

Post Leaving Cert. Courses (PLC Courses)

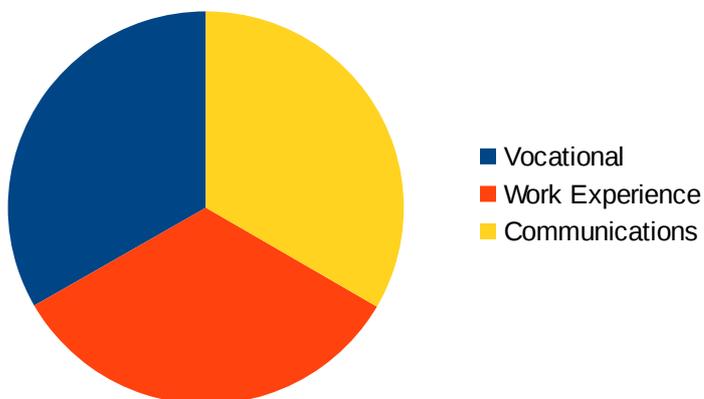
Presently there are over 34,000 PLC Students in over 200 schools and colleges across the country.



Essentially, the PLC courses are popular because of number of reasons:

- Firstly they meet the demands and interests of many students. They offer an opportunity to study something specifically not available anywhere else, such as Beauty Therapy, Court Stenography, Special Needs Assistant, Association Football or Sound Engineering.
- More likely to respond more immediately to the needs of industry and the broader economy.
- High employment rate, as many are designed for direct entry to specific jobs / careers. A large percentage of those who completed a PLC course gain employment. Over a third go directly to further training or education, of which the majority were in third level colleges.
- Provides alternative routes of entry to Further and Higher Education. Continuing education in Irish and U.K. Colleges. Cavan Institute, Coláiste Dhúlaigh, BCFE and Inchicore are good examples.
- Provide FETAC Level 5 Certification after one year, and FETAC Level 6 Certification after two years which is nationally and internationally recognised.
- Offers access to maintenance grants for eligible students and have no course tuition fees. Many will have material and exam fees, from €50 to €2,217, and of course the newly introduced €200 PLC Administration Fee.
- Lastly, they provide students with transferable skills, the general skills and qualifications which will prove useful in the future even if they change career paths.

The majority of PLC courses last one year but there is an increasing number of two year and three-year courses for students who wish to continue to study at a higher level.



Generally the PLC course structure can be broken into three parts - Vocational, Work Experience and General Studies/Communications. Each of these is designed to prepare people for direct entry to employment or for progression to higher education or training.

The courses cover diverse are such as:

Animations, Accountancy, Art/Craft/ Design, Art, Computer Aided Design, Craft, Design, Fashion Design, Furniture Design, Graphic Design, Interior Design, e Business , Business Studies - Administration, Bilingual Secretarial, International Trade, Business Studies - Secretarial, Information Processing, Marketing, Retail Studies, Agriculture, Applied Science -Animal Care, Applied Science – Food, Horticulture, Applied Science - Laboratory Techniques, Construction, Technology, Control Technology, Electronic Technology, Engineering, Forestry , Horsemanship, Horse Breeding & Training , Information Technology, Motor Technology, Security Systems, Security Studies, Community Care, Childcare, Nursing Studies, Community and Health, Services, Hotel and Catering, Outdoor Recreation, Sport and Recreation, Tourism, Cultural and Heritage Studies, Language and European Studies, Media Engineering, Multimedia Production , Media Production, Radio Production , Performing Arts - Dance, Performing Arts - Music, Theatre Production, Theatre Performance and Print Journalism.

As stated, one of the distinctive features of the PLC sector is its ability to rapidly respond and adapt to current trends in industry. While all the courses are designed with a particular career focus, they are supported by broader skills in areas such as communications, decision making, teamwork and negotiation, technology, problem solving and time management. All skills that will stand to you in your future career.

