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PLC FEES

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CORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD

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1. Introduction

This document outlines Cork Education and Training Boards approach to setting of appropriate course fees and the collection of same. It sets out the principles which underlie the setting of fees, the elements that make up a course fee, and the mechanisms for the collection of course fees. It clearly sets out the responsibilities of the learners in the process.

It further sets out the parameters and considerations that apply in the refunding of any fees paid and the mechanisms associated with any such refunds, Furthermore, in recognising that students may at a point on their course experience financial difficulties, it sets out the procedures to be applied at college level in considering fee alleviation for any student in difficulty.

In addition, this policy provides colleges with advice and guidance on the management of debts arising from uncollected fees

1.1 Policy

Cork Education and Training Board is committed to implementing a fair, equitable and transparent system for determining, collecting and refunding of course fees across all colleges and centres delivering Post leaving Certificate courses.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline for College Management, potential learners, and enrolled students in a clear and transparent manner the principles and procedures that Cork ETB adopts in relation to the setting, collection and refunding of course fees, dealing with students experiencing financial difficulty and handling unpaid fee's (debts).

1.3 Scope

This policy applies to all Post Leaving Certificate Colleges and Centres under the remit of Cork Education and Training Board, applicants to, and students enrolled on, full-time Post leaving Certificate Courses
Fees

2. Setting PLC Fees

There are no tuition fees payable for PLC courses by EU/EEA nationals. However, learners are required to pay a Course Fee comprising:

1. Student Services Charge
2. Examination fees
3. PLC Government Levy

2.1 Student Services Charge

The Student Services Charge will vary from course to course. It comprises the following elements:

- College services - €250¹
 - While no list of items or services covered in this area can be exhaustive, and some flexibility is required, the spirit of this contribution is to cover services, materials and supports provided directly to the student or of direct benefit to the students. Examples would be photocopying, book rental, cooking ingredients, binding, technical support.

Additional charges may apply on a course by course basis as follows:

- Specialist Class materials charge, including any specific excursion charges relating to that course
- Uniforms/kits and books that will become the property of the student

2.2 Examination fees

- QQI Fees - In general, PLC courses lead to QQI awards on the National Framework of Qualifications. Examination fees for QQI awards are:
 - Level 5 €50²
 - Level 6 €80³

Full details of QQI fees are available at <https://qhelp.qqi.ie/learners/certification-fees/>

¹ 2017-2018 academic year

² 2017-2018

³ 2017-2018

- Other Awarding Bodies – fees for other awarding bodies are set by these bodies on an annual basis. In some instance the fee includes a requirement to register with the awarding body at the commencement of a course. In such instances, it may not be possible to refund any fees paid, even if the students does not complete the course for certification.

2.3 PLC Government Levy

- The Government introduced, in budget 2010, a PLC programme participant contribution of €200. The contribution is an annual contribution. Eligible participants on PLC courses of more than one year's duration must pay the contribution for each year of their course.
- The following categories of participant are exempt from paying the contribution:
 - Full medical card holders in their own right and their dependent children
 - Those who are eligible under the student grant (SUSI) scheme
 - Those in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) or Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) allowances

2.4 Determining Individual course fees

PLC colleges are required to be cognisant of the financial pressures experienced by students and their families, and set fees at a level that will cover costs associated with the course which can be considered to be, or provide for, a direct service to the student. Fees **cannot** include any component that is intended to cover what could/would be considered normal day-to-day operational expenditure for the college.

The following mechanism to be applied to the determination and setting out of fees for each individual course.

