.
- Vocational schools (ETBs)
- Community or comprehensive schools
- Private fee-paying secondary schools.

The majority of children in Ireland go to voluntary secondary schools. These are privately owned and managed. They are often run by religious orders, but the teachers in these schools are generally lay people.

It is free to attend secondary school Ireland, but there are also private fee-paying schools.

Vocational, community or comprehensive schools are usually free. These schools tend to provide both academic and technical education and they



often provide additional further education opportunities for school-leavers and adults in the local community.

You can find a list of secondary schools on the [School Days](#) website.

Some schools have a waiting list, each school will then use its own admissions policy to decide which students will be given places. You can get the school admissions policy on the school's own website.

## Students in Secondary School

The first three years of secondary school are known as the Junior Cycle. At the end of the third year, children take their first external State examination called the Junior Certificate. Children then have the option to do Transition Year before they go into the Senior Cycle. At the end of two years in Senior Cycle children take their second external State examination called the Leaving Certificate.

Year groups in secondary schools

| Year Group                 | Typical Age Groups |              |
|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1st year                   | 12 - 13 years old  | Junior Cycle |
| 2nd year                   | 13 - 14 years old  |              |
| 3rd year                   | 14 - 15 years old  |              |
| 4th year (Transition year) | 15 - 16 years old  |              |
| 5th year                   | 16 - 17 years old  | Senior Cycle |
| 6th year                   | 18 - 19 years old  |              |

The Irish secondary school year begins in the last week of August and lasts until the first week in June. If a child is taking an external exam (Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate) they will finish until later in June. This because the exams are held in June. During the school year students get a number of holidays. All are listed below

- October mid-term break
- Christmas Break
- February mid-term break
- Easter Break

To get up to date information visit [Citizens Information](#).

## Junior Cycle (1st, 2nd and 3rd year)

Junior Cycle is the first three years of second level education. Beginning at the age of 12-13 and ending at the age of 15-16. Children in Junior Cycle have between 9-13 subjects. Some of the subjects are compulsory and some are optional.

The compulsory subjects are:

- Maths
- English
- Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE)
- Social Personal and Health Education Curriculum (SPHE)
- Irish (Note that students who have not studied Irish in primary school are exempt from Irish and will not sit any exam in this subject.)

The optional subjects offered by the school for Junior Cycle depend on the school but here is a list of offered subjects for Junior Cycle in Ireland.

|   |                  |                 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|
| Applied Technology  | Business Studies | Classics        |
| Engineering   | English          | Gaeilge (Irish) |
| Technical Graphics  | History          | Home Economics  |
| Jewish Studies  | Mathematics      | Wood Technology |
| Music   | Science          | Visual Art      |
| <b>Exam Religion</b><br>(depending on the school, religion may be a non-exam compulsory subject or it could be a compulsory exam subject) |                  |                 |
| <b>Modern Foreign Languages</b><br>For Example, French, German, and Spanish<br>(the languages offered depend on the school)               |                  |                 |

All subjects are done at a Common Level with the exception of Irish, English, and Maths. These three subjects are offered at either Higher or Ordinary level. Higher-level is more advanced than Ordinary level.

In some schools, first year students can try out the subjects offered in the school and choose which ones they want to do at the end of the year.

In other schools, students choose their subjects before they start secondary school and, in some schools, a mix of both happens where students pick certain subjects but try the rest.

For the Junior Cycle, students must do a foreign language (a language offered in the school that is not English or Irish) of their choice as part of their chosen subjects.

## Assessments and Grades

During 1st and 2nd year, children take in-school exams. The exams are generally held twice a year and are known, as 'Christmas exams' or 'Summer exams' (or end of year exams).

At the end of third year students take the external State examinations Junior Certificate. The exams test the children on the subjects that they have done over the last three years. Most exams are written, with some subjects having a practical exam and project work (known as Classroom Based Assessments. Students will sit a spoken exam (known as an oral) and a listening exam (known as an aural) in Irish and foreign languages. They do not have to take oral or aural exams in Irish if they exempt from these subjects.

