

Guide to Third Level Education *for PWCF*



The Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland

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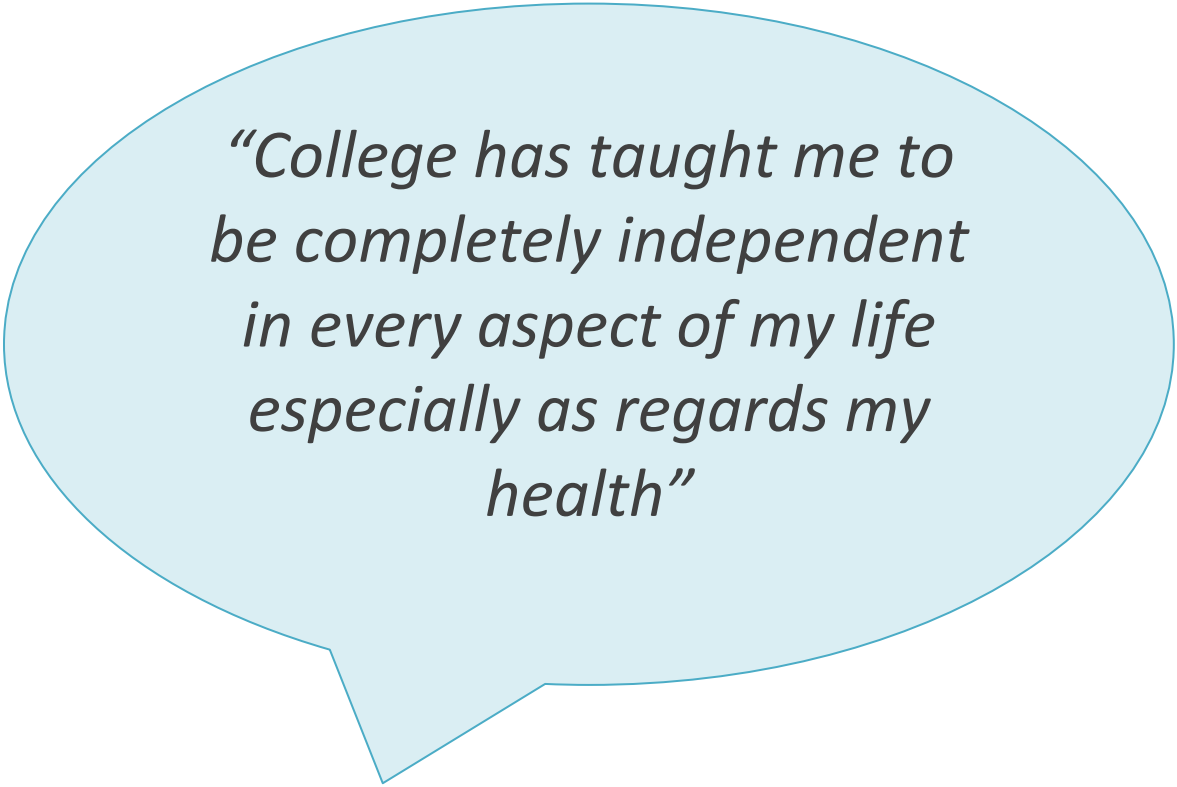
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“College has taught me to be completely independent in every aspect of my life especially as regards my health”

PWCF final year student

Contents

Introduction	4
<i>What are the different types of Third Level Education?</i>	4
Third Level Application Procedures for Students with Disabilities	5
<i>Importance of Disclosing your Disability</i>	5
<i>Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)</i>	5
Third-Level Options for Mature Students	7
Third Level Fees & Student Contribution	9
Supports for Students with Disabilities at Third Level	10
Back to Education Allowance	11
<i>Qualifying for BTEA</i>	11
<i>How to Apply</i>	11
<i>Can I get a Student Grant if I am on BTEA?</i>	12
<i>Disability Allowance versus BTEA</i>	12
Grants for Students in Further and Higher Education	13
<i>Student Grant Scheme</i>	13
<i>Where to Apply</i>	14
Other Financial Supports for Students	15
<i>The Fund for Students with Disabilities</i>	15
<i>The Student Assistance Fund</i>	15
<i>Other Finance Supports: Bursaries & Scholarships</i>	15
Finding Accommodation for College	18
<i>On Campus Accommodation</i>	18
<i>Off Campus Accommodation</i>	18
<i>Rent Supplement</i>	19
PWCF Experiences	20
<i>On College Life...</i>	20
<i>On Various Types of Education Courses...</i>	21
Useful Resources	23

Introduction

The period approaching entry to third level education can be a difficult time and even more so for a person with cystic fibrosis (PWCF). It may be the first time that you are moving away from home and have to find your own accommodation in which to live. This booklet has been designed to make the process of transition to third level as straight forward as possible and to help answer some of the many questions that may arise at that time.

The information in this guide is taken from many resources including the Citizens Information Board, www.studentfinance.ie and www.accesscollege.ie. The website www.qualifax.ie is a one stop shop for information in relation to college courses and is an excellent resource to help find the right course for you.

Many PWCF have completed third-level education courses and have attained certificates, diplomas, degrees and beyond. Some of their personal experiences are also documented inside this guide to provide you with additional insight on what to expect if this is the path you have chosen to follow.

What are the different types of Third Level Education?

Third-level education can be divided into two sections – **further education and training** and **higher education and training**.

Further education and training is education and training between post-primary level and higher education, for example, PLC courses and Colleges of Further Education. Higher education and training is provided chiefly in universities and Institutes of Technology (ITs) or equivalent bodies around the country.

