

CAREER GUIDANCE INFORMATION

Leaving Certificate 2025 -2026



ST DECLAN'S COLLEGE

4th November 2025

Dear Parent/Guardian of 6th Year Students,

I hope this finds you well and your son is coping so far with his Leaving Certificate year. I have put together this *career guidance information document* below to help you support and guide your son with his choices for next year. I would really appreciate it if you took the time to go through this with your son so he knows we are working together to support him.

Plan for 6th Year

As with any 6th Year group, it is important to be future focused towards the Leaving Certificate exams and beyond. I have often said to the students that the Leaving Cert is like a "job" in 6th Year. However, it is **not** the most important thing in their lives and it never will be. They will move on to different areas, college, apprenticeships, employment, and all will carve out exciting and meaningful futures for themselves. The events of the covid pandemic are not going to define them and it is important to remember this. In fact, one positive to emerge from all of this is that the boys will become more resilient from having to deal with a life challenge which they have had no control over. This resilience will benefit them as they meet challenges with their studies and throughout their lives in general.

Grades/Career Appointments

In October all students set grade/points targets for each subject. I asked students to write these into their journals so you and their subject teachers could see them. It is important that they are striving towards achieving this target in each of their exams that they sit throughout the year. I encourage you to discuss this with him now and again when he receives reports home from school.

The students can make one to one career appointments with me. Some students think they have to wait until they know what they want to do, this is not the case. Please encourage your son to make an appointment. These are available all year and I am delighted to help and guide them.

College Open Days

All the colleges have open day events. Dates are available on the 'events calendar' on the Qualifax website. I will try to cover the dates in class and I always encourage students to attend at least *one* open day. Students are asked to register for these days. For you as a parent, you can attend with him or on your own! Please help him plan ahead by booking the events which he wants to attend, check the schedule of the particular facilities/courses he wishes to research and ask him to write down some questions to ask on the day.

All of the CAO colleges will have open day schedules on their websites.

CAO:

In 2022 the CAO went completely digital, for environmental reasons. You and your son can download the CAO handbook from cao.ie. He was given an opportunity to download this to his phone during his weekly guidance class using a QR code.

He can apply for the CAO 2026 online through cao.ie **from November 5th**. The closing date for application to CAO is **February 1st 2026**. **Applications received on or before 20th of January will be charged at the reduced rate of €35**. We would like all of our students to have applied by the 20th January. I have asked the students not to apply **until** I covered more of the CAO process in their guidance classes. All information on applying is in the CAO handbook. He can use the change of mind facility between May 6th and July 1st once the course is not labelled '**restricted application**'. CAO are extremely strict on deadlines so they must be adhered to. There are over 1800 courses in 42 colleges on the CAO system. Students can apply for levels 6, 7 & 8 through this system.

There is also a link to CAO information for parents below:

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

Apprenticeships/SOLAS courses:

It is important to be aware there are now **80+ apprenticeships** available.

SOLAS are the body who are in charge of *some* of these apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships provide a great opportunity to engage with an "earn and learn" model of further education and are gaining in popularity every year. Traditional companies like the ESB, Defence forces, Irish Rail etc will hopefully begin their recruitment campaigns in the spring of 2026. However, **many companies in the financial services, sales, ICT, logistics, hospitality, insurance and biopharma are now offering competitive apprenticeship programmes. Further information can be found through the link below.**

As you may know some apprenticeships can be difficult to obtain so students are being encouraged to actively seek a potential employer at this stage. You may be in a position to help your son gain some work shadowing/experience in the area he is interested in so that he has an idea what is involved/ahead of him. He may need a CV, letter of application and 1 day 'safe pass' course to apply for some apprenticeships. Your son will need your assistance with all of this as it might be difficult for him as a 17 or 18 year old to approach an employer without your guidance. Please help him with the skills to make these connections/approaches.

SOLAS (formerly FAS) run a variety of courses. Students can register for these courses once they have completed their Leaving Cert.

<https://apprenticeship.ie/>

PLC Courses

Application to Post Leaving Cert courses are to individual colleges OR through setting up a FETCH (Further Education Training Course Hub) account. There is a link from the CAO website to this FETCH system. There is no cost to apply for a PLC. These PLC's are at level 5 and are one year in duration. He may need a school reference as part of the application process. He will need to call to Ms O' Reilly to arrange this. He may also need a passport photo, most recent exam results and a personal statement. A small number of courses will require an interview. Interview skills will be covered in class and on an individual basis where necessary. Early application to these courses is advised as many are on a first come first served basis.