The practical and oral examinations take place during the third year of the programme. The written examination takes place in June.

## CBAs - Classroom Based Assessments

During the three years of Junior Cycle, children do projects known as Classroom-Based Assessments (CBA). CBAs are projects that students do as part of the Junior Certificate programme but do not count for the overall grade.

CBA's are done in the following subjects:

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
| English | Geography   | Jewish studies                          |
| Irish   | History   | Classics                                |
| Maths   | Business Studies  | Physical Education                      |
| Science | Home Economics  | Woodwork                                |
| Art     | Religious Studies<br>(this can also be a non- exam subject) | Metalwork                               |
| Music   | Jewish studies  | Any Language that is taken as a subject |

The Junior Cycle exams are graded by an anonymous State Examiner outside the school. However, the CBAs are graded by class teachers, with other teachers from the same department in the school.

The group of teachers then give the student their CBA grade. This is done to make sure everything is fairly marked and grades are given to those that deserve them.

At the end of the Junior Cycle, the student will be given a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. In this, they will be awarded one of these grades: Distinction, Higher Merit, Merit, Achieved, Partially Achieved or Not Graded. These grades are called “descriptors” and they reflect the percentage the student achieved.

Percentage Range and Grade:

| Descriptor         | Percentage            |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Distinction        | 90% or over           |
| Higher Merit       | 75% but less than 90% |
| Merit              | 55% but less than 75% |
| Achieved           | 40% but less than     |
| Partially Achieved | 20% but less than 40% |
| Not Graded         | Less than 20%         |

### Classroom Based Assessment - Grade Descriptor

Exceptional

Above Expectations

In Line with Expectations

Yet to Meet Expectations

## Transition Year (4th Year)

Transition Year (also known as TY) is the fourth school year in secondary school. Transition Year allows students to explore non-academic interests, whether they are social, creative or linked to the world of business. It is a one-year programme that is optional in some schools, mandatory in some others and not offered in other schools. Where

Transition Year is not mandatory or where a child chooses not to do TY, then students go straight into 5th year after 3rd year. Admission criteria for Transition Year varies from school to school.

## Curriculum and Assessments

There are usually no exams (though some schools do have Christmas and summer exams) in Transition Year. The year is filled with lots of different activities and workshops. Students often go out on week long work experience placements in local businesses for 3 weeks during the academic year.

Every school offers different activities but usually there are trips and activities where students bond and learn important life skills, outside of the traditional classroom environment.

Students also attend many workshops and talks as they prepare for the Leaving Certificate to help them in their future career choices. Students choose the subjects they wish to study for their Leaving Cert at the end of Transition Year.

Assessments in Transition Year are school based and often carried out through continuous assessment, presentations and assignments. Students who have successfully completed the Transition Year Programme are usually awarded a certificate of participation by their school.

## Transition Year Competition

Students are also encouraged to take part in various external competitions open to transition year students based on their interest. A

list of the most popular competitions among TY students can be found on the [ty.ie](http://ty.ie) website.

Taking part in the competitions is different in each school. You should check the school website or talk to the Transition Year coordinator to see which competitions are on offer. More information about Transition Year can be found on the [ty.ie](http://ty.ie) website.

## Leaving Certificate (5th Year/5 LCA 1 and 6th Year/6 LCA)

After finishing the Junior Cycle Examination or Transition year, students will have the opportunity to choose from three different Leaving Certificate programmes:

- Leaving Certificate programme (Leaving Cert Established)
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)
- Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA)

The traditional Leaving Certificate programme (established) focuses on academic subjects. The LCVP and LCA programmes focus more practical and technical abilities.

At the end of the two-year course, children sit their second set of State Examinations, known as the Leaving Certificate. This is the final external State exam in secondary school. Children who choose to go to university or higher education in which they may need to score a certain amount of points if they wish to go to university or another third-level institution.



To get the most up to date information regarding the Leaving Certificate visit the [Citizens Information](#).

## Leaving Certificate (Established)

The Leaving Certificate (established) is a two-year programme that aims to provide students with a broad, balanced education while also offering them a chance to work towards a particular university or higher education subject or career options. Children are aged 16-17 when they start and finish between 18-19 years of age.