Information on the full range of courses in Ireland can be found at www.qualifax.ie. Bear in mind that it is possible to take up a place on a PLC course and work your way in to the Institutes of Technology and universities – a number of PWCF have taken such a route (see ‘PWCF Experiences’).

Third Level Application Procedures for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities apply to third-level institutions using the standard procedures, i.e., through the Central Applications Office (CAO). There is no central applications body for Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses – students must apply directly to the individual colleges for such courses. When filling out your CAO forms (due to be returned by February), you should tick the box that asks if you have a disability. The form will be processed in the same way as all other applications.

Importance of Disclosing your Disability

PWCF are encouraged to disclose their disability by writing "Medical Condition" along the bottom of Page 1 of their CAO application form (in the space below the box for the applicant's signature).

The advantage of disclosing a medical condition such as CF is that it will make the college aware of the numbers of students that will require extra supports and services, such as campus accommodation, and can provide assistance to you in advance. If your CF is not disclosed through the CAO process, you may not be eligible for such services from the start of the term.

In addition to the standard CAO application, it is also possible that a student with a disability may qualify for entry to third-level education via the **DARE** scheme outlined next.

Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)

DARE is a college and university admissions scheme which offers places on a reduced points basis to school leavers with disabilities, including PWCF. DARE has been set up by a number of colleges and universities as evidence shows that disability can have a negative effect on how well a student does at school and whether they go on to college. To be eligible for the scheme you must provide evidence that your disability has affected your educational performance significantly – see 'Supplementary Information Form' further below.



How the scheme works

Each of the third-level colleges participating in the scheme has reserved a number of places on their courses for school leavers who are eligible for DARE. You can find details of the places available through DARE on the **websites of the participating third-level colleges**. You apply for DARE through the CAO – see 'How to Apply to DARE' below. Once you have been accepted as eligible for DARE, you then compete for the reduced point places based on your Leaving Certificate results. A 'reduced point' place means that you may get a place on a third-level course with less than the full CAO points. For example, if you are eligible for DARE and you get 430 Leaving Certificate points, you may be offered a place on a course that is 470 points through CAO. However, you must meet the college matriculation and any specific course entry requirements – these vary depending on the college or university.

How to Apply to DARE

If you are a school leaver and you want to be considered for the DARE scheme, you must follow the 4 steps below:

Step 1: Apply to the CAO at www.cao.ie by **17:15 on 1st February 2012**.

Step 2: No later than **17:15 on 1st March 2012** you must disclose your disability and/or specific learning difficulty in your CAO application and fully and correctly complete Section A of the Supplementary Information Form (the SIF is a part of your CAO application). If you wish to be considered for the DARE scheme, you must indicate this on Section A of the fully completed SIF by ticking “Yes” to Question 5 by **17:15 on 1st March 2012**.

Step 3: You must return the fully completed Second Level Academic Reference (Section B) and Evidence of Disability (Section C) to the CAO by **17:15 on 1st April 2012**.

Supplementary Information Form

There are four sections to the Supplementary Information Form, which you, your school and an acceptable medical consultant or specialist must complete.

- **Section A** is a personal statement in which you describe the impact your disability or specific learning difficulty has had on you.
- **Section B** is a second level academic reference which must be completed by your school and provides information about your educational experience and assists the decision the third-level supports you need.
- **Section C** is an evidence of disability form which must be completed by the **accepted medical consultant or specialist**. This provides verification of your disability and helps the decision about the third-level supports that you need.
- **Supplementary Admissions Routes** – Tick ‘Yes’ to Question 5 to say you want to be considered for DARE.

When you are filling in the CAO form you must complete the part of the form to say that you have a disability or specific learning difficulty. You will then be directed to a separate online Supplementary Information Form.

No applications will be accepted after the closing dates. The closing dates are very strict because DARE is an additional application procedure which needs extra processing time.

You will get a letter telling you whether you are eligible for the scheme. If you are told you are not eligible you can ask for your application to be reviewed.

Important: If you are not eligible for DARE, you can still get into college through the CAO if you meet the entry requirements for the course of your choice.

Additional Advice and Support

- The CAO helpline at (091) 509 800 can assist school leavers with their DARE application.
- Access College website: www.accesscollege.ie.
- You can also contact the access services of the colleges participating in the DARE scheme here: www.accesscollege.ie/dare/info.php#instructions

Third-Level Options for Mature Students

Third-level education is becoming increasingly accessible to adults on both a full-time and part-time basis. Third-level colleges reserve a small number of places specifically for mature students who want to participate in full-time day programmes. If you are over 23* you can apply for one of these places. This means that you will compete for your place on a different basis to those who are just leaving school. The numbers of places reserved for mature students are limited, however, so it is likely that you will still have to compete with your peers.



*Generally, you are considered to be a mature student if you are at least 23 years of age on January 1 of the year you enter your course. If you are interested in a particular college you should check how it defines a mature student.

If you opt for a full-time course in this way, you will be expected to attend classes or lectures everyday and you will be assessed in the same way as the other students on your course. However, if such a model does not suit your lifestyle, there are other options available, including part-time courses, modular programmes and distance learning.

Part-time Options

If you choose to study on a part-time or modular basis, you can spread your studies over a number of years. This gives you the opportunity to organise your time and to study in bursts when it is most convenient for you. It has the obvious drawback that it will take longer to complete than a full-time course, but it also has the advantage that it allows you to work at your own pace, gradually building credits towards your qualification. It should be noted however that it can be more difficult to get government grant aid for part-time courses.

