



Get Smart

Smart Futures is a joint government and industry program aimed at promoting science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers to secondary school students in Ireland

Smart Futures is a collaborative government-industry-education program that provides second level school students (typically between 12-18 years of age) in Ireland with information about careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). It was set up in 2013 and is coordinated and managed by Ireland's national funding body, Science Foundation Ireland, and is now supported by 200+ organizations from research and industry as well as representative bodies like Engineers Ireland, BioPharma Ireland, the Royal Society of Chemistry, ICT Ireland, the Irish Medical Devices Association (IMDA), the Institute of Physics, the American Chamber of Commerce, IDA Ireland and other stakeholder groups.

For students and their parents, choosing third level study options, be it in university or one of Ireland's National Institutes of Technology, is never easy – there are a vast number of options to explore and many find themselves confused when it comes to STEM related courses. The Smart futures program's main aim is to encourage the take up of STEM subjects among second level students and offer them access to free online resources that will allow them to delve deeper into the range of STEM careers available to them and what these careers entail in the areas of science, technology and math available for all students.

A Science Foundation Ireland survey found 51% of college students said their parents influenced their decision making, and that they had advised their child to pursue something they (as a parent) thought would suit their personality. Unfortunately, if a parent holds any stereotypes when it comes to science or math (it's too hard or it's not really for girls) this can influence a student's decision. Here at Smart Futures we want to break down the barriers and stereotypes that hold many students back from exploring their options in STEM careers. The website www.SmartFutures.ie provides an online resource for second level school students and their influencers, such as parents, guidance counsellors and subject teachers. It facilitates exploration of STEM role model career experiences and acts as a direction post to supplement college and career information.

There are diverse career areas open to students with STEM qualifications – from designing video games or medical devices, to



improving food science and sport, and even saving lives through cancer research. STEM graduates are in high demand across the globe. Smart Futures provides students and parents with valuable insights and practical examples of STEM career paths, helping them to make more informed subject choices and higher education course decisions.

Dr. Ruth Freeman, Director of Strategy and Communications at Science Foundation Ireland; highlights the benefits of choosing a STEM career: “Studying a course in a STEM-related area can equip students with problem-solving skills and develop their ability to think creatively and innovatively. Logical thinking and literacy in technology are now essential skills for the workplace. It can be hard for parents to know where to start to find out more, and they should be mindful not to unconsciously pass on their own potential stereotypes about studying or working in STEM. Unfortunately, many people still believe, for example, that these career paths are typically not for females, or are only for students excelling in math, but these perceptions are simply untrue. I would encourage parents, teachers and students alike to visit SmartFutures.ie ahead of the higher education course selection deadline to help them find out more and to better navigate this important decision-making process.”

As well as the supporting website, Smart Futures works with and supports many partner organizations. These volunteer based groups facilitate school visits and organize programs for schools nationwide. Contact details for

these partners can be found on our website. Smart Futures also has a presence at many career events throughout the year and gives the students involved an opportunity to meet and listen to some of our incredible volunteers explain their own personal experience as well as offer student's advice and tips for studying/working in the STEM field.

Smart Futures STEM careers roadshows will be taking place at many of the Institutes of Technology during SciFest in 2018! SciFest is an all-inclusive, all-island science competition where second-level students showcase STEM projects at a series of one day science fairs held regionally. These events present the perfect venue for our roadshows offering facetime for teachers and students with STEM role models across the country.

www.SmartFutures.ie

Visit www.SmartFutures.ie to read 200+ STEM career stories, watch videos, access free downloadable career infographics and help students learn more about the many exciting and diverse STEM career opportunities in Ireland. Keep an eye on the Smart futures website to get the latest news on STEM events nationwide for all ages. Make sure to follow Smart Futures on twitter @smartfutureIE and like our Facebook page for more info.