

5. Education

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5A. Your Children's Education

If you are moving to Ireland and you have a child of school-going age, you will require information regarding the educational choices available to you and how to enroll your child. Every child in Ireland is entitled to free, state-run primary and secondary education. Attendance at full-time education is compulsory for all children between six and sixteen years of age. Although children in Ireland are not obliged to attend school until the age of six, almost all children begin school in the September following their fourth birthday. There is no widespread free pre-school system in operation in Ireland. While primary and secondary education is free, there are a number of costs involved. The principal ones are uniforms and books. If you get a social welfare payment you may be entitled to "A Back to School Allowance" for school uniforms and shoes. For further information, you should contact your local Health Board.

All queries regarding education can be directed to:

Department of Education and Science Marlborough St, Dublin 1 Tel + 353 1 873 4700

Web: www.education.ie

Primary Schools

The Irish school year for primary school children is from 1 September to 30 June approximately. The primary school cycle is 8 years long. Schools generally have 2 years of infant classes, followed by 1st class to 6th class.

What types of primary schools are available?

The Irish primary education sector consists of state-funded primary schools, special schools and private primary schools. State-funded primary schools used to be known as national schools and you may still hear this term being used. Primary schools are generally administered by Boards of Management. State-funded schools include religious schools, non-denominational schools, multi-denominational schools and Gaelscoileanna, which are schools that teach the curriculum through the Irish language. For a list of schools, you should contact the Department of Education or your local CIC (Citizen Information Centre), which are available nationwide.

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What role does religion play in Irish schools?

Most Irish primary schools are under the management of one denomination or another and the majority of these are Roman Catholic. There is a growing choice of schools of other denominations and of multi-denominational schools. Schools that cater for a single religion may give priority to children of that religion but they will also admit children with other religious beliefs, or none. Children do not have to attend religion classes and you may choose to withdraw your child from such classes if you wish.

What do I do to enrol my child?

You must enrol your child in your local primary school. You should do this as early as possible due to long waiting lists in many areas. Each school operates an admissions policy, which they must make available on request. It is important that you ask for the admissions policy of any school in which you are interested. State-funded primary schools tend to give priority to children living in the immediate area, but problems can arise if their classes are already full and they have a waiting list. Multi-denominational schools, non-denominational schools and Gaelscoileanna (schools taught through Irish) each decide their own admissions policy. Some secondary schools give priority to the students from certain primary schools so it may be useful to plan ahead when choosing a primary school for your child.

If you wish to enrol your children in a particular primary school you should contact the Chairperson of the Board of Management or contact the school directly.

Secondary Schools

The Irish secondary school year is from the first week in September to the first week in June. If your child is going in to a Junior Certificate Class or a Leaving Certificate class, however, they will not finish until the end of June, as they will be taking their exams at that time.

Exams

The Intermediate Certificate examination has been replaced by the more flexible Junior Certificate and final year students may now choose from 3 different Leaving Certificate programmes. They can take the 'Traditional Leaving Certificate' or they can choose from the 'Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme' or the 'Leaving Certificate Applied Programme'. The "Leaving Cert Vocational Programme" and the "Leaving Cert Applied Programme" focus on a student's more practical and technical abilities.

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What types of secondary schools are available?

You have a number of options when looking for secondary schools for your children. The secondary school system includes secondary schools, vocational schools, community or comprehensive schools and private secondary schools. Fees charged by private secondary schools can vary considerably. You will need to check with each individual school. The majority of Irish children go to secondary schools which are privately owned and managed and often run by religious orders, although the teachers in these schools are generally lay staff. The majority of secondary schools are free, but there are fee-paying schools also. Vocational schools and community or comprehensive 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. For a full list of secondary schools contact the Department of Education.

What if my child doesn't speak Irish?

Irish is normally compulsory in second level schools. However, if your child has been educated outside of Ireland up to the age of 11, your child is exempt from studying Irish.

How do I enrol my child in a secondary school?

You should enrol your children as early as possible as most schools operate a waiting list. You should ask for the school's admission policy. You must contact the school directly. If you require more information contact the Department of Education.

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Third Level

If you intend on studying at a third level institute, you should contact the Department of Education for a list of third level options.

Do I have to pay fees?

There are no fees for third level colleges provided that you are a first time undergraduate (i.e. a university student who has not yet received a first degree) **or** you are an EU national **or** you hold official refugee status and **have been ordinarily resident in an EU member state for at least 3 years out of the past 5 years**. Holding an Irish passport is not sufficient to qualify for these benefits.

What about financial support?

Grants are available but are subject to a means test. To qualify for a maintenance grant, you must be resident in Ireland for one year prior to your application. You must make your application for a grant to your local authority. For a complete list of Local Authorities in Ireland, contact the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government + 353 1 888 2638.

Am I eligible for third level education?

Entrance to third-level education in Ireland is generally decided by competition. At the end of your secondary school education, you sit the Leaving Certificate exam and the grades you receive are converted into points. These points are calculated and third-level places are awarded on this basis. Applications for third level courses are made through CAO (Central Applications Office), 33 Eglinton Street, Galway. www.cao.ie

What if I completed my secondary school exams in another country?

If you have taken your secondary school exams under another system in another country you will need to check whether your qualifications will be sufficient to secure a place in the Irish third-level course of your choice. Contact the college directly to confirm this before making your application. If you meet the requirements you should then apply to the CAO.

I am a mature student. What are my options?

A small number of places are retained for mature students, those over the age of 23. These places are designed to improve access to third-level for adults who may not have sufficient points from their Leaving Certificate to compete with school-leavers.

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If you are interested in applying for one of these places, you will need to apply directly to the college of your choice not through the CAO.

