

### APPLICATION FORMS

Applications for further study vary depending on the institution and type of course you are applying for. These might take the form of:

- Application form
- Personal statement outlining your suitability for the course
- CV emphasising your academic record (useful to include an explanatory letter with this).
- Some applications will involve the submission of all of the above. A good quality application in any format will demonstrate a strong interest in the course, show clear reasons for studying the subject and illustrate how these fit in with your career aims and objectives

### BEFORE APPLYING

#### **Research the course and institute:**

- The key to putting together a successful application is research. Make sure to research the course thoroughly and have a good understanding of what this career area involves.
- Read the prospectus and course handbook, look at the website and talk to students who have completed the course. If possible get in touch with the course co-ordinator to ask them for more information and to show your interest in the area. Before ringing them - find out as much as possible about the course, and careers in that field, so that you don't come across as not having done any research at all. Try to make a good impression with them and demonstrate that you are committed to a career in this field. This will help create a good impression, so that when your application lands on their desk they have already heard of you, and have a positive image of you.

#### **Research yourself:**

- Imagine what course coordinators are looking for in the ideal student – e.g. enthusiasm, interest and commitment. Course co-ordinators are looking for students who are motivated, have the ability to succeed academically and who will fit into the course environment.

#### **Skills & abilities: are you able for the course**

- Evidence of academic achievement, consistency of grades, prizes or academic awards
- Relevant projects or thesis
- Include information on core skills you have gained that are relevant to the subject, e.g. Academic Skills (research, technical, IT); Transferable Skills (team work, critical thinking, time management, taken charge of own learning, ability to work without supervision etc.)
- Admissions tutors are looking for people who can bring together experiences from different parts of their lives so don't be afraid to use examples from your personal life
- Positions of responsibility assumed in class and in clubs, societies –what significant skills and qualities do these demonstrate?
- Relevant employment experience – paid and unpaid - how it relates to course and what skills you developed
- What core skills have you developed through what you do in your spare time – are these relevant?

**Motivation: How can you show evidence of this?**

- Show evidence of research carried out – Met with course co-ordinator(s)/professionals in the field? Spoke with careers adviser? Studied course module descriptors and website in detail? Have researched potential and actual Graduate Destinations (FDRs) from course?
- Know course content extremely well and reflect this back in your application: What really interests you about the course? How does the course fit into your long-term career plan? Co-ordinators are looking for evidence of informed and mature career decisions.
- Will the course increase your knowledge of area? Enhance career prospects? Give you a professional qualification?
- Evidence of your ability to reflect upon your skills, interests, values and personality and identify that the course is a good match for you.

**Interest: Why are you interested in this course/research project/institute?**

- Why you want this course above other courses at other institutes?
- When did you become interested in this area and what have you learned about it? How did you learn about it?
- What insights have you gained that lead you to believe the course/project/institute is a good match for you?
- What appeals to you about the institute: specialist department/links with industry/advanced technology/work placement/renowned academics/course structure/choice of modules?

**Fit: Will you be suited to the course?**

- Try to identify any particular requirements and, point out how you fulfil them. Show that you have a very good understanding of the course
- Highlight your personal qualities– this gives them an idea of the type of person you are. Reflect back the skills they are looking for plus any relevant personal attributes
- Justify your reasons for choosing the course / courses

**TIPS FOR YOUR APPLICATION**

- Course co-ordinators are looking for people who can bring together experiences from different parts of their lives, give clear reasons for wanting to do a particular course and relate it to **plans for the future**. It's important to show that you have a plan for the future and a good understanding of what this career area involves. This can be shown by securing relevant employment experience, and by having talked to professionals in the area. This shows that you are really committed
- Mention any **relevant work experience** (including voluntary and placement work) - this is essential for some courses such as medicine, veterinary work, social work or teaching. Be specific - say when and where you worked and for how long. If you don't have relevant work experience – try to get some – even if it is just shadowing someone for a period of time
- If appropriate, show the **relevance of your course you are completing/have completed to this field**. Show that you have been committed to your studies and have succeeded in this area. If it is a conversion course or a course not related to your primary degree be able to explain your change of direction
- Mention **any visits** you may have arranged, which are related to your intended course of study/research - for instance to hospital departments, schools, legal offices or science laboratories.
- If you have employment experience which is not directly relevant to your proposed course and career, can you identify core **(transferable) skills**, which you learned or developed there?

- Include information on your **core skills that are relevant to these fields** – e.g. communication, numeracy, information technology, problem solving and working with others
- Include **personal qualities** - for instance being a caring person, a good communicator and able to work in a team etc and back up with examples
- If you are involved in **activities outside college/positions of responsibility**, mention these - especially if you excel or hold positions of responsibility and if they relate to the subject. Even if they do not relate to your chosen subject they add to the impression of you as a person.