### Curriculum and Subject Choices

Leaving Certificate (established) gives students a choice in the subjects they wish to study and at to which level they would like to study. Subjects are offered at foundation, ordinary or higher level. The level that a child studies a subject will affect the points that they can get in their final exams, which will impact the university or higher education course they choose.

All university or higher education courses have certain subject and level requirements. This is why it is important that the subjects and levels chosen meet the subject requirements of the preferred course in university or higher education. You should always talk to the Career Guidance Counsellor in school for further information.

In general, students take six or seven subjects for Leaving Certificate. Irish is a compulsory subject (unless exempt). Some schools may also make Maths and English compulsory. All subjects are normally studied at

either Ordinary or Higher Level but Irish and Maths, can be studied at Foundation Level.

There are lots of subjects available at Leaving Certificate but they may not be available in every school, so it is important to check which your school does. Subjects are grouped as shown in the table below. Two subjects, Home Economics and Physics and Chemistry, belong to two groups.

See table below for subject choices:

|   |                   |                |
|---|-------------------|----------------|
| <p><b>Practical Group</b></p> <p>These subjects are 'hands-on' and involve working with tools and machinery on physical things like wood, metals and plastic. They may involve designing, planning and building things.</p> |                   |                |
| Construction Studies  | Engineering       | Technology     |
| <p><b>Science Group</b></p> <p>These subjects demonstrate how to explore nature using carefully planned methods, and teach the basic methods and findings of scientific investigation.</p>                                  |                   |                |
| Agricultural Science  | Applied Maths     | Biology        |
| Chemistry   | Mathematics       | Physics        |
| Physics and Chemistry   | Computer Sciences | Home Economics |

### Artistic & Creative Group

These subjects involve developing creativity and the appreciation of the work of others. This involves learning the methods and techniques of the subject and producing your own work using these skills.

|     |       |   |
|-----|-------|---|
| Art | Music | Design and<br>Communication<br>Graphics |
|-----|-------|---|

### Humanities Group

These subjects explore the ways in which humans live and communicate in the world. Human life is examined by looking at our past, our present and into our future. These subjects help people to express themselves clearly and develop their reasoning ability.

|                |                   |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Arabic         | Classical Studies | English           |
| French         | Gaeilge           | German            |
| Hebrew Studies | History           | Italian           |
| Japanese       | Latin             | Russian           |
| Spanish        | Ancient Greek     | Mandarin- Chinese |
| Polish         | Portuguese        | Lithuanian        |

|  |                     |                      |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|
| <p><b>Social Group</b></p> <p>These subjects explore common issues faced by all people living in society. They develop the skills and knowledge used to manage personal resources and guide human behaviour.</p> |                     |                      |
| Geography  | Home Economics      | Religious Education  |
| Religious Education<br>(Non-Exam)  | Physical Educations | Politics and Society |
| <p><b>Business Group</b></p> <p>These subjects teach the skills and knowledge needed to understand how business works.</p>   |                     |                      |
| Accounting   | Business            | Economics            |
| LCVP Link Modules  |                     |                      |

## Oral and Practical examinations

Just like the Junior Certificate, students will sit a spoken exam an oral and an aural exam in Irish and any other foreign languages they are studying. Oral exams are conversations or interviews with an external examiner from the State Examination Commission.

Music requires a practical exam (25%) which is a performance on the child's chosen instrument. This test is examined by the State Examination Commission.

The Leaving certificate language and music practical performance tests are held over two weeks either before or after the Easter break depending on how early or late in the year Easter falls.

## Grades

The established Leaving Certificate is marked in points. The maximum number of points that can be achieved add up to 625. Children need to achieve a certain number of points for university and higher education. The points are different for each course, so it is important to check with the university or Higher Education College.

Please note, your final result will only be based on 6 of your best subjects. For example, a student can sit 10 leaving cert exams but only their top 6 will be counted towards their final points.