Modular Programmes

A modular programme is made up of separate modules, which are self-contained units within a course. You can study and complete each module separately at different stages during that course. Modular programmes can take place in regular classroom settings or can be part of a distance learning programme. Modular courses are available at degree level in some universities. The UCD modular B.A. degree is a good example of this. If you get a place on this programme you will be expected to attend between 5-6 hours of lectures, seminars and tutorials a week. Each module involves approximately 120 hours of tuition, which is equal to 30 credits. You will need 240 credits to gain your B.A. degree. BlueBrick.ie is a website that allows learners to search for, to compare and to apply online for a range of programmes and modules available on a flexible basis within a range of higher education course providers in Ireland.

Distance Learning

The term "distance learning" covers a wide range of learning programmes that take place away from the physical presence of the classroom and the tutor. If you participate in a distance learning programme, it is likely that you will use a wide range of packaged materials and media throughout your course. These could include tapes, videos and the internet. Some courses organise periodic classes where students come together for a day, a weekend or a week at a time, in order to study intensively.

Information on distance learning can be found on the Oscail website which is the National Distance Education Centre of Ireland. They can offer you the chance to achieve an Irish university qualification without changing your current lifestyle. No previous qualifications are required for their undergraduate programmes if you are over 23 years of age – except for the Bachelor of Nursing Studies programme which is for registered nurses only.

Students under 23 years on 1st January of the forthcoming academic year must meet the normal entry requirements of the university with which they wish to register. You study in your own time, at your own pace and wherever is most convenient, with the help of their specially written self-instructional course texts. You build your study timetable to fit your individual lifestyle. It can also be more difficult to get government grant aid for distance learning courses.

How to Apply

In order to apply for a third-level course as a mature student, you should first contact the college of your choice directly and send them an up-to-date CV. Some colleges require you to apply through the CAO and you must apply before 1st February of the year you start your course. You will be in competition with other mature students for a place on the course so make sure to include as much detail as possible regarding your educational background, work experience and other interests. If your CV gets through the first part of the application procedure, you will be called for interview. At this point, you may be asked to bring along work that shows your aptitude for the course in question or you may be required to sit an aptitude test.

Cost of Part-time, Modular and Distance Education

You will have to pay fees for all part-time, modular and distance education courses. The costs vary from course to course. You can, however, apply for tax relief if you are participating on an approved course that is at least 2 years in duration and is being paid for out of your own income.

When planning to return to full-time education, it is worth remembering that your maintenance costs may be high. Some mature students may be eligible for student grants to help with costs while at college.

Detailed information about college requirements and supports for mature students can be found on the Qualifax website or by clicking here: www.qualifax.ie/attachments/096_Mature.pdf

Third Level Fees & Student Contribution

Most undergraduate students attending publicly funded third-level courses do not have to pay tuition fees. Under the terms of the Free Fees Initiative, the Department of Education and Skills pays the fees to the colleges instead.

A separate annual charge is payable to colleges for the costs of student services and examinations – see 'Student Contribution'



Most colleges charge an annual student contribution, formerly called the student services charge. It is also known as a registration fee and it covers student services and examinations. The amount of the contribution varies from one institution to another. The maximum rate of the student contribution for the year 2011/2012 is €2,000.

If you are getting **Back to Education Allowance** (BTEA) you may qualify for exemption from the student contribution.

If you are planning to study at a private third-level college, however, you will be charged fees. These vary from college to college. You can apply for tax relief if you are paying for the course from your own income or your spouse can claim if they are paying fees on your behalf.

Supports for Students with Disabilities at Third Level

There are a number of support systems for students with disabilities who are undertaking courses at third level in Ireland. These support systems include Disability Officers who work in several universities. Where there is no Disability Officer, one staff member may be given responsibility for providing support and advice to students with disabilities.

Disability Officers work in the Universities and **Access Officers** work in the Institutes of Technology. The role of the Disability/Access Officer is to work collaboratively with students with disabilities in arranging supports that a student with a disability may need while they are in college. Such supports may include assistive technology, examination arrangements, organising additional tuition or support during lectures

As previously mentioned, the organisation **AHEAD** is a voluntary organisation that promotes the participation of students with disabilities in third-level education.

The AHEAD website has a range of information about educational supports for students with disabilities at third level. It includes advice to students about how to deal with lectures and tutorials and how to use the library. There is information about admissions procedures, accommodation, student services and disability supports and services. The AHEAD website also provides names and addresses of associations that could be of assistance to students

AHEAD Contact Details:

AHEAD, East Hall, UCD, Carysfort Avenue, Blackrock, Dublin

Tel: 01 7164396

www.ahead.ie

Back to Education Allowance

If you are in receipt of a Disability Allowance you may attend a second-or third-level education course and get the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA). This weekly allowance is paid at the maximum standard rate of the social welfare payment and is not means-tested. In addition to your weekly BTEA payment, you also get an annual **Cost of Education Allowance** of €500, paid at the start of each academic year.

Two study options are available under the BTEA scheme;

1. Second-level option: Includes a second-level course of education at any secondary, community, comprehensive or vocational school. The course must be full-time and lead to a certificate recognised by the Department of Education and Skills or approved by the Further Education and Training Awards Council.

2. Third-level option: You can attend a third-level course of education at any university, third-level college or institution, provided that the course is a full-time day course of study and is approved by the Department of Education and Skills for student grant purposes and/or is recognised by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC).

