

Making the MOST of an Open Day

Research is the key to career choice! Whether you are thinking about taking on an apprenticeship as an Electrician or planning on heading to Trinity to study Human Genetics, the rules are the same: Find as much information as possible, from as many sources as you can locate!

The non-completion rates in the Higher Education Institutes (Colleges) are between 25% and 35%, this includes those who dropout, fail exams or switch courses. The dropout rates from the FÁS (Solas) Apprenticeship system are even higher! These figures do not include the number of people who opt for training or courses with which they are evidently unhappy yet continue with their studies because changing their choices causes too much inconvenience personally or indeed financially. Much of this can be avoided with proper, thorough research!

Much of the information you need you can get from Subject Teachers, from the Guidance Counsellor, from people already working in your area of interest, from pamphlets, booklets, DVDs, the Internet, TV Programmes and most importantly your own copy of the Free Prospectus from your Higher Education Institutes of choice.

But there is much vital information, which you can only access through other means. These include Career Evenings, Seminars, Summer Programmes and of course the all important Open Days.

All the 49 third level institutes represented on the C.A.O. have Open Days, as well as the 180+ PLC Colleges around around the country. Most colleges have more than one, sometimes a separate day for Arts, or an evening set aside for a particular Department. Always check the dates and times for these events early in the year, as some such as Queen's University Belfast are usually early September, while the Royal College of Surgeons is early in the New Year, but does require booking a ticket in advance. The Higher Options conference usually organised for around mid-September, is a good way to get a lot of information quickly, early in the year. But, but given the impact of college and course choice on the rest of your life, even this event is no substitute for visiting individual colleges.

Ill prepared students will get nothing more out of the day other than a few wasted hours away from school, spent aimlessly touring buildings with a carrier bag full of brightly coloured brochures and maybe a free pen. Getting the best from an Open Day requires that you arrive with a plan, including some well thought out questions!

If you are still unsure of what course you are interested in, as most are, then Open Days are a great opportunity to see what is available and what might suit you. Of course you should use some interest tests to give you a good place to start. Talk to your Guidance Counsellor.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS MIGHT BE:

How does this course differ from similar courses?(How does Trinity Science differ from Maynooth Science?)

How is it taught and assessed? (Is it project work throughout the year or a nasty exam at the end? What's the failure rate like? Do I get to spend much time in the lab?)

What number of places are available? (Trinity Psychology has 31, Arts in UCD has over 1220!) (This can also affect the points)

What are the points? (Is there a pattern?) (Do I get extra for a Suitability Test, an Interview, a Portfolio Review or an Audition?)

What are the specific requirements? (Pharmacy in Trinity you need a HC3 in Chemistry and another Science subject, but they'll accept Maths. A lot of PLC courses look favourably on Foundation Level Maths!)

Are there any tests or interviews? If so when? (Are there any guidelines available to help me with this?)

How many graduates get jobs? (Most Admissions Offices keep track of this information)

What are my post-graduate opportunities? (Do I have to transfer College or leave the country?) (If you take the CAD Course in Coláiste Dhúlaigh in Year 4 you can enter the BSc Hons at the University of Wolverhampton)

How long do I have to travel everyday to get here? (Might living away from home, be a better choice?)

There are more questions to ask on the 'Questions To Ask' page on this website. Bear in mind that everyone's situation is unique and there may be questions that you need to ask that others don't.

There is no substitute for exploring the Campus and seeing first hand the facilities available in various Departments. This is vital for those interested in Science & Technology Subjects as well as those interested in Design & Media Courses. Similarly, it is a good idea to check out the library, computer rooms and language laboratories. Sit in a lecture theatre and see if you like it!

It is also a good idea to remember that College life is not all about studying, so you would do well to check out the sports and social amenities available to students. A trip to the Student Union Office will give you information on shops, bars, music venues, clubs and societies.

Be sure to talk to some of the students. There is no one better to give you an insight into the standard of teaching, the food in the canteens, the night life, the cost and availability of accommodation and the prevailing atmosphere of the place. Finally when you get home, reflect seriously on what you have heard and seen, discuss it with your parents and friends and read carefully all the relevant literature you have collected. Remember course and college choice is one of the most important decisions you will ever make, so take it seriously!

To give you some help when attending an Open Day, use the College Research Worksheet to keep track of all the information you are gathering.

College Research Work Sheet

Tips and Advice before you set off

Look at a map of the campus before you leave home and have a plan for what lectures/ presentations you need to attend and what time they start.

Don't wait to find out the basics about the college, do your research beforehand, so you are ready to ask more in-depth questions.

Be ready for a day's work. If you treat this as a day off, you won't benefit from the day, and you're setting yourself up to make poor decisions.

Politeness goes a long way.

Listen in on some conversations. Often other students will ask questions and get information that is useful to you.

College Name:	
Location:	Date:
Start Time:	Finishing Time:
Particular Lecture I need to attend:	

These are websites have I researched before attending the Open Day

www.qualifax.ie	www.careersportal.ie
www.collegehub.ie	

What specific information do I need to find out on the day?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

10.

Names and contact details of people I found on the day

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My general impressions about the day

My initial impressions

What I liked and why.	What I disliked and why.

What I need to do next?

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