

# Planning for Life After the Leaving Certificate

- CAO, PLCs, Apprenticeships, Funding & Supports etc.

Guidance Counsellor Presentation for Parents/Guardians  
January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Patrician Presentation Secondary School, Fethard





# Aims of Tonight's Talk

- Explain all post-Leaving Cert options
- Demystify the CAO process
- Outline supports and grants
- Highlight alternative and progression routes



# Post-Leaving Certificate Options



Higher Education – Universities & Technological Universities



Further Education – PLC / FET courses



Apprenticeships – traditional & new



Employment, gap year, or combined pathways



# What is the CAO?

- Central Applications Office (CAO)
  - One online application for Level 6, 7 and 8 courses
  - Students may list up to 10 choices at each level
  - Choices must be listed in genuine order of preference



# Understanding CAO Levels

- Level 8 – Honours Degree
- Level 7 – Ordinary Degree
- Level 6 – Higher Certificate
- Level 5 – Certificate

Accepting a Level 6 or 7 does not block progression to further levels.



# CAO Timeline & Key Dates



1<sup>st</sup> November – CAO opens



1<sup>st</sup> February – Normal closing date



1<sup>st</sup> March – Late applications close



1<sup>st</sup> July – Change of Mind closes

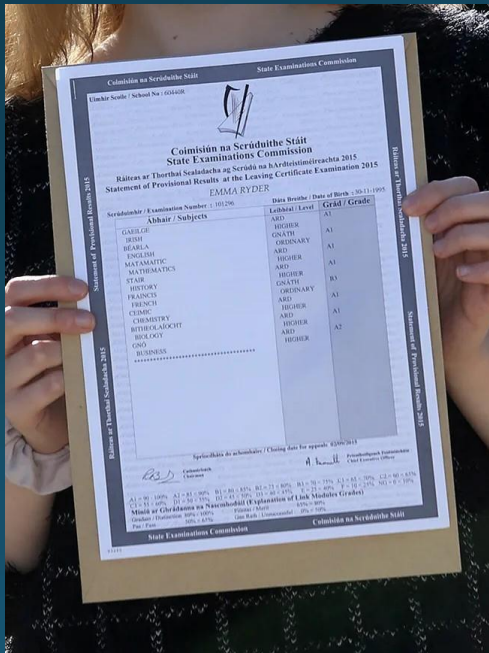


August (TBC) – CAO offers issued (in Rounds)



# The Points System (Overview)

- Best 6 subjects counted
- Higher Level bonus points
- Maths bonus points (+25 points for H6+)
- Points change every year, depending on demand



CAREERSPORTAL.ie

Subjects: 7  
**TOP 6 RESULTS**

+25 bonus points for Higher Maths included

**500**  
points

HIGHER	ORDINARY	LCVP LINK
H1	H2	H3
H4	H5	H6
H7	H8	START OVER

# HEAR – Higher Education Access Route

- For students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Reduced points where applicable
- Financial, academic and social supports
- Apply through CAO by 1<sup>st</sup> March (financial year for means testing is 2024 for 2026 entry)



**HEAR** | HIGHER  
EDUCATION  
ACCESS  
ROUTE

# DARE – Disability Access Route to Education

- For students with disabilities or learning difficulties
- Includes dyslexia, ADHD, autism, mental health conditions
- Reduced points and college supports
- Apply through CAO by 1<sup>st</sup> March



**DARE** | DISABILITY  
ACCESS  
ROUTE TO  
EDUCATION

# SUSI – Student Grant

- Maintenance grant and tuition fee support
- Based on: household income & distance from college
- Apply online at [www.susi.ie](http://www.susi.ie)
- Applications open each April (the financial year for means testing is 2025 for 2026 entry)

[SUSI Thresholds Link](#)



# Other Sources of Funding..

- 1916 Bursary
- College scholarships (academic, sports, access)
- Student Assistance Fund (SAF)
- Charitable grants/bursaries (SVP education bursary)
- Clonmel Credit Union
- Borrowing (AIB)