In general you must be starting your third-level course at year one. However, you can apply for BTEA if you didn't complete your course and are returning to the second or subsequent year of your course; are exempt from part of your course because of a qualification you received in a previous course; or completed some of your course as a part-time student, but are now getting a jobseeker's payment and will continue your course on a full-time basis.

You can get the BTEA for a postgraduate course of study that leads to a Higher Diploma (H.Dip.) qualification in any discipline or a Graduate Diploma in Education (primary and secondary teaching). Other types of postgraduate qualifications are not recognised for BTEA.

You will not get BTEA if you already have a postgraduate qualification.

Qualifying for BTEA

- You must have been accepted onto a qualifying course.
- You must be at least 21 years of age. You must be 24 for a third-level postgraduate course.
- For second level courses you must have been in receipt of your Disability Allowance (or other qualifying social welfare payment) for at least 3 months immediately before you start the course.
- For third level courses you must have been getting your Disability Allowance (or other qualifying social welfare payment) for 9 months immediately before you start the course.

You must provide a certificate from the school/college confirming your registration, commencement and attendance at the course. You must supply this information before payment can begin.

If you qualify for the BTEA, you can keep your entitlement to any secondary benefits you already have, for example, Fuel Allowance, Rent Supplement and Mortgage Interest Supplement.

How to Apply

When you are accepted on a course, you should notify the Department of Social Protection by filling in the Back to Education Allowance application form, which is also available from your Social Welfare Local Office (alternatively you can download it from this link:

www.welfare.ie/EN/Forms/Documents/bte1.pdf. You must get written confirmation that you are registered as a full-time day student from the college registrar or admission officer. You will not get payment of BTEA or the Cost of Education Allowance until you give this confirmation letter to the Department of Social Protection.

Can I get a Student Grant if I am on BTEA?

From the 2011/12 academic year the Student Grant Scheme is divided into 2 components – maintenance grants and fee grants. You cannot get the BTEA and the maintenance component of a student grant together *unless* you were getting BTEA in the 2009/10 academic year and are continuing your studies or progressing to a new course.

Although you are not entitled to the maintenance component of the student grant, you must still submit a student grant application form to be assessed for a fee grant to pay your Student Contribution (formerly called the student services charge), field trip costs and tuition fees (if payable).

If you are on the Disability Allowance you can choose to stay on your current social welfare payment and apply for a student grant or you can choose to transfer to the BTEA. You will need to assess whether it is more beneficial for you to transfer to the BTEA when you go back to education or to remain on your current payment and apply for a student grant.

Disability Allowance versus BTEA

If you are currently in receipt of a Disability Allowance, and have been accepted on an approved full-time course you have two options as follows.

Option 1: Transfer to BTEA

If you transfer to BTEA, you will:

- Receive a payment equivalent to the maximum standard rate of your current payment
- Receive a Cost of Education Allowance, currently €500, for each academic year of the approved course
- Not be eligible for maintenance under the student grant scheme
- Be able to apply under the student grant scheme for a fee grant to cover the student contribution and course fees/field trip costs (where appropriate)
- Be able to work part-time without affecting your BTEA payment
- In general, retain secondary benefits like Rent Supplement. **Note:** If you are in receipt of Rent Supplement or Mortgage Interest Supplement and your income increases, you will be re-assessed for these benefits.

If you have a medical card, you are entitled to keep it while you are receiving BTEA.

Option 2: Continue to get your Disability Allowance

If you continue to get your Disability Allowance you will:

- Keep your existing payment
- Be entitled to apply for both the maintenance and fee components of the student grant. (**Note:** applicants on social welfare payments do not automatically qualify for a grant)
- Not be eligible for a Cost of Education Allowance
- In general, lose your Rent Supplement or Mortgage Interest Supplement, because you are in full-time education

If you have a medical card, you are entitled to retain it for a period of 3 years from the date of entry to full-time education, after which you will be re-assessed.

Grants for Students in Further and Higher Education

Student Grant Scheme

The Student Grant is the main source of financial assistance and anyone who is thinking of embarking on further study should investigate whether they are eligible, and, if so, submit an application. The Student Grant section of www.studentfinance.ie provides a handy step-by-step guide to eligibility in clear, plain English.

To be eligible for a student grant, you must be entering an approved full-time course in an approved institution and meet the residency and nationality or immigration status requirements as set out in the Student Support Act 2011 and the Student Support Regulations 2011 together with the eligibility conditions as set out in the Student Grant Scheme 2011 which includes academic progression and means.

Students on part-time courses, access or foundation courses (in higher education institutions) and short courses are not eligible to apply for a student grant.

Student grants are divided into 2 classes – maintenance grants and fee grants.

Maintenance grants

A maintenance grant is a contribution towards the student's living costs. Students who started or are starting courses from the academic year 2010/2011 onward do not qualify for a maintenance grant if they are on a Back to Education Allowance or VTOS allowance.

To qualify for a maintenance grant, you must fulfil the conditions of the scheme as regards:

- Nationality and immigration status
- Residence
- Means

You must also be attending an approved course in an approved institution.

Fee grants

A fee grant can cover any of the following 3 elements:

- All or part of the student contribution
- Costs of essential field trips
- All or part of a student's tuition fees (but not if covered by the Free Fees Scheme)

In general, if you qualify for a maintenance grant you will qualify for all elements of the fee grant. However, you will not get the tuition element of a fee grant if you already qualify for free tuition under the Free Fees Schemes.