Each course fee should be illustrated by a breakdown as below, setting out the elements of the proposed fee as follows:

Fee Element	Cost
PLC Government Contribution Charge	€200
Students Services	€250*
Materials	Itemised
Uniforms	Itemised

Other fees	Itemised
QQI certification	€50 (L5) €80 (L6) ⁴
Other certification	Itemised
TOTAL	

*2017-18

Taking cognisance of the fact that some centres have set their Students Services /College Registration fee as low as €50, this is to be increased and be brought into line as follows:

- 2017-18 – Minimum Student Services charge = €150
- 2018-19 – Minimum Student Services charge = €200
- 2019-20 – Minimum Students Services charge = €250 (or the agreed charge pertaining in that year)

2.5 Approval for proposed fees

Fees proposals will be submitted to the Director of Further Education and Training to be discussed with the PLC management group for consideration by the end of December in the year preceding the commencement of courses

The Director of Further Education and Training will make a recommendation regarding fees to the FET Strategy Group for its approval.

2.6 Publishing Fee schedules

All PLC colleges and centres will be required to publish the fee schedule on their website, providing a breakdown of the fee for each course, under the following headings:

1. Student Services Charge
2. Examination fees
3. PLC Government Levy

2.7 Payment of Fees

⁴ Centres are required to review fees proposed to reflect actual QQI costs

In line with Government policy to move away from cash transactions, Cork ETB encourages all applicants to use the online payment facility available through each college.

Payment by cash is not provided for. Cork ETB and its colleges accept payment by:

- Cheque
- Bank draft
- postal order
- debit/credit card

All fees must be paid in full by a date to be confirmed on year by year basis.

2.8 Non-Payment of Fees

In an instance where a student has not paid his/her fees in full, and has not engaged with the college regarding any difficulties they are experiencing with the payment of fees, the following remedies are available to the college:

- Removal of college identity card until fees are paid in full or an agreed arrangement is put in place to provide for payment
- Refuse to sign attendance forms (BTEA, social welfare, third party or student card request forms)
- Suspension from involvement in college activities, including availing of classes, tutorials, study and library facilities
- Removal from the course

A student who has not paid their fees in full will not be permitted to sit examinations, and no results shall be provided to that student until payment in full is made.

No student who has outstanding fees will be allowed to graduate

2.9 Applicant/Student Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the applicant/student to:

- Ensure that they read and understand the fee and refund policy and the procedures relating to each
- Pay all fees due within the specified timeframe.
- Ensure that they keep all receipts and documentation as evidence in the case of a dispute.

- Engage with the college immediately if they are experiencing difficulties in relation to paying fees.

3 Refunds Policy

The purpose of this policy is that all students receive similar service and responses in all Colleges when requesting refunds. The decision to approve the issuing of a refund will have to be authorised by the College Principal or Deputy Principal.

In General, it is Cork Education and Training Boards policy not to make any refunds to a student who has commenced on a course. However, a number of instances or scenarios where refunds may legitimately be requested and approved are described below. Additional instances may arise which are not covered by the scenarios described, in such instances the principles of reasonableness and fairness should be applied in making decisions.

3.1 Situation 1

Student accepts an offer of a place and pays fees (fully or partially) and then informs the College **before** the commencement of classes that s/he is not going to take up their place.

Refund:	Full amount of fees paid.
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3.2 Situation 2

Student accepts an offer of a place and pays fees (fully or partially) and having commenced the course, informs the College before 01 October that s/he is not proceeding with their participation on the course.

Refund:	Fees paid Less €50 from Student Services payment. Less cost of any uniforms, kits etc. that have been given to the student as a requirement for the course. Less any examination fees that have been paid by the student for external examination bodies, if those fees have been remitted to that body.
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3.3 Situation 3

Student, having completed a place and commenced on course, decides to leave **after** 01 October.

Refund:	No refund Except for any external examination fees that have not been paid to the external examining body and/or fees for any uniforms, kits that have not been distributed to or used by the student.
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3.4 Refunding Government PLC Levy

The PLC Government Levy is refundable to any of the following categories of student, provided the evidence is received prior to the 30th September:

- Full medical card holders in their own right
- Those who are eligible under the Students Grant Scheme
- Those in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) or Vocational Training
- Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) allowance

If a student leaves a course after 30th September, they are not entitled to any refund of the PLC Government Levy.