See table below:

| Percentage | Grade    | Points awarded |          |            |
|------------|----------|----------------|----------|------------|
|            |          | Higher         | Ordinary | Foundation |
| 90-100%    | H1-O1-F1 | 100            | 56       | 20         |
| 80-89.99%  | H2-O2-F2 | 88             | 46       | 12         |
| 70-79.99%  | H3-O3-F3 | 77             | 37       | 0          |
| 60-69.99%  | H4-O4-F4 | 66             | 28       | 0          |
| 50-59.99%  | H5-O5-F5 | 56             | 20       | 0          |
| 40-49.99%  | H6-O6-F6 | 46             | 12       | 0          |
| 30-39.99%  | H7-O7-F7 | 37             | 0        | 0          |
| 0-29.99%   | H8-O8-F8 | 0              | 0        | 0          |

Students can use the [Points Calculator](#) to calculate their points

## Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

The Leaving Certificate Applied programme is a two-year programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life.

The programme recognises the talents of all students and gives opportunities for developing personal responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge. It aims to help students apply what they learn to the real world.

### Curriculum

The two-year programme consists of four half-year blocks called sessions. Grades are given at the end of each session. Children do not have choices in the subjects that they take in the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. All students taking this programme will study all the subjects included in this programme. It is broken into three areas:

- **Vocational Preparation** - involves work experience, enterprise and communication
- **General Education** - offers life skills, the arts, social education, leisure and language
- **Vocational Education** – Agriculture/Horticulture, Childcare/Community Care, Graphics and Construction Studies, Craft and Design, Engineering, Hair and Beauty, Hotel, Catering and Tourism, Office Administration and Customer Care Technology

## Assessment and Grades

Children are assessed throughout the course and there is also a final examination in each of the following areas:

- English and Communication
- Two vocational specialisms
- Mathematical Applications
- A language
- Social Education

There are written and spoken (oral) exams in languages and practical exams in the vocational subjects.

Students who successfully complete the programme are awarded a Leaving Certificate from the Department of Education and Science. The certificate is awarded at three levels: Pass; Merit; and Distinction.

| Level       | Marks and Credits Required |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| Pass        | 60-69% (120-139 credits)   |
| Merit       | 70-84% (140-169 credits)   |
| Distinction | 85-100% (170-200 credits)  |



Students who complete the Leaving Certificate Applied programme go on to do a Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs).

There are many areas of study such as Art/Design, Business, Science, Services/Leisure, and Communications/Media studies. These courses can lead to an award recognised by the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Students with a Leaving Certificate (established) get into university or higher education through a system called the Central Applications Office (CAO). There is more information on this system below.

Students with the Leaving Certificate Applied cannot get into university or higher education through the Central Applications Office (CAO). After doing a PLC course, some students choose to do a Level 5 or Level 6 award, and some students go into third level with their award. However, this depends on the PLC course the student does.

There is also the option of doing an apprenticeship. An apprenticeship train students in a craft trade or profession. Another possibility is for students to go directly into full-time work.

## Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), is a Leaving Certificate with a focus on enterprise and preparation for working life. It is a two-year programme. Students do some academics from the Leaving Certificate (established) and modules on enterprise, work and community.

LCVP students take 5 other Leaving Certificate (established) subjects and two additional courses, called Link Modules, in the areas of Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education.

## How to Apply for the LCVP

If you are a post-primary school student, your details will be sent to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) by your school. If you are not in post-primary school, you can apply online for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme through this [Application Form](#).

## The Link Modules

The Link Modules are activity-based. They usually take a total of 2 to 3 classes per week.

The Link Modules are assessed in a written examination (40% of total marks) and a portfolio of coursework (60% of total marks.)

## Graded and Certification

Students receive the same certificate as other Leaving Certificate students, but their Leaving Certificate includes the results of the Link Modules (pass, merit or distinction).

Institutes of technology and the universities give these points to the Link Modules:

| <b>Grades</b>      | <b>Points</b> |
|--------------------|---------------|
| <b>Distinction</b> | <b>66</b>     |
| <b>Merit</b>       | <b>46</b>     |
| <b>Pass</b>        | <b>28</b>     |

Please note that the highest points awarded for the LCVP module is 66 which is the same as a H4 grade at Higher Level Leaving Certificate established subjects.

