



# Idealism realism

**Dave Kilmartin**, head of the career development centre at **DIT**, is all about career motivation and he has the following advice for CAO students

**T**here are many factors to consider when choosing a third-level course: employment prospects, course availability, entry requirements, location of the college (live at home or move away), and financial means, to name just a few. While all are very important considerations, they need to be understood and assessed in the context of career motivation.

## CAREER MOTIVATION

Career motivation can be internally or externally defined and driven. Externally, labour market prospects and the degree of probability of securing a good job post graduation largely dictates course choice.

In essence, the advice is to "follow the jobs" and third-level courses are a means to achieving this end. It is very understandable that some of the key influencers on student course choices, notably parents or guardians and indeed the government, use this rationale.

When students are making a decision based on perceived labour market demands, they're more likely to veer down the science, technology, engineering and maths route. For many, this is a fine choice which will lead to a positive career outcome. However, for



others, the outcome may not transpire in ways they hoped for as the choice is made for the wrong reasons.

Career motivation is internally driven when students follow their passion in choosing a course. The course is then a means to realising that passion and developing knowledge and skills in an area the student considers

fulfilling. This method can often be viewed as more emotionally based, where decisions are made by following one's heart or gut instinct.

It becomes a question of balancing the needs and wishes of the individual with the needs of society and the economy. Not just the economy but society at large benefits greatly when

individuals are in careers they find fulfilling and personally meaningful, and are appropriately rewarded. We need to find a manageable equilibrium between the head and the heart.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

These websites will help you explore career interests and values, research career sectors and occupations as well as third-level courses.  
[www.careersportal.ie](http://www.careersportal.ie)  
[www.gradireland.com](http://www.gradireland.com)

## SUPPORTING STUDENTS

A good start is to support students to firstly look inwards to explore their own inner career ideas – to understand their interests (what they like), values (what's important to them), personality (what ways of engaging suit), skills and abilities (what they can do). As humans, we all want to make a difference, achieve and have a sense of purpose.

In essence, we are trying to get to the why of one career option over another. The task is then one of putting these ideals through the filters of pragmatism and realism – by asking the questions of the what, how, when and where, taking into account all relevant practical considerations.

This approach enables us to make decisions more holistically. The key is to optimise and make the best choice possible given the circumstances one finds oneself in. Too often, students fail to do enough research on both their motivations, their course options and their options post graduation, leading to potentially poor and unfulfilling decisions. Idealism without realism can lack focus, while realism without idealism is tunnel vision.

Given my experience working with students, choosing a course in an area which broadly sits well with a student's career motivation positively affects that student's attitude and application during the course.

The corollary is also true whereby disengagement, stress and/or failure/dropout can result if there is real dissonance between career motivation and the course experience. This can be financially and emotionally costly for students and, indeed, their families. **CL**