3.5 Processing Refunds

- Refund requests may take up to two weeks to process.
- Online payments made by credit/debit card will be refunded to credit/debit card used to pay the original fee.
- Cash/cheque payments will be refunded by cheque
- No cash refunds will be provided.

3.6 Recording Refunds

Colleges in applying the above policy and procedures, should reference their decisions on refunds not only to the date the refund was requested but also to the date of last attendance. A clear record of refunds made and the reasons for applying them must be kept. The Principals authorisation of the refund must be recorded

Colleges may determine to vary the refunds policy in situations where they consider that students are experiencing financial hardship. The reasons for making any such variations should be clearly recoded on the refunds record

The College Principal must verify and sign off on all fee refund decisions.

4 Fee Waiver Policy for PLC Courses

4.1 General

Cork Education and Training Board recognises that some students attending our PLC courses may face financial difficulties that could impact on their participation and ability to complete the course they have enrolled on. While the level of fees associated with a course are calculated to be at a level which minimises any possible barrier to participation, and are set to reflect the costs associated with that course, it is recognised that even these minimal charges may create difficulties for some students. As it is not possible to eliminate completely the necessity to charge fees under the current funding arrangements for PLC courses, Cork ETB has determined that, in order to minimise the impact that such fees may have on a small number of student's ability to participate in, or complete their course, that the following alleviation mechanisms operate across all colleges.

4.2 Structured Payments

For many students experiencing financial difficulties, this may be a short term or transient issue, and the application of a structured part-payment plan may provide the students with the flexibility required to ensure that they can participate or continue to participate on the course.

In agreeing to a structured payment plan, the following principles should be applied:

- Part payments can only be approved by the Principal/Deputy Principal
- The Principal/Deputy Principal shall satisfy themselves that the case presented by the student is genuine, and that there is a realistic expectation and commitment that the payment commitment will be met
- Part payment agreements should generally be structured to provide for payment to be collected over the minimum possible period
- Part-payment agreements should not, in the majority of circumstances, extend beyond the end of March of the academic year
- A written agreement (Appendix 1) setting out the amount to be paid and the weekly/monthly instalments should be completed by the Principal/Deputy Principal and signed by them and the student.

- A log/register of all part payment agreements must be kept in each college/centre
- Students who fail to adhere to the terms of the agreement will be prevented from receiving certification outcomes until all obligations are met
- And materials, equipment, kits, etc. that are provided to a student entering into a part payment agreement remain the property of the college until the agreement is met in full.
- In the event that the student fails to complete their course, the college will make every effort to recoup the monies owed/outstanding

4.3 Waivers

Students in certain defined categories are entitled to waivers for the PLC Government Levy and QQI certification costs. Only in exceptional circumstances should an agreement be made to waive any part of the fee associated with a course. In general, only the portion of the fee associated with the college's Student Services Charge may be waived, no fees associated with equipment, kits uniforms etc., which become the personal property on completion of the course/receipt of payment, may be waived.

In agreeing to a fee waiver, the following principles should be applied:

- A waiver of fees may only be agreed to by the Principal, and they are required to satisfy themselves that the case presented by the student is genuine, and that there is a realistic likelihood that the student may fail to complete the course if a waiver is not provided.
- A written agreement (Appendix 2) setting out the reasons for approving the fee waiver, and the amount and description of the fees being waived, should be completed by the Principal and signed by them and the student.
- A log/register of all waiver agreements must be kept in each college/centre

5 Dealing with Student Debts

5.1 General

Cork Education and Training Board has, through the mechanisms and procedures in the fee alleviation and waivers sections of this policy, provided for students who are experiencing financial difficulties to put in place agreements for fee payment. However, there will likely be a proportion of students who fail to pay (in full) the fees owed or to engage with the College/centre.