# **THIRD-LEVEL EDUCATION**

## Third-Level Education

After finishing second level education in Ireland, it is not mandatory for students to do third level education. Many people do third level education to get into specialised careers such as teaching, engineering, medicine or law. Third level education can include:

- Level 6/7 College Degrees
- Level 8 University Degrees
- Post Leaving Certificate Courses
- Apprenticeships

## Central Applications Office (CAO)

The CAO is an organisation responsible for admissions to third level education for level 6/7 and 8 courses. Applications usually open in November and close at the beginning of February. Students usually fill out their CAO application during 6th year.

On a CAO application, students fill out the courses they would like to do in university in order of preference. Students will only be offered one course if they get enough points in the Leaving Certificate. It is important that students think about their course preference.

Students have to get a certain amount of points to get into a course, and some courses require a specific grade in English and a language. It is important for students to confirm these details with the higher education institute before applying. In some cases, students may be given an exception to one or more of these requirements. Students can also check these exceptions with the higher education institute.

## Change of Mind

It is very important that students check their course choices carefully to make sure that they are correct. If a student needs to change or add courses, they can do this by using the Change of Mind facility.

To make changes to your course choices

- Log in via the **'My Application'** facility
- Go to add/change course choices
- Introduce all of courses on the 'New List' in your preferred order of preference, remembering to click, continue with course changes to save the information and
- Check the acknowledgement email sent to the email address given when making your application. Make sure to check that the changes have been recorded completely and correctly.

For more information on the Change of Mind facility, watch this short video resource: [CAO Change of Mind Video Guide](#)

### **Change of Mind notifications**

If a student uses the Change of Mind facility and makes changes to their courses, they will receive an email to confirm their new course choices. Students can also log into their account through the My Application facility to confirm that all of your details are recorded completely and correctly.

## 6/7 Degree vs Level 8 Degree

Level 6/7 courses are Advanced/Higher Certificates (6) or Ordinary Bachelor Degrees (7). Students study Advanced/Higher Certificates and Bachelor Degrees in further education institutions or institutes of technology.

Level 8 Degrees are Honours Bachelor Degrees. They are usually provided by a university. International qualification levels can be compared to the Irish system in the [Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#) website.

Students can look at most Level 6/7 and Level 8 on offer on the [CareersPortal](#). More information on how to apply to the CAO and level 6/7 and 8 courses can be found on [Central Applications Office](#).

## Getting a CAO Offer

CAO offers come out after the Leaving Certificate results have been released. Once students have calculated their points, they need to wait for their CAO offers.

Based on individual student's points, they will be offered a place on one of the courses they have put down on their CAO. It will then be up to the student whether they want to accept the offer or reject the offer. Students can only accept one course.

This process is divided into two rounds:

**Round One** - Round One offers are available online, and will also be sent out via post, email and text message. By this point, students will know if they have been accepted into their preferred course.

**Round Two** - CAO Round Two offers will be made after the reply deadline for Round One offers. If students missed out on their choice of course in Round One, they may now be offered a place on a higher preference course if a place becomes available, even if they have accepted an earlier offer. Students will not be offered a place on a course that was lower down in their preferences to the course they have already been offered.

If students have accepted an offer in Round One, they don't have to accept a Round Two offer, if they don't want to. Students can simply ignore the offer and stay in the course they accepted in Round One.

## **Accepting or rejecting a CAO offer**

If a student wants to accept or reject a CAO offer, here are some things they need to know:

- A reply date will be printed on Offer Notices. If a student wants to accept an offer, they must reply by the "Reply Date" printed on the Offer Notice.
- Offers will be presented online at the CAO website, and a student can accept an offer online
- If students don't want to accept the offer they receive, then they simply do nothing, and wait for Round 2 offer



## **Restricted Courses**

Some courses on the CAO are called "restricted courses". The "restricted" category includes most art and design courses, music or drama studies, and some architecture courses, as well as medical degree programmes.

If you are planning to apply to a restricted course, please ask the guidance counsellor in your school for more information. These courses may have additional assessments and different deadlines.

