

Help in making a choice

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You might already know which subject to choose, but there are thousands of students who ask the same question: what should I study? Below are some points to consider before making that all-important decision.

Find a course which matches your interests, career plans and abilities

There is no one course that suits everyone, so we know how important it is to find the right one for you. The best way to decide what you would like to study is to ask yourself the following questions.

1. Which subjects interest me?
2. What would I like to spend the next four years studying?
3. What are my strengths?
4. What job would I like to do after university or college?

Above all you should aim to study what interests you.

Steps in Choosing a Course

One of the most difficult decisions facing leaving certificate students is what course and college to choose.

Going to college is much more than just preparing yourself for a career. The three or four years students spend at third level are often life changing - the final year student and graduate is very often a different person to the one who entered college in first year.

The following steps are guidelines to follow before making the final decision.

Step 1: Assess yourself and your interests.

The most important starting point is to find out what you would like to devote the next four years to studying. The more interested you are in a subject, the more likely you are to study it and achieve a good result. In College you will be studying on your own and the only force to keep you going is your interest in the subject. Do the Interest Assessment in Qualifax and use the results as a starting point in your search for a suitable course.

Step 2: Investigate different universities and colleges.

For some courses there will be only one or two colleges to choose from however for the majority of leaving certificate students there are a range of colleges offering courses in their chosen area.

The content of courses with the same name can vary significantly between different colleges. It is crucial therefore that you read the prospectus, course brochures and websites to find the course programme that best suits your requirements.

Attending college open days will give you the opportunity to tour the campus, see the lecture halls, sporting facilities, and accommodation, and meet the lecturers & students. Ask questions about the college investigate the different clubs & societies on offer and ask about the destinations of their graduates etc. The help you get the most out of an Open Day there is a Workbook called "Prepare for Career Events" in Qualifax to help, you will find it under Students / Career Events. The details of all Career Events are to be found in the same section.

Step 3: Think about what you hope to gain from going to College.

Students often say they attend college to secure a good job but one of the myths behind choosing a particular course is that it locks you into a specific career path. The college course you choose is only one of many factors that will shape your career path.

Although some careers require a particular course (e.g. medicine), over 60% of graduate employers are more interested in the course result and transferable skills students have gained than the subject of the course. It is very important to keep this in mind and as you look at people in particular jobs it is worth noting that the

qualification they got in College is very different to the work they now do e.g. Pat Kenny is an engineer by qualification.

Employers pay a premium to recruit graduates because of the transferable skills they gained in college. These skills include teamwork, communication, time management, commercial awareness, planning & organising, problem solving, leadership and flexibility.

Step 4: Investigate what you will be looking for in a career.

What types of careers appeal to you? Research the careers you have an interest in on www.careerdirections.ie website. Here you can see lots of information on the career area and a link to the relevant courses in Qualifax.

If you are interested in a certain career, do some research to see if a particular course is essential, or will give you an advantage? Check to see also what professional recognition and exemptions you are entitled to. For example, if you are going to study accountancy compare the exemptions you will get from the professional accounting exams from all the different colleges.

Remember that 60% of graduate opportunities are open to graduates from any field so there is no need to worry if you have not yet decided on a career path. Ask colleges for information on what past graduates are now doing.

Step 5: Realistically evaluate your options.

Do you love the idea of being a doctor but don't like science subjects?

Does your desired career path require a postgraduate? If so are you willing to continue studying after your course?

Investigate the entry requirements; these are listed in the course details in Qualifax. Some courses require specific grades in certain subjects and even if you get enough points you will not get in if you don't have the required subjects.

Step 6: Pick your courses.

As a result of the research you will have done you will have a better idea of the careers and courses you are interested in as well as those you feel are no longer an option. Make a list of your top choices and keep your mind open to all relevant information.

What you need

1. **Facts** – clear, first hand and only trust what you understand.
2. **Time** – start early and have sufficient time to digest the information and even change your mind a few times.
3. **Support** - from school, home and friends is very important but don't allow support to become a crutch – think for yourself.
4. **Advice** - discuss your plans with others and be open to their comments. You have to make the final decision but not without lots of help from others.