

Portarlington Community Development Association
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**P.C.D.A. Clg. (Portarlington Community Development Association)
Submission to the Planning Department in
Laois County Council
County Development Plan 2021 - 2027**

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the PCDA is the comprehensive and inclusive strategic development of Portarlington for future enterprise, commercial, tourism, leisure, environmental and social considerations.

This submission has been put together in conjunction with P.C.D.A. / Portarlington Enterprise Centre / MakePort Makerspace / Institute of Technology Carlow with support from Enterprise Irl / Derryounce Lakes & Trails Committee

TOURISM PLAN

The town of Portarlington is steeped in history and the many buildings of the Huguenot and Georgian Era which are still in good condition are visible examples. Surrounding areas are rich in natural history and environmental content. To capitalise on these assets and to entice visitors to the town it is necessary to undertake a comprehensive tourism feasibility study to be used for long term structuring and implementation of a tourism strategy.

This would include:

- ↔ Application for designation of Heritage Town Status for Portarlington.
- ↔ The conservation and further development of historic buildings.
- ↔ Collation of a local tourism package to be targeted at Tour Operators and Tourism Workshops assisted by relevant agencies and appropriate experts
- ↔ Expansion of services i.e. Tourist office, approved accommodation and increased recreational and social facilities geared towards the tourism industry
- ↔ Amenity Tourism Project: Blueway through Portarlington on River Barrow
- ↔ Amenity Tourism Project: Greenway through Derryounce Lakes & Trails Amenity
- ↔ The sensitive rejuvenation of derelict and unsightly buildings and the provision of aesthetically designed street furniture and railings.
- ↔ The further development of the 'French Connection' through the continued development of cultural content of the French Festival, twinning and cultural

exchanges with French towns and the development of tourism attractions with a French slant.

- ↔ The development and promotion of eco-tourism and activity holidays for people interested in the natural environment, walking, cycling, angling, bird watching, orienteering, (Derryounce Lakes & Trails) and golfing.
- ↔ The development of a Tourism ethos which has the support of all sectors of the local community
- ↔ Port Hub > the development of an effective Centre of Technology in Portarlington

VISUAL APPEARANCE OF THE TOWN

The visual appearance of the town is an important feature for all strands of future development whether it be for the sake of tourism, economic development, or enhancing a sense of pride amongst the local population. The PCDA have members who are active on the Laois Tidy Towns Federation and who are working with other Community Groups and organisations to provide services and facilities in their local areas. Visual appearance incorporates steps which are taken to maintain buildings, control litter, recycle etc., Raising public awareness of litter and maintenance problems are also necessary.

Immediate action to improve the visual appearance of Portarlington can be taken in strategic areas such as:

MAIN STREET

The provision of co-ordinated street furniture such as litter bins, lamp posts, street signs and tourist information signs (bi-lingual or tri-lingual).

The co-ordinated use of natural materials and colour schemes for shop fronts and advertising.

To continue ongoing efforts to have all overhead wiring placed underground and pathways improved by repair and/or cobbling. All materials should be sensitive to the historic/traditional facades of buildings and only traditional materials should be used.

The introduction of a monthly market day, showing all the local produce along the Main Street with bollards having being erected on the day so as the street becomes pedestrianised for the duration of the day. The use of sunken bollards would also assist the committees of the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the French Festival, the Lions Club Hunt and countless other activities that require volunteers to stand at locations in order to control traffic on the day.

Develop a public realm strategy for the Market House situated in the Square, main street in the town.

MARKET SQUARE

The central focus point of the town has been overlooked for many years. The re-development of the Market Square would include:

brighter lighting of the Square through the provision of traditional style lamp-posts, with co-ordinated litter bins, street signs and seating and the placing of flower and shrub beds. Placing of a tourist map and information point. Buildings facing onto Market Square should be subsidised by grants to upgrade their fronts to a traditional appearance. The acquisition of the Market Square building is essential as the "centre of attraction" with all the information/history on/of Portarlinton being accessed in this building. The acquisition of the old Cinema is also a priority for this area.