I cannot overemphasise the importance of applying for a PLC course even just to have as an "insurance policy" should they not get the college course they desire. It is also a great route for a student who may have the requirements/points for their desired area of study but may not be fully sure of what he specifically wants to study. A post leaving certificate course is an introduction to a field of study which he can progress to in college or university should he wish to. There are some changes happening to the PLC links scheme for entry 2026 so please keep a close eye on this. More information can be found through the links below.

<https://www.plccourses.ie/>

<https://www.fetchcourses.ie/courses/cao>

Grants/Finance

I am aware that finance for college is a major concern for many parents. Information on financial support for further and higher education is available on www.susi.ie. Your son may be eligible for a maintenance grant. You and your son can fill in the 'eligibility reckoner' to establish if he should apply. Applications for these grant should open in March 2026. Students apply on line and they will need your assistance. If your son intends to apply for a grant, he may indicate this on his CAO online application. CAO will then provide his identification, contact and offer/acceptance details to the grant authority (SUSI).

The 3rd level registration fee for entry 2026 is €2500 for TU's and Universities. Private colleges fees can be €3000 – €6000 per year.

<https://susi.ie/>

HEAR Scheme (Higher Education Access Scheme)

The HEAR (Higher Education Access Scheme) is available for school leavers from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. HEAR applicants must meet a range of financial, social and cultural indicators to be considered for a reduced points place and extra college support. Students apply for the HEAR scheme on their CAO form. Please check dates and documentation he will need to send to CAO.

Further information is available on <http://accesscollege.ie>

DARE Scheme (Disability Access Route to Education)

If your son has a disability/learning difficulty he may wish to apply for the DARE scheme. This is a supplementary admissions scheme which offers college places on reduced points and extra college support where necessary.

Students apply for the DARE scheme via their CAO form.

There are 4 sections: Section A: filled in by your son (with your assistance), Section B: filled in by the AEN teachers and/or myself with your son. Section C: form filled in by a Dr/Consultant/Psychologist (proof of disability). Section D is only for students that have an SLD but no Educational Psychological report. It is very important that your son lets us know early he intends to apply for DARE. Please check dates and documentation he will need to send to CAO.

Further information is available on <http://accesscollege.ie/>

STUDENTS CAN APPLY FOR BOTH THE HEAR AND DARE SCHEMES.

Irish and 3rd language exemptions:

Language requirements for college courses need to be checked by your son. If he has an Irish exemption and is planning on attending one of the NUI colleges he will have to fill in a form online. Please see the link below. He will need your assistance with this.

<https://exemptions.nui.ie/>

Study/After School Study

At this stage, over two months into their 9 month Leaving Cert year we hope your son realises the importance of regular, structured study. Leaving Cert students are advised they need to be spending 3 hours including homework per night and studying 6/7 days. Again they may need your help with making a *plan on paper*, monitoring this time and in some cases 'minding' their phones while they study! Study plan templates are available for students outside the guidance office and I can also help him with these study plans.

We hope no student is engaging in part time work as this will adversely affect their performance in the Leaving Certificate. *Full attendance in school is absolutely essential.*

A reminder that we have an 'After School Supervised Study' facility on *4 evenings a week*. If your son is interested in attending this he knows he can contact Mr O Laighin. *Students can join this at any stage during the year. Cost from the beginning of November – Christmas is €60.*

Further advice

It is in the students' interests to keep their options open by applying to a variety of courses in different colleges/ to research and apply for different apprenticeships. They should also have an up to date CV done by the end of the school year.

I repeatedly encourage them to keep an open mind on options available to them after they leave St Declan's.

I talk a lot about the importance of the life skill, having a *Plan A, B & C* for next September.

I have covered a lot on goal setting, motivation, study techniques, study plans, mindfulness techniques and looking after ones health (physical, emotional, mental) in their guidance classes.

The following websites provide useful information on courses and careers:

Qualifax.ie (course information/Open day events calendar)

Careersportal.ie

Careers and Education news.ie (students have been asked to sign up with their e mail) I would advise you to sign up too.

Generation Apprenticeships.ie

All of the above has been or will be covered with the students during their weekly Career Guidance class in school. Should you have any queries about your son's choices either now or throughout the year please don't hesitate to contact me at the school number.

Many thanks for your time as I support your son through his final year with us.

Karen Tierney

Career Guidance Counsellor