Students who are medical applicants must separately register for the Health Professionals Admissions Test (HPAT) or Graduate Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT) examinations, as well as applying to CAO.

## **PLC (Level 5/6 Degrees)**

If college or university courses are not the right route, students may prefer a Post Leaving Certificate course (PLC course) also known as a Further Education course through which they can get into various universities or learn the skills for specific jobs.

## **Curriculum and Assessment**

PLC courses are typically full-time, one to two year programmes that are module based. This means that students choose different classes that are offered. PLC courses generally have 8 modules. They are offered in Colleges of Further Education, 2nd Level schools and Community Education Centres.

All PLC courses have a work experience element included. Assessments can be 100% coursework or a combination of coursework and exam while many modules may also have a practical assessment.

Most PLC courses offer a QQI qualification at level 5 for one year, or 6 for two years. This is internationally recognised and is often a job requirement in areas such as childcare.

PLC courses also offer the opportunity for some to progress into further education through the Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS) using their Level 5 or Level 6 Major award.

There are over 1,800 of these linked PLC courses in Ireland. To find what courses are linked through HELS it is important to search the unique course code given to all PLC courses.

Many PLC courses also offer learners the opportunity to progress onto apprenticeships. These are often called Pre-Apprenticeship PLCs.

## Assessments and Grades

The marking system for PLC courses is Distinction (80%+), Merit (65%-79%), Pass (50%-64%) and Unsuccessful (0%-49%). In order to achieve a full award, and to be able to apply to Higher Education, students must get a minimum of a Pass grade in every module.

The grade required to access a university course after a PLC course varies from course to course, some require a minimum of 5 distinctions (above 80%) other simply require student to pass all their modules (above 50%)

PLC candidates can achieve a maximum of 390 QQI points which are distinct from CAO points. After a PLC, a student may apply for university courses with CAO points higher than 390 as many university courses leave specific places open for PLC students. If a student goes onto further education after a PLC they can apply to courses through CAO.

## Applying to PLC courses

Most Further Education colleges accept applications from January on and there is no set deadline or change of mind facility such like with CAO.

Applications to PLC courses are made either directly to the Further Education College or through [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie)

Once students apply, they will receive a confirmation of their application. Some PLC courses require students to do an interview either through the phone or in person, or that they submit a portfolio of work.

There is no limit to the amount of PLC courses you may apply for.

Successful applicants will be notified through email or phone call and offers are often made much earlier than the CAO offers.

## Fees

If students are offered a course, they will need to pay their registration fee (€40/50) to secure their place which is non-refundable. PLC courses are covered by grants like the Student Universal Support Ireland grant (SUSI). Each student may have to pay a contribution of €200 per year.

Students do not have to pay the contribution if:

- They hold a full medical card in their own right
- They are a dependent child of a full medical card holder
- They are eligible for a student grant
- They are getting Back to Education Allowance or a Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) allowance

### Asylum seekers and fees

From the start of the 2021/22 academic year, International Protection applicants who have permission to work and want to access a PLC course will no longer have to pay international fees of €3,600.

### Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a way for people to be trained in a particular craft or trade. Unlike PLC courses or university courses, apprenticeships follow a learn-as-you-work model. Students do on the job training with employers for which they are paid and study in education centres.

Apprenticeships last between 2 to 4 years. They are offered in various sectors like craft apprenticeships (building, plumbing, etc.) or newer apprenticeships, for example: accounting, hospitality and software development.

If a student completes an apprenticeship they will be awarded an Advanced Certificate – Craft (Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications).

## Applying

To be able to do an apprenticeship, applicants must be at least 16 years of age and have a minimum of grade D in 5 subjects in the Junior Certificate or equivalent exam. However, employers can also ask for higher educational qualifications and/or other requirements.

The minimum age to apply is between 16 and 18 years old.

To apply students should contact their local ETB (Education and Training Board). All of the ETBs on the [ETB website](#).

## Student Grants

The Student Grant Scheme is the main financial support scheme for students studying in Ireland and abroad. It is also known as the SUSI grant because the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) is the awarding authority for the Student Grant Scheme.