(Proposed Landscape Improvements for Portarlinton Co. Laois Dr. Christy Boylan 2017)

ENTRANCES TO THE TOWN

All entrances to the town should have individual points of attraction. An important landmark in Portarlinton is Corrig Wood, a glacial hill, topped by a stone structure known as The Spire. The Spire can be used as a beacon for the town. Large public sculptures to be placed at entrance roads depicting the town's history e.g. Huguenot connection, turf cutting, farming etc etc.

PART 2

(1) Partnership Projects: Derryounce Walks & Trails (Tourism)

P.C.D.A. aim to create a *unique* outdoor heritage site museum commemorating the history of Bord na Mona, the uniqueness of the bog and the use of turf to generate power.

(We want to promote the history of our local peat lands in a way that the "Arigna Mining Experience" in Roscommon has successfully achieved.)

This sustainable tourism project, which is within a mile of the town in itself when fully developed will have the capacity to create jobs locally. Being a voluntary group with limited resources, this project will be realised over a number of phases.

Phase 1 is the upgrading of three looped walks around the bog and the existing lake.

Phase 2 is the development of a historical trail through the bog showcasing the history of turf and turf harvesting. There is no other Heritage trail or museum in Ireland documenting the history of the bog and turf which is a big part of Irish Life. *We*



are currently putting together a tender for a Feasibility Study for Phase 2 to secure the Phase 2 section of the Derryounce site (400-acre section) that will include a Bog Bike Trail development, a lake development to promote environmental biodiversity. This will also enhance the current potential for outdoor activities such as orienteering and geo-caching.

Phase 3 will involve the development of a coarse fishing lake on the site which will have the capacity to attract significant numbers of international anglers to Portarlington. The completion of a 20km cycle path throughout the Park.



This project is now an inter territorial project. P.C.D.A. are working in partnership with:

Laois Partnership Co., Offaly Partnership Co., Laois Co Co, Offaly Co Co, North Offaly Development Co., Bord na Mona, Coillte, Bord Failte and Midlands Ireland

(2) Partnership Projects - Enterprise Opportunities

Portarlington Enterprise Centre is facilitating the development of local entrepreneurship through the support of an Enterprise Ireland funded and Institute of Technology Carlow managed program which anchors internationally focused initiatives within Portarlington and its hinterland.

The program is based on *Team Entrepreneurship* which will capture individual and collective ambition, the overall program is designed to stimulate and build a more sustainable local economy. The program will build on the existing Portarlington Enterprise Centre initiatives, such as the MakePort Makerspace.

Submitted by: Peadar Casey, Enterprise Development Manager / Carlow IT

(3) Education Vision for Laois

Overview

The access for residents of Laois to quality 3rd level education has been stymied by the position of the main towns at the edge of the Dublin outer commuter zone. This has meant that while students are Dublin focused for further education the logistics of getting to the city daily creates a huge challenge with our students having to undertake long and disruptive commutes or face paying for city accommodation and the incredible expenses and strain this puts on families and students.

Looking at the data on Laois secondary schools and the destinations of their 3rd Level students it becomes apparent that the appeal of the technical colleges of Carlow & Athlone are very high with Carlow the top destination of Laois students. Both provide an array of courses up to degree level and the cost of accommodation is cheaper than Dublin city.

How Does This Impact Us

The outcome of this has an ongoing negative impact on our county and is highlighted in two key points:

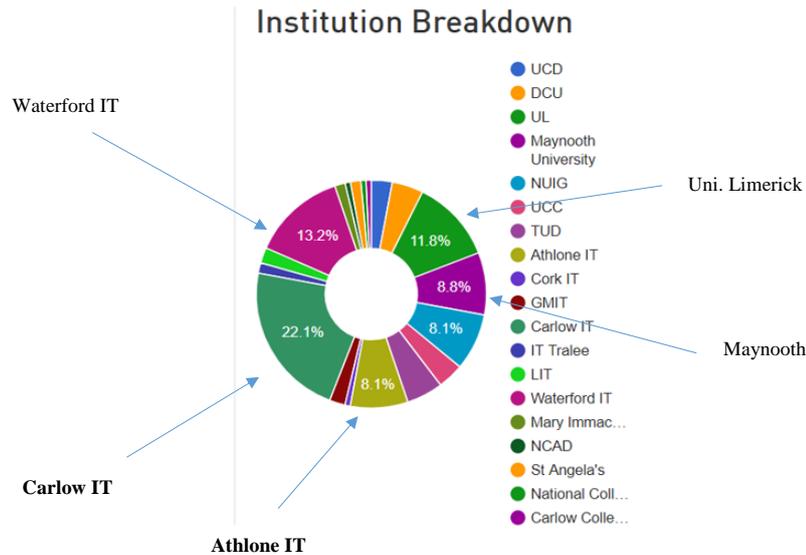
- 1) The midland Technical Colleges while popular still force our students and their families to incur huge costs based on the distance to get to Carlow/Athlone or the payment of accommodation.
- 2) Laois is being deprived of the benefits of having a talent pool of 3rd level qualified students clustered in our area and the type of quality jobs these skilled graduates generate.

The benefits to the midlands towns of Carlow and Athlone of having thriving education centres can be seen in the type of companies that are basing themselves around the colleges taking advantage of the skills and the attractiveness for workers to be based closer to their home towns and not having to commute to Dublin.

Commented [MK1]:

Graphic from Irish Times Feeder Schools Map 2019

Colaiste Iosagain, Portarlinton, Co. Laois:



Why is Laois an Ideal Base for 3rd level?

A vibrant digital community has matured in the county over the last decade – with hundreds of youths training in STEAM disciplines. This is a unique asset for the area that marks it out as a place rich in potential and coupled with the huge number of IT professionals living here but leaving the county for work means there are great fundamentals in the county to build it out as an educational hub focused on digital skills.

Mature Coderdojo Community

Over the last decade there has been a strong coding club presence through the Coderdojo movement based in Portarlington and Portlaoise. These clubs have now matured into excellent digital learning facilities bringing junior developers through from the introductory classes of graphical coding with the scratch framework and engineering with Lego Mindstorm robotics onto more advanced 3D game development and IOT development with python and Raspberry Pi devices. The youths who have attended these courses up to the advanced level would be excellent candidates for digital based 3rd level courses and would take potentially years of prior experience with them having begun coding at such a young age.



STEAM Focused Makerspace

The makerspace project began in the Portarlinton enterprise centre Innovation Hub in 2019 and leveraged off the skills and community already in place through the Coderdojo. This provided a space for teenagers and adults to do creative and digital project work combining the electronics and coding skills with creative maker projects.

3D Software Game Development (Unity)



July 1st – 5th
Ages 12+

This is a brilliant camp for anyone with an interest in making their own computer games. The lessons are given using the Unity Gaming Platform which creates 3D + 2D games for mobile, web and Xbox consoles. It covers programming, lighting, 3D models and publishing games.

Intro to Photography



July 22nd – 26th
Ages 8-12

This camp will give attendees a great introduction to some of the fundamentals of photography and let them practise some of these techniques in a fun and friendly environment.

Dungeons & Dragons – DM & Players



July 8th – 12th
Ages 8+

The Dungeons and Dragons camp is split into new players and experienced. It lets the players immerse themselves in this incredibly creative role -playing game. Some of the benefits include: Problem Solving, Team Work, Creativity, Social Skills, Improvisation, Self-led Learning AND 😊

Video Editing and Publishing



July 29th – 2nd Aug
Ages 10+

If you have an interest in creating videos adding audio and editing the content then this summer camp will introduce you these techniques using the Davinci Resolve software so you can create polished YouTube content or start making short animations and videos yourself.

Intro to Electronics (using BBC Micro:Bit)



July 15th – 19th
Ages 10+

This camp will give attendees a great introduction to electronics using the Micro:Bit controller board. It is great fun to learn and has 25 LEDs, 2 Programmable Buttons, Accelerometer, Compass and Bluetooth. Laptops, Micro:Bits supplied.