You may qualify for a fee grant, but not a maintenance grant, if you are what is called a 'tuition student' under the Student Grant Scheme. A tuition student is someone who fulfils all the conditions for a student grant except for residence in the State, but who has been resident in an EEA state or Switzerland for 3 of the last 5 years.

The members of the EEA (the European Economic Area) are the 27 members of the EU, along with Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein.

Students doing Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses do not get fee grants, but if you qualify for a maintenance grant you will be exempt from the PLC participant contribution.

Fee grants are available for approved courses below graduate level in Ireland and for approved postgraduate courses in Ireland and Northern Ireland. However, there are no fee grants for courses in other EU states.

Where to Apply

You should apply to the **Vocational Education Committee** in your home area if you have applied for or will be attending an approved course in one of the following institutions in the 2011/12 academic year:

- an approved Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) centre;
- an Institute of Technology.



You should apply to the **local authority** in your home area if you have applied for or will be attending an approved course in one of the following institutions in the 2011/12 academic year:

- a university;
- a prescribed educational institution in Ireland (for example a college of education);
- an approved undergraduate course in an approved educational institution in the EU;
- an approved postgraduate course in an approved educational institution in Northern Ireland.

Note: If you were previously in receipt of a student grant you should re-apply to the grant awarding authority who previously processed your student grant application.

For a detailed list of income limits for the student grant scheme please refer to the Citizens Information website and search for 'Student Grants':

www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/third_level_education/fees_and_supports_for_third_level_education/maintenance_grant_schemes_for_students_on_third_level_courses.html

From 2012/2013 on, the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee, which has been nominated as the new single grant-awarding authority, will start handling all new applications. Renewals of existing grants will be handled by the authority that issued them initially.

Alternatively, log on to www.studentfinance.ie.

Other Financial Supports for Students

As well as the student grant scheme, additional student support funds and scholarships are available that may also provide assistance to certain students.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities

This Fund provides grants for students who have serious sensory, physical, learning and/or communicative disabilities. The aim of the Fund is to provide those students with assistance and/or equipment to enable them to pursue and complete their course of study.

When registering for a course, the student should contact the disability/access officer in the third level institution or the principal in the student's PLC college to discuss his/her particular disability and the equipment or services required. A claim under the Fund is made on behalf of an eligible student by their college following an assessment of need. Applications cannot be made directly to the Fund by students.

The three types of assistance typically provided under the Fund for Students with Disabilities include assistive technology equipment and software, personal and academic support and transport assistance.

The Student Assistance Fund

This Fund assists students who, having commenced a third-level course, experience financial hardship and, therefore, may be unable to continue their third-level studies. Applications for funding should be made by the individual student to the access/disability officer in their institution. The Fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Students can apply for Student Assistance to help them with either temporary or ongoing financial difficulties. In order to be eligible to apply for student assistance, you must be registered on a full-time undergraduate or postgraduate course of not less than one year's duration in a participating college. The Student Assistance Fund is not available in further education/PLC colleges.

Other Finance Supports: Bursaries & Scholarships

A variety of other bursary and scholarship schemes are in operation that provide an opportunity for students or potential students to access additional financial support if they meet certain criteria. Schemes are available which are specifically targeted at students with limited means, students with disabilities and students from minority ethnic groups. Some example of these scheme are listed below.

Awards for Students with a Disability

There are two scholarship schemes exclusively for students with disabilities:

1. The National University of Ireland- Award Scheme for Students with Disabilities

Awards with a total value of €11,000 are available to new entrant undergraduate students registered for the first year of a primary degree programme of studies, in one of the constituent universities or recognised colleges of the NUI, and who have serious physical disabilities.

Applicants are required to submit evidence of their disability with their completed application forms which are available at the following link: <http://www.nui.ie/awards/grants.asp> from: <http://www.nui.ie/awards/grants.asp> or by contacting The Registrar, National University of Ireland, 49 Merrion Square, Dublin 2. Closing Date is November 1st each year.

2. Dr. Ciaran Barry Research Scholarship: Central Remedial Clinic

The scholarship is reserved for a postgraduate student with a disability and is open to any academic discipline. Applicants must be graduates of a recognised University or third level institution. Candidates sitting their final examinations may also apply.

A proposal must be submitted on a special application form, outlining the research topic, proposed methodology, timescale, expected outcomes and funding requirements. All proposals must have a significant research component. All grants will, in general, cover one academic year. A longer period may be agreed if the study is deemed to warrant an extension.

The scholarship is advertised in the public press in late February or early March with a closing date for completed applications in mid May. Application forms are available from the Central Remedial Clinic, Vernon Avenue, Clontarf, Dublin 3. For more information please see: www.crc.ie/research_drc.shtml

Department of Education and Skills Scholarships

The Department of Education and Skills also offers a number of scholarships which are awarded on the basis of results obtained in the Leaving Certificate. These include the Easter Week 1916 Commemoration Scholarships and scholarships for students who have attended all-Irish second-level schools.

In 2007 the Department introduced the Donogh O'Malley Scholarship scheme for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The scholarships are awarded to top-performing students from second-level schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme.

For more information on these schemes, please go to the following link: www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=10900&ecategory=22558&language=EN

North-South Scholarship Scheme

The aim of this scheme is to encourage outstanding students from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to cross the border to undertake postgraduate study and experience life in the other Irish jurisdiction.