The Student Grants are divided into two categories:

- Maintenance Grants: helps students with their living costs.
- Fee Grants: covers tuition fees, the Student Contribution and the cost of essential field trips.

To get up-to-date information on Student Grant Schemes visit [Citizens Information](#).

## PLC Bursary for Displaced Persons (Ukraine) Scheme 2022

Under the International Protection Act 2015, Displaced Persons can apply for up to €6,115 to study an approved PLC (Post Leaving Certificate) course.

To see if you qualify for the Displaced Person Scheme bursary visit the [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie) website.

# ACRONYMS

## Acronyms/Abbreviations

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>CAO</b>                    | Central Applications Office  |
| <b>CBA</b>                    | Classroom Based Assessment   |
| <b>CSPE</b>                   | Civic, Social and Political Education  |
| <b>Crèches</b>                | A nursery where babies and young children are cared for during the working day.                |
| <b>Curriculum</b>             | A description of the lessons and academic content in a school or a specific course or program. |
| <b>Denominational schools</b> | A school that is associated with a particular religion.  |
| <b>ECCE</b>                   | Early Childhood Care and Education   |
| <b>Gaelcholáiste</b>          | Secondary schools where Irish is the primary (first) language                                  |
| <b>Gaelscoileanna</b>         | Irish speaking primary schools   |



|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>LCA</b>                         | Leaving Certificate Applied  |
| <b>LCE</b>                         | Leaving Certificate Established  |
| <b>Montessori</b>                  | a system of education for young children that seeks to develop natural interests and activities rather than use formal teaching methods. |
| <b>Multidenominational schools</b> | religious and nonreligious backgrounds are equally respected and explored within the school  |
| <b>SEC</b>                         | State Examinations Commission  |
| <b>SEN</b>                         | Special Educational Needs  |
| <b>SPHE</b>                        | Social, Personal and Health Education  |

# RESOURCES

## Resources

Below are some helpful resources for both parents and students

### Study Resources (post-primary)

#### [Examinations.ie](https://www.examinations.ie)

Examinations.ie is a website by the State Examination Commission. All Junior Cycle and Leaving Cert past State exam papers and marking schemes for all subjects can be viewed completely free of charge.

Here you will also find information on the secondary school, the subject syllabus for different subjects and anything related to the state exams, orals and practical examination.

#### [StudyClix](https://www.studyclix.ie)

StudyClix is Ireland's most popular study website with great learning resources for Junior & Leaving Cert students. On their website, you can find all past exam papers divided into specific topics for all leaving Cert and Junior Cycle subjects.

They also provide Quizzes, Podcasts, notes and video solutions. Set up a free account or login to your existing account at [Studyclix.ie](https://www.studyclix.ie). On the pricing page enter **ISSU20** to get €20 off any upgrade.

## [Quizlet](#)

Quizlet is a free website + app that provides learning tools for students, including flashcards, study and game modes. It enables you to create your own study set with your own term and definition or you can find and use any premade study sets by other users.

It's a fantastic resource to find/make digital flashcards for any of your subjects and for studying on the go!

## [The Conical Flask](#)

The Conical Flask is a free science resource website for Junior Cycle Science and Leaving Cert Chemistry and Biology students. You can find free video lessons, presentations, notes and questions on different topics in your syllabus explained here.

## [Word Hippo](#)

WordHippo is an online website and application providing a range of tools related to the use of words for creative and recreational purposes such as writing, poetry, translations, word games, etc.

Find synonyms and meaning for different words to make your writing interesting to read, stand out from the crowd.

## [Ombudsman for Children's Office](#)

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is a human rights institution and work to protect the rights of children and young people in Ireland. It investigates complaints about services provided to children by public

organisations, such as schools, hospitals and other government departments. It also teaches children about their rights, so children and young people are actively heard and respected in order to experience safe, fulfilling and happy everyday lives.

## Mental Health Supports

Services and supports for young people

### [Jigsaw](#)

Mental health advice and support – online and in person – for young people aged 12 to 25 years old, and for parents or concerned adults.