Make & Do Summer Camp

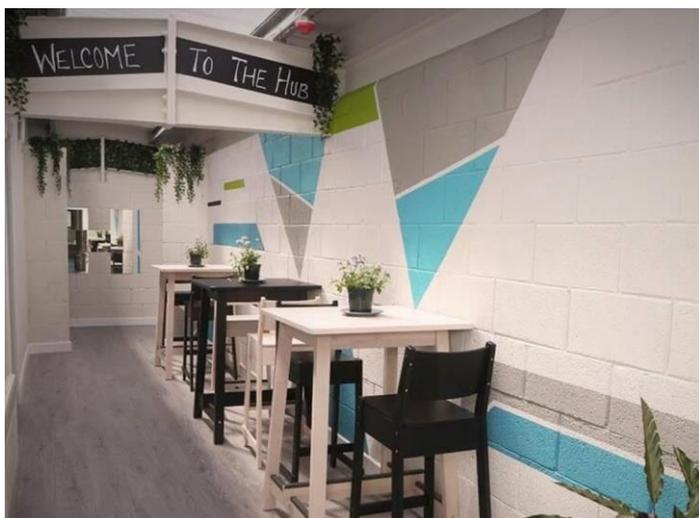


Aug 5th – 9th
Ages 8+

Work on some fabulous make-&-do projects in the training room of the makerspace where you will get a chance to design and build using different fabrics and materials and even use our amazing 3D pens!

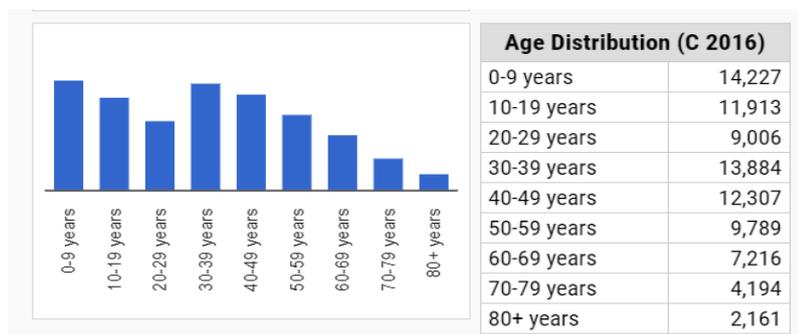
Innovation Hubs and Co-working Facilities in Laois

There is now a strong network of co-working facilities in Laois (www.laoisonline.ie) providing the commuting population with an option to work closer to home in a highly connected shared office space for extremely reasonable rates. These hubs can be a great catalyst to allow people with entrepreneurial ideas and start-ups to step up from college and build businesses driving local jobs and wealth generation.



Strong Demographics

The demographics of the population coupled with the growth of our main towns mean that there is huge latent demand for good quality 3rd level courses within the county and with nothing to service their needs every single student is commuting huge distances or paying for accommodation.



Fastest Growing Town in Ireland

Between 2006 and 2016 Portlaoise was one of the fastest growing towns in Ireland with its population growing by 45%. There are over 22,000 people in the town with a labour force of over 10,000 and 48,000 within a limit drive. The town has a young population with 31% of the total population aged 19 years or younger – ahead of the national average of 28%.

<http://www.connect2laois.ie/locations/portlaoise/>

laoistoday.ie/2018/02/16/portlaoise-miss-athlone-becomes-midlands-capital/

Portlaoise to miss out as Athlone becomes 'midlands capital'