It is open to students currently registered at an Irish or Northern Irish university or Dublin Institute of Technology (or who have graduated within the past two years) proposing to take up a place on a Master's course which would require them to relocate to the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland. There are eight of these scholarships in total. These scholarships are worth €15,000 (approx. Stg£14,000) each. For more information please click the following link: www.universitiesireland.ie/news/2009leaflet.pdf

National Disability Authority (NDA)

The NDA Postgraduate Research Scholarships aim to promote postgraduate research in Ireland on matters relating to disability that are consistent with the mission and strategic priorities of the Authority.

Note: At the time of writing this Guide, the NDA is currently reviewing its Research Scholarship Scheme. Please check the following page for up to date information: www.nda.ie/cntmgmtnew.nsf/0/F903B182313DCDFD802570660054EC0B?OpenDocument

Or contact the NDA directly on (01) 608 0400.

Fulbright Scholarships

The Fulbright Commission in Ireland annually awards scholarships to Irish and EU students, scholars and professionals to study, research and lecture across all disciplines in the US. Fulbright Awards include a monetary grant, visa administration, accident and emergency insurance and cultural and professional programs while in the US.

Fulbright Student Awards provide funding of up to €20K for 6-12 months of study or research in the US.

- Undergraduates who wish to enrol on a masters or PhD in the US
- PhD students to carry out research in the US as part of an Irish PhD
- FLTA Awards for postgraduate students / recently qualified teachers with excellent Irish
- Additional Specific awards for Law, Engineering, Business, Water, Climate Change, Sustainability

For further information, log on to www.fulbright.ie or call the Fulbright Commission on 01 660 7670.

Individual College Hardship Funds

Most colleges have a fund for all students experiencing financial difficulties. All applications are considered very carefully, as funds are strictly limited. These funds are normally allocated as loans, repayable by an agreed date before the student finishes college

Other Scholarships

Individual institutions have in the past offered first year students with disabilities a small scholarship or grant. Also, some companies sponsor students with disabilities. You should enquire with the disability officer or the registrar for details, if any, of these initiatives.

For further information on bursary or scholarship schemes in operation please log on to the www.studentfinance.ie.

Finding Accommodation for College

The quality, price and proximity of accommodation to college are considerably different from college to college. In general there are two main options open to students.

On Campus Accommodation

Accommodation on campus consists mostly of units made up of flats or small houses built and run by the college or contracted out by the college. The quality of on campus accommodation is very good in the majority of cases. It is within walking distance of the college and is clean (at the start anyway) and single rooms with toilet facilities ranging from ensuite to one or two people sharing. A good example of campus accommodation is at Corrib village in NUI Galway. Payment for campus accommodation differs from college to college but the set fee includes charges, such as electricity, broadband, refuse and a TV licence.

On campus accommodation is available in most of the big universities including UCD, NUIG, DCU, Cork and Limerick – get in touch with each college for more information on each. Most of the Institutes of Technology have campus accommodation, much of which is built and run by the private sector and so is not always on the campus, but is relatively close. For an example of campus accommodation in GMIT see www.gmit.ie/Life-at-GMIT/accommodation/index.html.

Colleges with campus accommodation have a number of units reserved for people with disabilities. Each college has its own policy in relation to allocation of rooms to people with disabilities; an example of such is the DCU which is available here: www4.dcu.ie/students/disability/dsg/policies/accommodation_policy.shtml.

It is advisable to contact the Disability Officer regarding accommodation. The disability officer can play a big part in the allocation of accommodation to students with disabilities on campus. You may have to explain what your requirements are as you could be offered an apartment with other people, other PWCF or persons vulnerable to chest infections. You must be registered with the disability services to have a chance of getting accommodation.

Off Campus Accommodation

Some students prefer the relatively quiet and homely comforts of lodging or digs with a family. Digs are, in most cases, with families who offer bed, breakfast and evening meal for either five or seven days per week at asset price. Each college will have a list of families who offer digs; contact the college accommodation office for details.

Renting off-campus accommodation is the most popular form of accommodation and students can find such accommodation in a number of ways. You can rent a room individually or a group may share a whole house/apartment. A security deposit (usually the cost of one month's rent) plus a month's rent in advance is usually paid prior to moving in. However, this can vary to payments being made weekly or bi-monthly. Charges, such as electricity, refuse and cable TV (including a TV licence) are the responsibility of the tenants and must be paid for as they arrive.

A comprehensive listing of houses, flats and general self-catering accommodation is available from accommodation offices in each college, through letting agents, on websites such as Daft (www.daft.ie) or Gumtree (www.gumtree.ie), or you can contact the landlords/landladies directly.

Also, you must read the lease carefully and be completely comfortable with the conditions therein. A written or indeed a verbal contract can be legally binding. See this link for an example of a Private Rental Lease & Inventory: www.gmit.ie/shared/shared_accommwg/Private_Rental_Sample_Lease.pdf

Rent Supplement

Rent Supplement is paid to people living in private rented accommodation who cannot provide for the cost of their accommodation from their own resources. If you are receiving the Back to Education Allowance, you may be entitled to Rent Supplement.

Rent Supplement will only be provided if the accommodation is suitable for your needs and the rent is below the maximum rent level set for your county.

The Department of Social Protection's representative (formerly known as the Community Welfare Officer) will decide if you are eligible for Rent Supplement and calculate the amount you will get. Rent Supplement is paid to you weekly or monthly by cheque, Electronic Fund Transfer or post draft, usually in arrears.

The amount of Rent Supplement will be calculated and will generally ensure that your income, after paying rent, does not fall below a minimum level. This level is the basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate for your circumstances minus €24. You must always pay at least €24 towards your rent.

