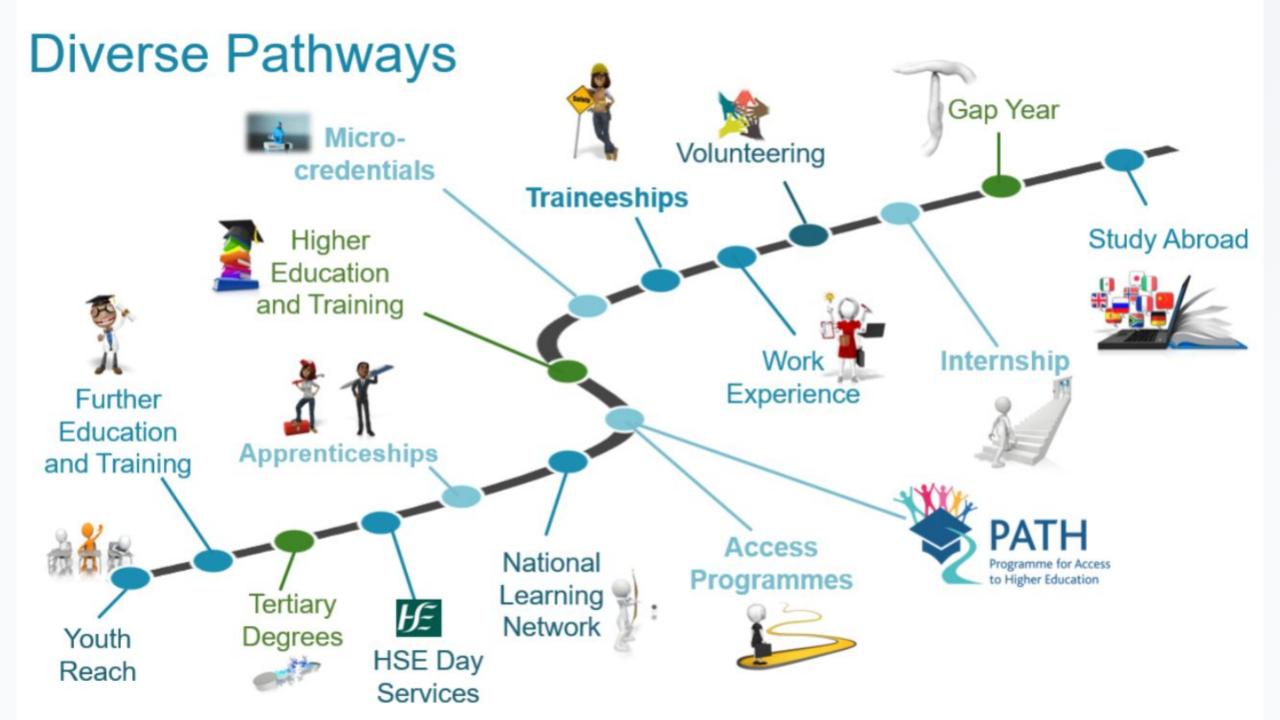


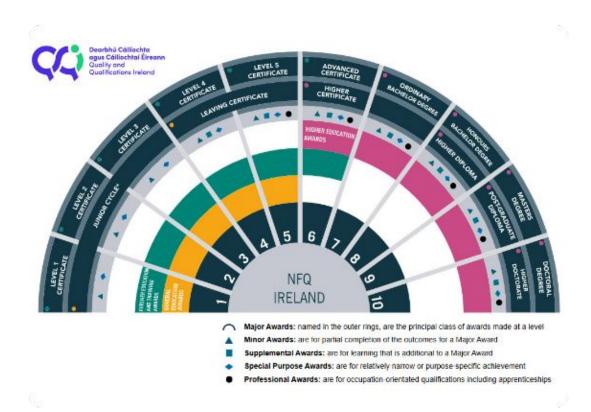
Beyond the Leaving Cert

A Guide for Parents: Navigating Pathways to the

Future



National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)



The Ladder of Opportunity

Level 5: Leaving Certificate / PLC Courses.

Level 6: Higher Certificate / Advanced

Certificate.

Level 7: Ordinary Bachelor Degree.

Level 8: Honours Bachelor Degree (Typical

University Entry).

Key Takeaway: Students can step up this ladder at their own pace. Completing a Level

5/6 can lead directly into Year 1 or 2 of a Level 8 degree.

Higher Education (CAO)

The Central Applications Office (CAO) handles applications for Universities, Technological Universities (TUs), and Institutes of Technology.

Points System: Based on the best 6 subjects in the Leaving Cert.

Minimum Requirements: Specific subjects (e.g., Maths, English, Science) are often required for matriculation.

Level 8 Degrees: Typically 3-4 years, academic focus.

Key Deadline: February 1st is the primary closing date for applications.



Further Education (PLC) APPLY DIRECTLY TO COLLEGE FROM NOW

A Bridge to Success

Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses are usually 1 year long (Level 5).

Low Cost: Fees have been largely abolished.

Career Ready: Excellent for vocational skills (e.g., Pre-Nursing, IT, Art).

University Route: A proven "back door" to University.

High grades in a PLC can replace Leaving Cert points for many CAO courses.



Apprenticeships: Earn & Learn

Not Just for Trades

While traditional crafts (Plumbing, Electrical) remain strong, apprenticeships have expanded significantly.

New Fields: Finance, Insurance, Biopharma, ICT, Logistics, and Auctioneering.

Structure: Combine on-the-job training (paid) with off-the-job education (college).

Degree Level: You can now earn a Level 8 degree via an apprenticeship.

Employer Led: You typically apply to an employer, not the CAO.



The Tertiary Degree Pathway

An alternative pathway

Structure: This programme is a joint further and higher education degree.

Students start their course in a Further Education (FE) college (usually an Education and Training Board or ETB) for 1–2 years, and then seamlessly progress to a Higher Education Institution (university/technological university) to complete the degree.

Award: All Tertiary Degree programmes lead to an NFQ Level 7 or Level 8 degree.

https://nto.hea.ie/courses/



Study Abroad Options



Europe (EUNiCAS)

Hundreds of degrees taught
through English in the
Netherlands, Denmark, Poland,
etc. often with lower entry
requirements and lower fees.

£

UK (UCAS)

Northern Ireland and Great

Britain remain popular. Note that
fees can be higher in England,
but Northern Ireland offers value.



Benefits

Independence, cultural
experience, and a chance to
study high-demand courses (like
Medicine or Psychology) that are
competitive at home.

Gap Years & The World of Work



Taking a Breath

A gap year is not "time off"—it's time on. It can be a valid and mature choice.

Maturity: Students often enter college more focused after a year of work or travel.

Financial: Working for a year allows students to save for college life.

Discovery: Helps undecided students figure out what they truly want to do before committing to a 4-year degree.

Useful Resources



CAO.ie

For all Higher

Education

applications and key

dates.

CareersPortal.ie

Comprehensive
database of courses,
careers, and guidance
tools.



Qualifax.ie

The national learners' database for course search and entry requirements.



Apprenticeship.ie

Information on all SOLAS apprenticeships and how to apply.

How You Can Support Them



Open Dialogue: Focus on their strengths and interests, not just "job titles."

Reduce Pressure: Remind them there is always more than one pathway to a destination.

Research Together: Look at course modules, not just college names. Is the content interesting?

Practicalities: Discuss accommodation, transport, and costs early to manage expectations.