

Focus: making the call on business courses

What you should look at if considering a career in the diversified world of business

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It's quite fitting that so many colleges are competing for students. But which one is best? A human resources officer might diplomatically tell you they all have their own strengths and weaknesses, a sales executive might demolish the competitors with promises and offerings, and an accountant might do a clinical analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of all your suitors.

Consider the end goal

Ronan Kennedy, a Dublin-based careers coach and trainer, says there is no one-size-fits-all answer as to where students should choose, but they should start by considering their end goal. "What do you want to get out of the course? Is it just for the sake of doing a course? Is it be-

cause you want a particular job?"

If it is for a particular job, then students should look at those jobs now, Kennedy advises. "Find out what qualification is needed to have that job. What experience is needed? What is the employer looking for?"

Of course, Kennedy acknowl-

edges there are a lot of students looking at a plethora of courses across a range of subject areas and they might have no idea what is right for them.

"Speak to people who have done the course you're interested in and see if they are in a job you would like. Check out the reading list on the course, and consider spending an afternoon browsing through them rather than waste four years on material that is not interesting to you. And some of the lectures are quite open, so you can sit in on them too."

Kennedy studied business and Japanese at Dublin City Uni-

versity. "It was an unusual choice and I really wanted to know if it was the right one for me, so I emailed the lecturer and she very kindly gave me an hour of her time. If that's not an option, is it possible to talk to people who work in the area you're interested in, whether that's finance, trading, human resources or something else."

With the growth of online learning, Kennedy also suggests that students can look at doing a short course online before signing up to three or four years of a full-time degree. "It is usually very cheap or even free, with top-quality content which is very accessible and can be viewed anywhere."

Consider the practicalities

But if the student does decide that business is the right option, what then? "There are practicalities to consider," says Kennedy. "If you're attending the best course in the country but you live some significant distance

from the university, will you actually be able to go or will the commute be tough? Will it be harder to make connections and get support?"

Students might investigate the class size in tutorials as well as looking at the strength of its alumni network, but the most important factor, according to Kennedy, is that students are interested in the area and will be able to fully engage with it. "Do your research. You will be working on this course for three or four years, and then possibly 35 hours a week for 40 years unless you change careers at a later stage - as many people now do - so it's worth spending a few hours talking to people."

How important are rankings?

Different colleges may have different strengths. According to a recent ranking by Eduniversal of business schools and universities in more than 150 countries, Trinity College has the number one business school in Ireland, followed by UCD and with DCU - a relatively young but ambi-

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tious newcomer to business education - nipping at the heels.

The Eduniversal ranking is based on interviews with human resources directors from various countries on which universities they would be most likely to hire from, in the event of having two equally qualified candidates.

How important are rankings, what do they mean and how much attention should they get when you're choosing your course. Professor Andrew Burke, dean of the Trinity Business School, says they can be useful because they allow graduates

an overview of how they will be perceived in an international jobs market.

"But people choose a course based on a composite of factors, and the aim is to develop themselves, not just in terms of their learning but also in terms of what their interests and skills are. Students should look not just at the course content but also on the way it is taught: how much explorative and project-based learning does it contain?"

A broad business degree opens doors, says Burke. "It's no longer just about being a senior executive; a good business course will be flexible and adaptable and will develop entrepreneurial and creative skills. The Leaving Cert is not great at developing creativity and emotional intelligence but these are abilities that are critical in terms of how people get on in life and work. These are important qualities in business courses and at third-level."

Make the call

DCU and the Kemmy Business School at UL have developed a reputation for delivering particularly innovative business courses. Trinity's business economics and social studies (BESS) degree draws a big crowd.

Business with a language is a particularly popular option, and for a good reason; you'll find a variety of offerings in UL, DCU, NUI Galway, DIT, UCC, Trinity College and as part of UCD's very popular international commerce course. Maynooth University's business courses allow students to choose from a wide range of electives, including language options. The National College of Ireland and the Dublin Business School also have solid offerings.

One thing to look out for before signing on the dotted line are courses with some element of work placement or international exchange.

But not just any work placement: is it innovative and engag-

ing? And does it help to develop practical skills as well as develop entrepreneurial skills? UCD, UCC, NUI Galway and DCU all perform well here. DCU, for instance, boasts that it has strong partnerships with business and that students get real-world experience in developing business skills.