Note: You cannot get Rent Supplement to help you pay rent to your parent if you are living in the family home.

How to apply

Application forms for rent supplement can be found on the Citizens Information or Department of Social Protection websites or through your local Citizens Information Office. Part of the form will need to be filled in by your landlord or their agent. Another part of the form may need to be filled in by your local authority, to confirm you are on their housing list and have a housing need, that is, if you are not exempt from this rule.

You also need to fill in a separate Supplementary Welfare Allowance application form. This form is used to gather extra details relevant to your application for Rent Supplement. The Department of Social Protection's representative (formerly known as the Community Welfare Officer) or local Citizens Information Service can help you fill in these forms.

Where to apply

To apply for Rent Supplement you should contact the Department of Social Protection's representative at your local health centre.

However in some areas of Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow new Rent Supplement applications are being taken by centralised Rent Units. You can find out what areas have a centralised Rent Unit on the communitywelfareservice.ie website.

For further information on how to apply for Rent Supplement and rate levels for each county, please refer to the Citizens Information website:

www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/supplementary_welfare_schemes/rent_supplement.html

Useful Websites

- www.daft.ie
- www.findahome.ie
- www.myhome2let.ie
- www.unison.ie

PWCF Experiences

On College Life...

I'm studying Genetics in Trinity College, Dublin. It is very near St. Vincent's hospital so if I am sick I can just call the nurses to be seen by a doctor. I've lived on campus for all of my time in college and this really makes you become more independent as you have to learn to survive on your own. Going to college allows you to study a subject you enjoy in more detail but more importantly it gives you the opportunity to participate in a huge variety of extracurricular activities.

Fresher's week was very exciting with all the nights out and activities, but I found the first few months of college very difficult as I was living with people I didn't know in a new city and this is especially hard when you're not feeling the best. There were around 300 people in my Science class in first year too which didn't help since I didn't know anyone. Joining the basketball team got me through this time in college as I was guaranteed a new set of friends to socialise with.

After Christmas I eventually settled into college life and began to really enjoy my new found freedom in the 'big smoke'. I had settled into a routine of getting up to take my medicines in the mornings before college and basketball really helped improve my lung function. Despite my course running from 9am-6pm most days, there were always breaks of an hour or two so living on campus made it easy to run home for some food or a nebuliser if I felt I needed it. The highlight of my first year was the Basketball Varsities (an inter-university competition) which was held in Trinity that year. I got to know the team a lot better during this weekend. So my advice for incoming 1st years is to give college a chance...it takes a few months to settle in and make friends especially if you're living away from home.

My college experience is dominated by my involvement in the basketball club. I became a member of the committee in 2nd year and helped out the committee for the rest of my time in college. In 3rd year I was captain of the club, which was definitely a challenge in regards balancing my health and having time to organise different things for the club. The committee was a great help though and when I had to go on IVs or was sick, they took over the running of the club. I'd really recommend being involved in a club or society committee in college as you make lasting friends, it improves your confidence substantially and you get to know people from other years in college which is a great help if you have to repeat a year due to illness.

In my final year of college I was very sick and missed half of the year's lectures due to hospitalisation and home IVs. College departments are very understanding of this situation. The Head of my department recommended that since it was my final year I split the year's work into two years as I wouldn't be able to catch up and get a good mark for my degree (90% of my degree's mark depends on final year). I also got help with this decision from my tutor and disability officer. I managed to complete 50% of my degree in the remaining months of that year so I'm doing the remaining 50% of my degree this year. I was a lot less pressurised due to this decision and had enough time to keep up basketball and do my medications and physiotherapy properly.

This year because having completed my thesis, I only have to attend lectures from 9-11am everyday, which has enabled me to keep on top of my health, as well as take up photography and get involved in the CFAI. I was on two weeks of IVs already this year, but since I only have two hours of lectures I was able to attend them while on IVs and go back to bed if I was tired afterwards. The fact that I'm involved in basketball really helped me as I don't know many people in my new class but a lot of my friends from basketball are still in college.

College has taught me to be completely independent in every aspect of my life especially as regards my health. My parents don't even know what medicines I take anymore! It has also allowed me to become more comfortable with CF and talking about it to other people. I have been through a lot... there were times when I was lonely, sad and wanted to give up but that comes full circle and I really love my life in Dublin now. Living on campus is an amazing experience especially if after a year or two you get to live with friends you've made in college. I have learnt so much in college...skills I can apply to life and to work.

I wholeheartedly recommend going to college as these years have truly been the best years of my life so far!

On Various Types of Education Courses...

When the time came to apply to the CAO it was only then I realised the number of options open to me for third-level education in Ireland. I had always wanted to have an active lifestyle and a job that would be interesting, active and outdoors. I looked at a range of college courses and my mind was made up, I would try outdoor education as a career.

Going to college meant moving out of home and to college in Dublin or Mayo. In Dublin there was an established number of post-leaving cert courses (PLCs) and in Mayo a new course in GMIT and I received offers for them all. I decided to try the PLC first to see if I liked it and if I was fit and able for all the activities. I moved to Dublin, rented a house with some of the others in the class, one of which I had gone to school with. The courses ran 9- 5, five days a week with four days of activities and one day of classes. The first week or two was very tiring being so active all the time and still having to do my daily medications plus cooking, cleaning and most importantly socialising. After a few weeks I was well able for all the activities, socialising and exams and did so well that the next step was from the big smoke and the PLC to the West and GMIT.

