**Designing your Pathways programme**

**What/How? Types of activities**

Pathways to college covers a range of activities designed to increase awareness as well as sharing specific information on third level options for students. Most traditional career guidance activities align with pathways to college hence, where possible, it is essential to include the career guidance staff on the CFES team. Their knowledge and experience as well as established practices are key to building a whole school suite of activities. There are two main categories of pathways activities:

1. **Whole Cohort Activities**

This type of activity is designed to include all students within a specific year group. They are usually aimed at increasing general knowledge and awareness of options at third level but can also be adapted to be more specifically aimed at certain subject areas. Some common examples are listed below.

**Campus & School Visits**

It can be hugely inspiring and beneficial for students to visit a college campus. Although many senior cycle students will visit several colleges to attend open days, a tailored visit aimed a junior cycle students can also be organised. Campus visits incorporating tours and talks from undergraduates provide an opportunity for mentoring. *See sample materials for an example of a campus visit schedule of activities.*

Campus visits can usually be arranged through college admissions or access departments. It is also usually possible to arrange for a representative to visit your school to give a presentation on their institution. *Contact your college partners for details.*

**Research Assignments/Mock Applications**

Encouraging students to engage in research on their college options through assignments and awards can be very effective in increasing their knowledge base without significantly impacting on class time. College Awareness Week is an ideal time for students to complete these assignments with a large number of pathways supporting events being run regionally. *See sample materials for examples of junior cycle research and mock activities and visit* <www.collegeaware.ie> *for details of this year’s events.*

**Careers Fairs & Open Days**

There are a huge number of careers fairs and open days offered for students. Visit [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie) for a full calendar of events nationwide.

1. **Specific Cohort Activities**

This type of activity is aimed at smaller cohorts within the year group with specific interests such as Maths and Science, Medicine, Law and many others. There a number of activities run through college admissions and access departments as well as other organisations such as Science Foundation Ireland. Contact your college partners or visit their websites for a full list of event/activities offered. Some common example are listed below.

**Faculty/Department Open Days**

Some college faculties or departments will run separate open days aimed specifically at their area of study. These provide an opportunity for students to visit a campus and interact with undergraduates currently studying in their interested field.

**Shadowing days**

These provide second level students considering certain third level courses to shadow and undergraduate student for the day, providing an opportunity for mentoring as well as knowledge exchange.

**Summer Schools**

Various institutions run week long summer schools for senior cycle students allowing them to sample different courses and immerse themselves in a college environment prior to making career choices.

**Careers Presentations**

Inviting speakers to your school from various backgrounds/colleges/careers can be an effective way to cater to students diverging interests. This can be done directly with contacts from colleges and the local community or through programmes tailored for specific subject areas. *See sample materials and visit* [*www.smartfutures.ie*](http://www.smartfutures.ie) *for information on organising STEM related careers presentations in your school.*

It is important to have a good balance of both of these types of activities (whole and specific cohort) for each year group in order to ensure all students are adequately prepared for and informed on progression to third level education. Below is a sample pathways plan for a whole school approach.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Year Group | Whole Cohort Activities | Specific Cohort Activities |
| 1st | Campus Visit | College Educational Awards |
| 2nd | CAW Research Assignment: College Courses | Faculty Open Days: Engineering, Health Science, Arts & Humanities |
| 3rd | Mock CAO Application | Smart Futures Presentation: STEM Careers |
| TY | Mock CAO offers based on JC Results | College TY Programmes: Medicine, Nanoscience etcBT Young Scientist |
| 5th | Higher OptionsCollege Open Days | College Summer SchoolsCollege Pathways Programme: Law, Science etc |
| 6th | Alumni Careers Fair | College Revision Programmes: HL & OL Maths |

**Who? Expanding the reach of your Pathways Programme**

Besides students, teachers and educational institutions, there are many other groups that you can get involved in your pathways programme.

1. **Parents**

Keeping parents informed on third level options is crucial. Hosting information evenings on the CAO as well as HEAR and DARE application processes can be especially useful to parents with no experience of third level education. Inviting parents to career events and open days can also help expand their knowledge base. Research assignments/mock applications can also be designed to include feedback from parents encouraging further discussion on student pathways. *See sample materials for examples*

1. **Mentors**

Involving mentors in the delivery of pathways activities is a great way to combine core practices and cut down on student’s time away from curriculum related academic activities. Mentor sessions can be used to help students with career investigations or mock applications. Mentors from specialised areas can give careers talks to larger groups while mentors from specific colleges are ideally placed to give campus tours. The more embedded mentors are in the overall CFES programme, the better the experience for both the mentors and mentees

1. **Alumni/Local Businesses**

Keeping an up-to-date alumni database as well as cultivating links with local businesses will enable you to recruit for and run your own careers fairs in school. With greater control over content and format, these events can be tailored to your student’s specific circumstances and interests.