The PLC sector caters primarily for students who have just completed their Leaving Certificate. The minimum entry requirement usually being five passes, including English and Maths at Ordinary Level, though Foundation Level Maths may be acceptable for certain courses. Some courses with links into Honors' Degrees or Higher National Diplomas will have at least a two honors' (HC3) requirement. Others might look for certain grades or subjects, such as Biology for Beauty Therapy. Some may require a portfolio and many base acceptances onto a course on an interview. Sport's related courses may be more interested in a Sport's C.V. In some instances you might need to investigate whether gaining some work work experience in a related area might be helpful. You should also note that in recent times an increasing number of adults are now looking for entry to PLC courses

The introduction of maintenance grants for eligible students in 1999 has increased the appeal of PLC courses, which are supported by the Department of Education and Skills. Students do not have to pay tuition fees for any course but as stated additional costs such as examination fees, materials, registration by professional bodies, student services and the new Administration fees may apply.

Most of the courses are certified by the Further Education & Training Awards Council (FETAC) at Level 5 or Level 6. A smaller number of courses provide accreditation through other organisations such as professional bodies including City & Guilds, I.A.T.I., CIDESCO, CACHE, Edexcel, BTEC, MII, Institute of Bankers and ITEC. The ideal arrangement is that students can gain a full Level 5 award in one year once they have completed the required 8 modules. A record of achievement is given to a candidate who achieves a credit in one or more modules. Learners can add to their module credits over time.

Students who wish to pursue their studies at a higher level and have an appropriate FETAC Level 6 Certificate can do so through the Higher Education Links Scheme. For 2012 FETAC CAO applicants there are **forty** higher education institutions including universities, institutes of technology and private third level colleges offering progression to a wide variety of Level 6 Higher Certificate, Level 7 Ordinary Degree and Level 8 Honours Degree programs.

In addition to the Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS) which links specific FETAC Level 5 Certificates and some Level 6 Advanced Certificates to a number of reserved places on higher education courses, the Institutes of Technology and some higher education institutions operate an admissions criteria and scoring system for non-specific FETAC Level 5 Certificate and Level 6 Advanced Certificate applicants.

NOTE: Specific FETAC certificates may be required for specific Higher Education courses, e.g. Nursing.

Every Certificate has an employer representative. Some are more closely linked, for example with some I.T. courses (Microsoft).

Short Summary:

- ✓ You need a minimum Pass Leaving Cert. Some courses may allow Foundation Level Maths, the minority require certain grades in certain subjects. A portfolio may also be required of certain courses. Always check the course entry for any extra requirements, such as a language or a specific grade in Maths etc.
- ✓ You apply to all these Colleges individually. Closing dates for applications vary, generally you can begin applying after the 1st February but some courses would receive applications before Christmas, so check.
- ✓ You may still get a place on a course in September. But beware, popular courses fill quickly.
- ✓ A good interview is vital. You may be rejected or accepted based on interview performance.
- ✓ Course duration is between one and three years.
- ✓ They are more career / job orientated. In many cases certain courses get you jobs with particular companies. They are also more hands on and less academic than many other third level courses.
- ✓ The qualifications vary from FETAC Level 5 to Higher National Diplomas and even Honours Degrees.
- ✓ Cost €300, plus €200 Government Levy (exempt for Medical Card holders). However watch out for equipment, examination and administration fees. They can be anywhere between €60 and €1000. The majority being closer to another €600.
- ✓ You are eligible to apply for a maintenance grant the same as any other third level student.
- ✓ It is important to check out further study options. Some courses are directly linked with Degree courses in English Colleges and Universities.
- ✓ You must visit a prospective college. Ask about facilities, class sizes, student retention figures, employment opportunities and where you can proceed to further study.
- ✓ Candidates who wish to progress further apply through the C.A.O..
- ✓ Watch for the PLC courses will have links with specific courses in the Institutes of Technology and/or Universities.