The PLC had given me an excellent foundation to move to the more academic setting of GMIT, which was the reverse of the PLC in terms of class room time, with only one day a week outside doing activities and four days a week in lectures. The course was a two year cert that leads onto a diploma and then a degree over four years. Although there were less timetabled activities, this was compensated by the activities offered by all the clubs in the college ranging from soccer, GAA, sailing, kayaking, climbing and snowboarding. We would go surfing in the evenings and travel all over Ireland at the weekends with the different clubs. I travelled all over Europe with the clubs from Alpine climbing to sailing in Croatia. It was the clubs which gave me the experience I need to travel myself when I left college. The workload was managed around my lifestyle with the students and staff of the college on hand if needed. I took two years off in the middle to go travelling and gain some work experience. The gap years from college helped me by, gaining work experience and taking that back to college. This made the final year less stressful as I felt I was in a better position to do well.

There is a lot to think about when taking up a college course from deciding what course to do, to where to live, and who to live with. How to finance it and how much work is involved over such a long period must be considered. I was on the back to education scheme which meant that I didn't have to take a part-time job to fund my way through college and that gave me little to worry about from a financial point of view. I lived off campus about a 15min walk to college with class mates. My class mates knew about my illness, but treated me no differently than any other student at college. I was never ill and only had IVs three or four times at college. After the 4 years in college and the work experience I had finished, I started working part time and decided to look into doing a masters.

I found that it was not as easy once you leave the comfort of being an undergraduate to do postgraduate study. The range of courses is smaller and it was hard to find the course I wanted to do. There were also less funding options open to me at the time. Funding was a major issue as the back to education scheme doesn't cover postgraduates and with the workload I would not be in a position to study full time and work part-time. As always with education I found a solution and the course I wanted. I had looked at the courses and the majority in the area I was looking at were in UK colleges. I did research on the internet and I found the course I wanted, which was a part-time distance masters in coastal zone management with the University of Ulster.

The fees had to be paid, but they could be managed and I could still live at home and work from time to time. It was a big change from what I had experienced in the past of college, I could do the work at my own pace when and where I had the time, there was no exams just assessment of different types to be in at fixed times of the year. The downside was that I was working from home and although there was interaction with my classmates over the internet from working on projects there was very little social interaction and no clubs or societies to join! The focus was on finishing the projects and freeing up time to do other things with friends outside off college. Overall the masters went well and I got used to working from home and the challenges that go with that. I don't think that I would have stuck with the distance education if I was just out of the leaving cert, but once you are a few years older it is a very good option for a PWCF to participate in third level education.

Access to third level education can always be found for anyone who really wants it. There is a course out there for most things; you just have to look for them and apply to gain entry. The time I spent at college and the way I progressed up from a PLC to a masters is only one such example. The journey from start to finish will be hard at times but will make for some brilliant days, nights, weeks, even years overall. You will make new friends from all over the world and share new experiences with them along the way. It is also the easiest, fastest, safest and most enjoyable way for a PWCF to become more independent for themselves.

Useful Resources

Student Finance Website

www.studentfinance.ie

Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)

www.accesscollege.ie/dare

The Central Applications Office (CAO)

Tower House, Eglinton Street, Galway

Tel: (0)91 509 800

Fax: (0)91 562 344

www.cao.ie

Qualifax

www.qualifax.ie

The Irish national database of all further and higher education courses

Online Student Grant Application System

www.grantsonline.ie

The online application facility for student grant applications is currently available for 35 awarding authorities.

Citizens Information Website

www.citizensinformation.ie/en

Oscail - DCU Distance Education

www.dcu.ie/oscaill

Threshold National Housing Charity

www.threshold.ie/

Higher Education Institutions

Universities

Dublin City University
www.dcu.ie

National University of Ireland, Galway
www.nuig.ie

National University of Ireland, Maynooth
www.nuim.ie

Trinity College Dublin
www.tcd.ie

University College Cork
www.ucc.ie

University College Dublin
www.ucd.ie

University of Limerick
www.ul.ie

Institutes of Technology

Athlone Institute of Technology
www.ait.ie

Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown
www.itb.ie

Dublin Institute of Technology
www.dit.ie

Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and
Technology
www.iadt.ie

Institute of Technology, Carlow
www.itcarlow.ie

Cork Institute of Technology
www.cit.ie

Dundalk Institute of Technology
www.dkit.ie

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
www.gmit.ie

Letterkenny Institute of Technology
www.lyit.ie

Limerick Institute of Technology
www.lit.ie

Institute of Technology, Sligo
www.itsligo.ie

Institute of Technology, Tallaght
www.ittallaght.ie

Institute of Technology, Tralee
www.itt.ie

Waterford Institute of Technology
www.wit.ie

Teacher Education Colleges

Coláiste Mhuire, Marino, Dublin
www.mie.ie

Church of Ireland College of Education,
Rathmines, Dublin
www.cice.ie

Froebel College of Education, Blackrock, Co.
Dublin
www.froebel.ie

St. Angela's College, Lough Gill, Sligo
www.stangelas.com

Mater Dei Institute of Education, Clonliffe
Road, Dublin
www.materdei.ie

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
www.mic.ul.ie

St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin
www.spd.dcu.ie

Other Colleges

Tourism College, Killybegs
www.tck.ie

National College of Ireland, Dublin
www.ncirl.ie

National College of Art and Design, Dublin
www.ncad.ie

Pontifical University of Maynooth, Co. Kildare
www.maynoothcollege.ie
Tipperary Institute

www.tippinst.ie

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI)
www.rcsi.ie

Open University- Ireland
www.open-university.com/ireland