

How to get to college via a post-Leaving Cert course

Huge opportunities are available to progress to third level through further education

Brian Mooney, Thu, Jan 8, 2015, The Irish Times

The further education sector in Ireland offers huge opportunities, not only for those looking for additional skills or hoping to go directly into employment, but also as an alternative route on to a college course in a university or institute of technology in Ireland or abroad.

Progression to third level from further education can be either through the CAO into first year or through advanced entry to the second year of that programme.

For example, if you want to study economics, politics and law in DCU, but think you may not get enough points (380 in 2014), or to give yourself a fallback should something go wrong in the Leaving Cert, you could do a one-year post-Leaving Cert (PLC) course in legal studies (5M2102) in Pearse College, Dublin. If you get five distinctions in this course, you are eligible for one of the places reserved on that DCU course for Fetac (Further Education and Training Awards Council) applicants.

The simplest way to check the progression routes for all PLC courses is using the search tools on careersportal. ie. On the site, click the what to study tab on the main toolbar for search tools on CAO and PLC courses.

The PLC courses leading to Fetac awards tool has a Fetac link icon next to all courses with progression routes. Within each course page are links to all CAO courses accepting students from that course. Using the Fetac progression routes tool, you can find a list of the nearly 700 CAO courses that will accept any Fetac award for progression, or if you know the Fetac code for a course you are interested in, you may be able to find even more.

To find out if a particular CAO course will accept specific Fetac awards, go to the CAO simple search tool and enter your course. If, for example, you want to study science in UCD (DN200), use the search tool to go to its course page on careersportal. ie and click on the Fetac links tab for a list of all the Fetac awards accepted by UCD for reserved places. Clicking on the award codes generates a list of PLC courses that will gain entry. A number of PLC colleges, including the pre-university science programme in Killester College, offer this option.

Interestingly, UCD says that although the points for science are now 515, it still has difficulty filling reserved places for PLC students each year.

This is a clear example of how a student with a specific aptitude for science, who does not score high points across the full range of Leaving Cert subjects, can still get on to their desired course through the Fetac/PLC route.

PLC colleges also offer students the opportunity to progress to level 8 honours degree programmes validated by external bodies. For example, Ballyfermot College offers a BA (hons) degree in media production management, awarded and accredited by DCU.

Blackrock Further Education Institute offers a new one-year arts with business management Fetac level 6 award from September. Course graduates can progress to advanced entry to second year of the BA (hons) business studies and art management in IADT Dún Laoghaire. Log on to your local colleges for details.

There is a mismatch between the number of PLC students of pre-nursing and the tiny number of reserved places in honour (level 8) nursing degrees through the CAO. However, there is a good supply of nursing places in UK universities for Irish students with pre-nursing Fetac awards. Almost 500 students took this option last year. Details of the top 10 UK universities offering nursing degrees to Irish students are in my recent book Start Your Career Journey Here (revisewise.ie).