[Scholarships Link](#)

[Student Assistance Fund](#)

[Clonmel CU Bursary](#)



[AIB Student Loans](#)

[SVP Education Grant](#)

# PLC Courses – Further Education

- Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses
- QQI Level 5 and Level 6 awards
- Practical, skills-based learning
- Usually 1–2 years duration

[FETCH Courses Site](#)



# Why Choose a PLC Course?

- Alternative pathway to higher education
- Smaller class sizes and continuous assessment
- Builds confidence and maturity
- Strong progression and employment outcomes





# Applying for PLC Courses

- Apply directly to colleges and ETBs
- Applications open in spring (until end Aug)
- Rolling offers – apply early for best outcomes
- SUSI funding is available for PLC students

[FETCH Courses Site](#)

[www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie)



# Apprenticeships – Earn While You Learn

- Combination of paid work and training
- No tuition fees
- Levels 5–10 available
- Traditional trades and also new career areas

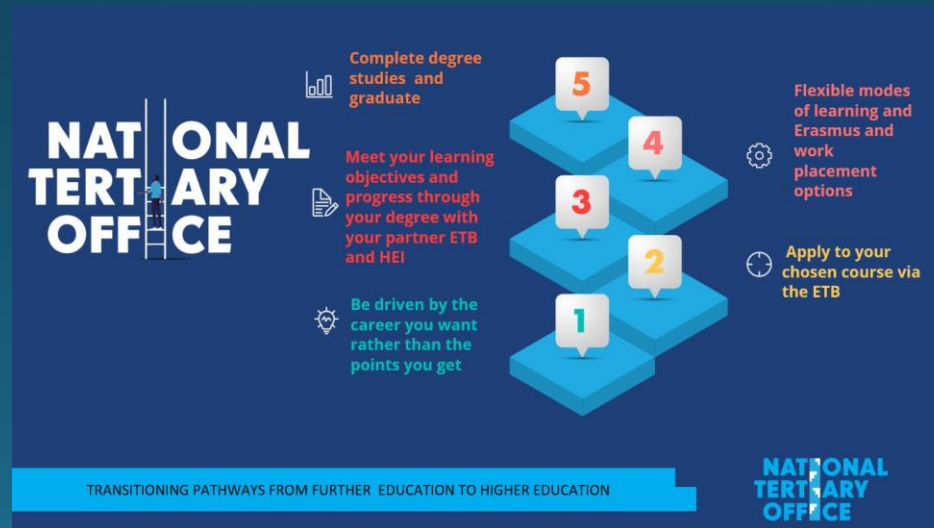
[Apprenticeship.ie](http://Apprenticeship.ie)



# National Tertiary Office (NTO)

- Links Further Education, Apprenticeships and Higher Education
- Creates flexible entry and exit points
- Ensures no dead ends in education
- Supports lifelong learning pathways

## NTO Courses



# Key Dates at a Glance

- CAO – 1 February
- HEAR / DARE – 1 March
- SUSI – April (5/6<sup>th</sup> usually)
- Change of Mind – closes 1<sup>st</sup> July
- CAO Offers – August



# How Parents Can Support Their Child



Encourage exploration of ALL options



Avoid comparisons with others



Focus on strengths, interests and wellbeing



Reassure students that routes are flexible



Encourage them to visit/try out options.



# Final Reassurance



There are many routes to success



One exam does not define a student



Progression is always possible



Support is available at every stage



The finish line is in sight!!

[Our Website Link for  
more resources](#)



# Questions & Useful Websites

Mail: [jmcgree@ppss.ie](mailto:jmcgree@ppss.ie)

Response typically within 24 hours, excluding June 8<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> (48 hour response during this time unless emergency)



[www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie)



[www.susi.ie](http://www.susi.ie)



[www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie)



[www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie)



[www.accesscollege.ie](http://www.accesscollege.ie)

# THANK YOU !