### [Childline](#)

Ireland's 24-hour listening service for young people up to the age of 18. Childline is a service from the ISPCC.

### [BeLonG To Youth Services](#)

Support, information and groups for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people in Ireland, their parents and carers, and other professionals.

### [spunout](#)

Spunout is Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people. Articles and information for young people on many topics, including mental health.

Free-text SPUNOUT to 50808 to chat with a trained volunteer, any time.

### Barnardos

Services for children, families and communities, to transform the lives of vulnerable children affected by adverse childhood experiences.

Barnardos also provide a Children's Bereavement Service.

Freephone 1800 910 123, Monday to Friday 10am to 2pm

### CARI

Therapy for children and young people who have been affected by child sexual abuse. CARI also provide information, support and counselling to non-abusing parents, carers and siblings.

Phone 0818 924567, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

# ANNEX

## Citation

### Pre-school

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/pre\\_school\\_education\\_and\\_childcare/early\\_childhood\\_education.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/pre_school_education_and_childcare/early_childhood_education.html)

<https://relocatingtoireland.com/irish-education/irish-childcare-and-pre-schooling/>

### Primary School

<https://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Read-More/>

[http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary\\_and\\_post\\_primary\\_education/going\\_to\\_primary\\_school/primary\\_education\\_life\\_event.html#:~:text=Most%20children%20in%20Ireland%20start,the%20age%20of%206%20years.](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/going_to_primary_school/primary_education_life_event.html#:~:text=Most%20children%20in%20Ireland%20start,the%20age%20of%206%20years.)

### Transition Year

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary\\_and\\_post\\_primary\\_education/going\\_to\\_post\\_primary\\_school/transition\\_year.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/going_to_post_primary_school/transition_year.html)

<https://ty.ie/>

### Secondary School

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving\\_country/moving\\_to\\_ireland/introduction\\_to\\_the\\_irish\\_system/moving\\_your\\_child\\_irish\\_secondary\\_school.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/moving_country/moving_to_ireland/introduction_to_the_irish_system/moving_your_child_irish_secondary_school.html)

<https://www schooldays.ie/articles/secondary-Schools-in-Ireland-by-County>



## PLCs and Apprenticeships

[https://careersportal.ie/school/plc\\_courses.php](https://careersportal.ie/school/plc_courses.php)

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/vocational\\_education\\_and\\_training/post\\_leaving\\_certificate\\_courses.html#:~:text=Post%20Leaving%20Certificate%20\(PLC\)%20courses%20are%20full%2Dtime%20programmes,level%206%20%E2%80%93%20see%20NFQ%20below.#](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/vocational_education_and_training/post_leaving_certificate_courses.html#:~:text=Post%20Leaving%20Certificate%20(PLC)%20courses%20are%20full%2Dtime%20programmes,level%206%20%E2%80%93%20see%20NFQ%20below.#)

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b9760-how-to-become-an-apprentice/>

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/vocational\\_education\\_and\\_training/apprenticeships.html#:~:text=An%20apprenticeship%20provides%20on%2Dthe,off%2Dthe%2Djob%20training.](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/vocational_education_and_training/apprenticeships.html#:~:text=An%20apprenticeship%20provides%20on%2Dthe,off%2Dthe%2Djob%20training.)

## CAO

<https://www.cao.ie/index.php?page=aboutCOM>

## Leaving Certificate

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state\\_examinations/established\\_leaving\\_certificate.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state_examinations/established_leaving_certificate.html)

[https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state\\_examinations/leaving\\_certificate\\_vocational\\_programme.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state_examinations/leaving_certificate_vocational_programme.html)

[https://careersportal.ie/school/subject\\_explorer.php](https://careersportal.ie/school/subject_explorer.php)

<https://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=recognitions>

## Mental Health

<https://www2.hse.ie/mental-health/services-support/supports-services/#belong-to-youth-services>

# Irish Second-Level Students' Union Guide to the Irish Education System



# ISSU

IRISH SECOND-LEVEL  
STUDENTS' UNION

## RESOURCE DETAILS

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01 443 4461

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