

New Tertiary Degree Opens Doors for Future Community Leaders Across Munster

July 2026: A new route into higher education for people who want to make an impact in their communities has been launched by Munster Technological University (MTU), Cork Education and Training Board (Cork ETB) and Kerry Education and Training Board (Kerry ETB).

The new BA in Applied Social and Community Development is being delivered through Ireland's Tertiary Degree Initiative, offering students a more accessible pathway to a Level 7 qualification while preparing graduates for rewarding careers creating positive social change.

Students begin their studies in a Further Education and Training (FET) College, in either Cork ETB or Kerry ETB, before progressing to MTU to complete their degree. The programme offers an alternative route into university, with no traditional CAO points requirement, while also providing recognised exit awards at each stage of the three-year programme.

Designed for people who are passionate about making a positive difference in society, the programme prepares graduates for careers in community development, family support, youth services, advocacy, social inclusion, community education, local development and the voluntary and community sector.

Caitriona Heffernan, Head of Department of Applied Social Studies, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, MTU, said: "We know that people come to higher education through many different pathways and at different stages of life. This programme has been designed to meet learners where they are, whether they are leaving school, returning to education after time away, or already working or volunteering in a community setting and looking to build on that experience.

"We want to ensure that anyone with the passion and commitment to create positive social change has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. By combining academic learning with practical community experience, graduates will leave with both the knowledge and confidence to make a lasting difference in the lives of individuals, families and communities."

Keith Murphy, Director of Further Education and Training, Cork ETB, said: "Further Education and Training is about creating opportunities and helping people take the next step in their learning journey, whatever their background or stage of life. This programme gives learners the chance to begin their studies in a supportive environment where they can build their confidence, develop new skills and prepare for progression to a Level 7 qualification.

"By working in partnership with MTU and Kerry ETB, we are providing a seamless route into higher education that is both accessible and learner-centred. It is an exciting opportunity for people who want to build a meaningful career while making a positive contribution to their communities."

Owen O'Donnell, Director of Further Education and Training, Kerry ETB, said: "The Tertiary Degree Programme is about opening doors and ensuring that more people can access higher education in a way that works for them. This new programme provides learners with a clear and supported pathway to a Level 7 degree while equipping them with the practical experience needed to build meaningful careers in community development and social services.

"The partnership with MTU, Kerry ETB, and Cork ETB opens up new opportunities for learners throughout the South West that will benefit the communities they will go on to serve throughout the region."

The programme combines classroom learning with extensive community-based experience, enabling students to apply their learning in real-world settings from an early stage. This emphasis on practical engagement ensures graduates leave with both a Level 7 qualification and valuable experience working alongside community organisations and practitioners.

The programme is ideally suited to people who are passionate about creating stronger, more connected communities and addressing social challenges including inequality, exclusion, poverty and health disparities. It also offers an attractive option for school leavers, adult learners and those seeking an alternative route into higher education.

Applications for the September intake are now open through Cork ETB and Kerry ETB.

Applications for Cork ETB can be made here: <https://morrisonislandcampus.ie/our-courses/degree-courses/ba-in-applied-social-and-community-development/>

Applications for Kerry College can be made here: <https://kerrycollege.ie/full-time-courses/ba-in-applied-social-and-community-development>

For more information about the BA in Applied Social and Community Development, visit [HERE](#).

ENDS

Notes to Editors

About MTU

Munster Technological University (MTU) is a multi-campus technological university serving the southwest of Ireland, with six campuses across Cork and Kerry and a student population of approximately 18,000. MTU provides a wide range of programmes

from apprenticeships and undergraduate degrees to Masters and PhDs. With a strong focus on applied learning, research with impact, enterprise engagement and lifelong learning, MTU plays a central role in supporting regional development while maintaining a growing national and international profile.

About Cork Education and Training Board

Cork Education and Training Board (hereinafter referred to as Cork ETB) was established under the Education and Training Boards Act, 2013 and is responsible and accountable for the proper direction and control of its functions in the Cork City and Cork County Councils' local authority areas. Cork ETB plans, provides, supports and co-ordinates education, training and youth services in Cork which are recognised internationally as a model of excellence.

Cork ETB is a driving force of education and training in Cork, providing high quality services which are innovative, responsive and inclusive to over 38,000 learners. Through Cork ETB there is a pathway for every learner.

About Kerry Education and Training Board

Kerry Education and Training Board (Kerry ETB) is a leading provider of education, training and youth services in County Kerry. Serving thousands of learners annually through its schools, further education and training programmes, apprenticeships, youth initiatives and community-based services, Kerry ETB is committed to building a lifelong learning society where every individual has the opportunity to fulfil their potential and contribute positively to their community and the local economy.

Kerry College is the Further Education and Training college of Kerry ETB, offering a broad range of full-time, part-time, pathway and apprenticeship programmes, ranging from QQI Level 3 to QQI Level 6, across County Kerry. Now partnered with the National Tertiary Office to provide clear routes to QQI Level 7 and QQI Level 8 degrees, Kerry College remains committed to excellence in education and training, supporting learners in developing the skills and qualifications needed for employment, further study and success.

About the National Tertiary Office:

Tertiary Bachelor's Degree routes are co-designed and co-delivered by Higher Education Institutions and the Education and Training Boards to provide seamless pathways from Further Education to Higher Education. The National Tertiary Office is responsible for coordinating and supporting the initiative. For more information see www.nto.ie

About Tertiary Bachelor's Degree routes

- **No Points Barrier** – With **78** routes to choose from around the country, entry is based on your **potential and interests, not points** - making higher education truly accessible to all
- **Lower Costs, Smarter Spending** – The **first 1-2 years** at an ETB come with zero tuition fees
- **Same Degree, Exciting New Path** – Earn your Bachelor's Degree differently. Start at an ETB, with seamless transition to a HEI. **No compromises, just a different route.**
- **Stay Local and Skip the Rent Trap** – **Start your study close to home** at one of 16 ETB locations across Ireland. No need to uproot your life or pay sky-high rent to start a top-tier education
- **Smaller Class Sizes & Student Focused Learning** – Making the move to college life easier from day 1
- **Designed for the Future** – Designed with industries to tackle skills shortages, these degrees don't just educate they get you **career-ready in a sector that needs you!**

For further information on regional tertiary developments, please contact:

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