### PRACTICAL TIPS

- Identify requirements and, make notes on how you fulfil them. Organise your material - draft, re-draft, re-draft again, until you get it the way you want it
- Practice in the allotted space, on a photocopy of the form, or even on an ordinary piece of paper which is the right size
- Take care with the layout - make the most of what you've got. Organise it into paragraphs which flow logically
- Be positive and enthusiastic. Use punchy writing, make concise statements rather than long narrative. Don't ramble, or pad it out
- Take care with your sentence structure and check your spelling and grammar
- Do not start every sentence or paragraph with 'I'
- Don't finish up with a long list of unrelated interests or other information of little relevance
- If you are handwriting the statement, make sure it is clear, legible and not too small - don't overcrowd the space
- If, in the end, your statement is still too long for the allotted space, go through it and cut out unnecessary words. For example, the sentence "My Saturday job in a shop has given me valuable confidence in dealing with the public" gives just as much information and takes up less space than "I work every Saturday in a shop. This experience has been valuable in that it has made me more confident in dealing with the public."
- Always back up statements with examples/evidence, skills, qualities.
- Complete all sections rather than saying "refer to my CV\*"
- Use STAR technique when answering competency-based questions, e.g. *Tell me about a time when you worked in a team*: Describe situation/what was the task involved/what was the action you took (your specific responsibility within the team)/what was the end result of working in the team? Use specifics: how often team met, for how long, your specific area(s) of responsibility, etc
- Tailor your applications as each one will need a slightly different emphasis depending on the course and college you are applying to
- Get a professional/constructive colleague, mentor or friend to review your application before you send it
- \*If your application requires a CV please see our TUDublin Career Development Centre CV Resource Sheets for more information.

### REFERENCES

Often you will be asked to provide one or more academic references. Your referees are a vital part of your application – choose them carefully! Send them the TUD Career Development Centre Resource Sheet: "Writing a student reference." Lecturers or tutors who know you well and are able to comment on your academic suitability and capability for the course can make a difference in whether you will be successful or not. If possible meet with your referee beforehand to discuss your plans.

**Possible reasons for your application not being successful:**

- Not having the required academic background/skills/experience/grades
- Inadequate preparation: lack of demonstrated knowledge regarding course content, delivery and career options, potential career paths etc
- Poor English/grammar/expression on application form
- Failure to provide appropriate references e.g. academic and professional
- Lack of relevant employment experience (some courses stipulate this)
- Incomplete documentation or lack of detailed response on application

**INTERVIEWS**

Academic interviews are usually less formal than job interviews but the same preparation applies. Interviewers will be looking to find out more about you as individual so get to know yourself well:

- What motivates you?
- What are your skills /strengths?
- Why are you the ideal candidate?

**Preparation:**

- Familiarise yourself with current/future research areas and projects so you are well informed at the interview Find out about staff members' research interests and publications as quite often you will be working closely with staff.
- Know your subject area and learn about the proposed research topic (especially MPhil/PhD students). Academic interviews will often focus on this aspect of your application particularly for research programmes.
- Think through your answers to some predictable questions that you might be asked to assist you in your preparations

**Common topics used for further study interview questions:**

- Motivations for undertaking further study;
- Reasons for choosing the particular course, research topic, department or institution;
- Potential research areas;
- Academic, transferable and personal skills you can bring to the course;
- Other experience which makes you suitable for the course;
- Demonstration of ability to succeed;
- Differences between studying at undergraduate and postgraduate level if that applies;
- Evidence of research undertaken in previous study and research techniques used;
- Ability to make presentations;
- Tactics you will use to stay motivated for the duration of the programme of study;
- Ability to undertake undergraduate delivery/demonstrations (particularly MPhil/PhD candidates);
- Career aims and objectives;
- Knowledge of the industry
- Knowledge of the subject area and advances in the field;
- Previous academic experience and how this is relevant to the chosen programme;
- Ideas for the future of that particular research area;
- Views on research carried out at the institution you are applying for;
- Knowledge of funding options.

- An interview is not a one-way process so use this opportunity to find out as much information as you can to determine if this is the right course for you. You might have questions around:
- Course/research requirements –will you be expected to deliver tutorials?
- Supervisory/tutorial arrangements for you?
- Funding arrangements?
- Destination of previous students?
- What do you regard as being special about this particular course/department?
- Possibility of extra activities such as organizing seminars, representing the institute at conferences, contributing to journals etc?
- Key issues in the future development of this area of research?

\*Please see the TUD Career Development Centre Interview Resource Sheets for further information and advice on preparing for interview. <http://www.dit.ie/careers/studentsgraduates/gettingreadyforinterviews/>