It is Cork ETB's policy that unpaid fees are considered a debt and will be dealt with as set out here.

5.2 Non-Payment of Fees

In an instance where a student has not paid his/her fees in full, and has not engaged with the college regarding any difficulties they are experiencing with the payment of fees, the following remedies are available to the college:

- Removal of college identity card until fees are paid in full or an agreed arrangement is put in place to provide for payment
- Refuse to sign attendance forms (BTEA, social welfare, third party or student card request forms)
- Suspension from involvement in college activities, including availing of classes, tutorials, study and library facilities
- Removal from the course

A student who has not paid their fees in full will not be permitted to sit examinations, and no results shall be provided to that student until payment in full is made.

No student who has outstanding fees will be allowed to graduate

Any unpaid fees are considered to be a debt to the college by the student.

5.3 Pursuing Debts

The college is required to keep an up to date record of fees paid and monies owed, and to review this on a regular basis.

Each college is advised to review the fee record monthly, and, commencing in October, communicate with all students who have fees outstanding and who have not engaged with the college to agree alleviation measures if they are experiencing difficulties, seeking payment of outstanding fees. A record of all communications should be kept, as well as a record of any actions taken on foot of responses/non-responses.

Prior to the end of April every year, all students with outstanding fees must be written to, advising them of the amount outstanding and that if payment or arrangements for payment are not agreed before the 1st May, any student so affected will not be permitted to sit end of year examinations, nor will certification requests be made on their behalf to the awarding body.

In July following the end of the academic year, the college will write to all students with outstanding fees, advising them of the amount owed and requesting payment.

At the first Board of Management meeting after the commencement of the new academic year, the Principal will present a report to the Board identifying student debtors and the amount owed by each debtor, and seek approval from the Board to have these amounts declared unrecoverable. The Principal will advise Cork ETB of the Board's decision.

6 Appendix 1

College:	
Year:	
Student Name:	
Date of Birth:	
Course:	

Reason why part payment agreement has been requested:

Recommendation that part payment agreement should be approved: Yes No

Fee Element	Total Cost	For Part payment
PLC Government Fee	€200	
Students Services	€250*	
Materials/Uniforms	Itemised	
QQI certification	€50 (L5) €80 (L6) ⁵	
Other certification	Itemised	
Other fees	Itemised	
TOTAL	X	Y

Period over which student agrees to make regular, weekly payments: ____ weeks

⁵ Centres are required to review fees proposed to reflect actual QQI costs

Student Agreement

I confirm that the reasons that I have presented for requesting this part-payment facility are true and valid, and agree that I will make the regular payments indicated below to (College Name). I confirm that I understand and accept that by availing of this facility, that any equipment, materials, kits, etc. that are provided to me remain the property of the college until such time as I have made full payment. I further acknowledge and accept that I will not be eligible to receive certification results from (college) until such time as the full amount of the payment has been made.

I agree to pay (College Name), €_____per week, commencing on ___(date)_, for a period of _____ (weeks) until I have fully paid the amount (Y) as indicated above.

Students Signature: _____ Date: _____

Principal/Deputy Principals Signature: _____ Date: _____

7 Appendix 2

College:	
Year:	
Student Name:	
Date of Birth:	
Course:	

Reason why waiver has been requested:

Recommendation that waiver request should be approved: Yes No

Fee Element	Total Cost	To be Waived
PLC Government Fee	€200	
Students Services	€250*	
Materials/Uniforms	Itemised	
QQI certification	€50 (L5) €80 (L6) ⁶	
Other certification	Itemised	
Other fees	Itemised	
TOTAL	X	Y

⁶ Centres are required to review fees proposed to reflect actual QQI costs

Student Agreement

I confirm that the reasons that I have presented for requesting this waiver facility are true and valid, and that the waiver only applies to the fee elements indicated above.

Students Signature: _____ Date: _____

Principal/Deputy Principals Signature: _____ Date: _____