There are a number of part-time courses and distance education options available if the full-time education option does not suit your circumstances. Distance education is quite popular as it allows you to study from home and you can submit assignments by post or email. It is an excellent option if there are demands on your time. For a full list of available courses, please contact the Department of Education.

Adult Education

Every year approximately 300,000 adults participate in education in formal and informal settings. There are a number of options open to you if you are planning to return to education.

Do you need help with reading and writing?

You should contact the following organisations for more information.

NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency)

A free and confidential Adult Basic Education service is available in over 100 Literacy Schemes nationwide. You can avail of one-to-one or group tuition in a relaxed, informal atmosphere. You can upgrade your reading, writing, spelling, math or computer skills. For further details contact NALA, Tel: +353 1 8554332 Web: www.nala.ie for a list of Literacy Schemes.

BTEI (Back to Education Initiative)

If you are interested in basic education, BTEI offers a range of courses from literacy programmes, computer and business skills, childcare to horticultural courses. For more information contact your local VEC (Vocational Education Committee).

Return to Education

The Return to Education Programme is a joint initiative between FAS (Training and Employment Authority of Ireland) and the VEC (Vocational Education Committee). It is a project aimed at giving participants on Community Employment (CE) Schemes an opportunity to attend a basic reading and writing skills course. For further information contact FAS or your local VEC.

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Are you interested in returning to education?

You should contact the following agencies for further information.

VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme)

The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme is a special initiative designed to cater for the educational and training needs of those who are unemployed. If you complete a VTOS course, you will get a certificate. You can choose to take the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, City & Guilds, post-Leaving Cert (PLC) courses or FETAC assessments. Your social welfare payments are not affected by joining VTOS. VTOS courses are free.

You are eligible to participate in VTOS if:

- You are over 21 years of age
- You have been signing on for 6 months or more
- You are in receipt of One Parent Family Payment
- You are on Disability Payments

FÁS

FÁS is the national training and employment authority and offers a wide range of day and night courses. For more information contact your local FAS office or www.fas.ie

PLC (Post-Leaving Cert) Courses

If you have finished your secondary education in Ireland and would like to develop vocational and technological skills in order to get a job or to go into further education and training, the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) course may be the one you are looking for. The PLC is often seen just as a course for school-leavers, but adult participants are also welcome.

In general, you should have finished your secondary education or equivalent and taken your Leaving Certificate examination, or equivalent, in order to be eligible for a PLC course. However, if you have work experience relevant to the course on offer or think you can demonstrate a particular ability in that area, you should write to the college where the course will take place. Explain your circumstances in the letter and ask to meet the co-ordinator of the course. For a full list of courses contact your local VEC office.

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Second Chance/Further Education

Schools, Colleges and Community Groups offer a wide variety of daytime, evening, full-time and part-time courses for adults. Programmes can range from personal development through to courses from which a qualification can be gained. A fee is usually charged for part-time courses but concessions may be granted to people who are unwaged. For further information contact the Department of Social & Family Affairs (DSFA).

Return to Learning

Courses are also offered by some schools and colleges to help adults prepare for entry to third level education as a mature student. These courses are referred to as Foundation Courses, Access Courses or Return to Learning Courses. For further information, contact your Vocational Education Committee (listed in your local telephone directory).

HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council)

HETAC is the qualifications awarding body for third-level educational and training institutions outside the university sector. Recognised HETAC Institutions currently comprise of the Institutes of Technology. For further information contact HETAC Tel: + 353 1 631 4567, Web: www.hetac.ie

FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council)

As the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland, FETAC gives people the opportunity to gain recognition for learning in education or training centres, in the work place and in the community. Programmes leading to FETAC awards are offered nationwide by a wide range of providers in diverse settings, including BIM, Fáilte Ireland (CERT), FÁS and Teagasc centres, VEC's, Adult and Community Education and Training Centres, Institutes of Technology and in the workplaces. For further information contact FETAC. Tel: +353 1 865 9500 Web: www.fetac.ie

PLOTEUS

PLOTEUS, the Portal on Learning Opportunities throughout the European Space, will help you find out about education and training available throughout Europe. Web: <http://europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/>

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5C. Education for People with Disabilities

Access to primary and secondary education

Special provision ranges from additional support in mainstream schools to specialist support in special schools. There are three models of provision:

- A student with a disability may be enrolled in a mainstream class with additional support from a resource teacher or a special needs assistant
- A student may be enrolled in a special class in a mainstream school
- A student may be enrolled in a special school which caters for the student's category of disability Home tuition may be provided for children who are unable to attend school on a regular basis because of a serious medical problem or for children who are waiting to be allocated a suitable school place. It may also be provided during the month of July for children with autistic spectrum disorders and severe or profound general learning disabilities who have specific needs

Children with special needs have the right to free primary education up to age 18. The Health Services Executive is responsible for providing speech and language therapy services to primary school children.

Access to Third Level Education

Students with a disability may apply for admission to a third level institution through the normal process – you apply to the Central Admissions Office (CAO). Some institutions reserve a number of places for people with disabilities and you must apply directly to the individual institution for such a place.

Most third level institutions have Disability Liaison Officers. The Disability Liaison Officer may provide a number of services including assistance with applying for a reserved place, finding suitable accommodation and arranging any special access requirements and provisions for sitting examinations. Some institutions reserve a number of student accommodation places for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are eligible for third level grants on the same basis as other students. There are some grants specifically for people with disabilities. A special fund to help third level students with disabilities is administered by the Department of Education and Science. You should apply directly to the third level institution at the beginning of the academic year.

For further information contact the Department of Education or AHEAD, Newman House, 86, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. Tel: + 353 1 475 2386 Web: www.ahead.ie