By **David Power** - 16th February 2018

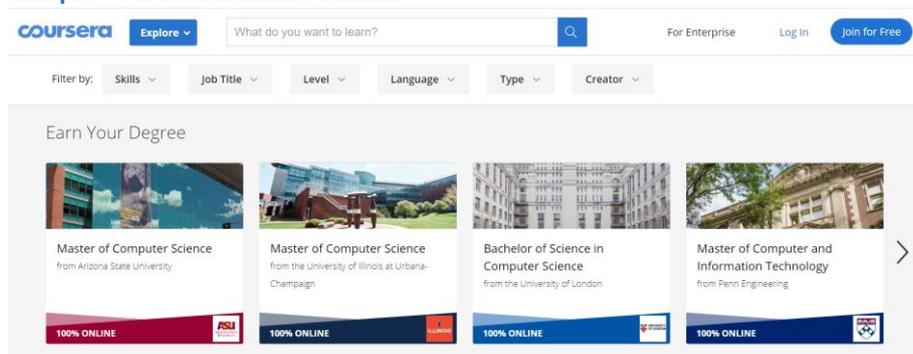
How to Make This Happen

- Create a Task Group to Oversee the Digital Course Formation and give them the goal of producing courses focused on areas that can be covered in the CoderDojo and Makerspaces **S.T.E.A.M.** classes such as:
 - o Software Development for IOT – Internet of Things
 - o Devops – Managing Cloud Based Applications
 - o Data Science and IOT
 - o Digital Animation
 - o Sound Engineering
- Enhancing the Existing Facilities in the LOETB and create a goal of delivering digital courses over the next decade – iterating from introductory FETAC level 6 with a view of delivering level 8 courses by 2030.
- Explore and create partnerships with existing Colleges that Provide Digital Degrees with a view to allowing students study in the LOETB centres for the degrees accredited by external colleges e.g. Carlow / Athlone. This will reduce the need for accommodation, reduce travel and a key benefit is that it will cluster local skilled students and future tech workers in our towns.
- Identify industry recognised qualifications that can be delivered as discreet courses in less than six months as opposed to multi-year programs and create dedicated centres to facilitate students achieving these digital accreditations such as:
 - o CCNA Cisco Certified Network Associate
 - o Microsoft Certified Developer, Administrator and Solutions exams
 - o AWS Amazon Web Services Certification
 - o IBM Software Certification for Developers and Administrators
- Leverage the growing availability of Online Courses and provide dedicated Study Labs to enable students complete these programs in dedicated facilitated centres with Subject Matter Experts available to support. This will be the learning of the future with a huge shift in global universities to providing certified courses online.
- In Laois there are companies such as Cellnex <https://cellnextelecom.ie/> with the capabilities to partner with local groups to deliver real smart town

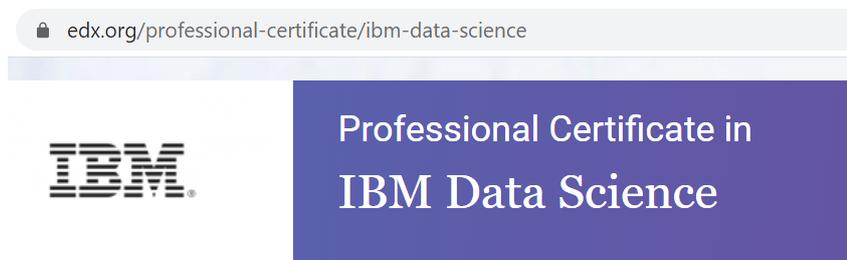
technologies and importantly this work can be used for training junior and 3rd level students as specialists in this growth area technologies.

- The Innovation Hub in Portarlinton Enterprise Centre houses both a STEAM makerspace and a Co-Working area with hot desks and meeting room. This hub provides a great blueprint for building on with the potential to extend the STEAM makerspace so that commercial projects can flourish in the environment and with a larger facility could also be a permanent home for the local digital group the Coderdojo – providing a clear path from junior – teen – student - commercial digital learning and growth.

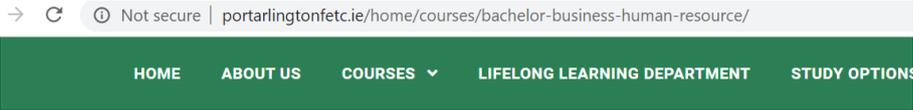
Sample Courses Available Online:



Industry Certified Qualifications:



Portarlington FETEC Degree Course - Accredited by NUI



Bachelor of Business Studies Honours in Human Resource Management - Part Time - NFQ Level 8

The BBS (Hons) (HRM) is a four-year, part-time programme that provides a comprehensive examination and analysis of the subjects critical to contemporary business life, focusing on Human Resource Management (HRM). It includes two interim awards – at Certificate and Diploma level.

Contact details:

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P.C.D.A. are working in partnership with:

Laos Co. Co, Laos Partnership Co, Laos Enterprise Office, Portarlington Enterprise Centre, Portarlington Codor Dojo Group / MakerSpace and Carlow IT.