



Grind schools

Over 50,000 students sit the Leaving Certificate each year, some for the second time. We examine what grind schools can offer in achieving those all important results.

The month of August marks the end of a nervous wait for thousands of students who will receive the results of their Leaving Certificate exams taken earlier in the summer. Most will use their grades as a platform to go onto third level education in one of the Universities, Institutes of Technology or Post Leaving Cert Colleges across the country. However, for those that did not achieve the results required for a place on their chosen course, August means a period of contemplation about whether to repeat the exams next year or take a less preferred third level programme.

One option that repeat students, and indeed those sitting the exams for the first time, may consider is enrolling in a private fee-paying school which has particular emphasis on maximising the CAO points needed for third level courses. 'Grind schools', as they have come to be known, market themselves on their reputation for delivering high quality education aimed at maximising the achievement of their students in the Leaving Cert. Many offer additional services such as study skills workshops which are tailor-made to cater to the needs of their enrolment. However, grind

schools are expensive, with annual fees running into thousands of euros. At these costs, it's important to become as informed as possible in choosing whether to attend a grind school, and if so, which one.

Things to consider

Fees are obviously an important factor when choosing which institution to enrol in. In our survey, the most expensive of the grind schools was the Institute of Education which costs €6,950 per year. The cheapest was Dean College, Cork which costs €4,900 per year. How fees are paid depends on the institution. For example, the Institute of Education has three payment options, all of which require a deposit of €1,000. Payment can then be made either in one, two or three instalments. Paying in three instalments costs €150 more overall, and must be made by submitting post-dated cheques written out for each instalment date. In relation to the €1,000 deposit, in the event of a student cancelling their application for any reason before commencement of the school year, the deposit will be refunded less a €400 administration charge. If the student

leaves after the commencement of the academic year the Institute says it will "retain the deposit of €1,000 and a proportionate amount of the fees."

The payment of fees alone does not guarantee admission to all of the colleges in our survey. Hewitt College for example, is clear in its admissions policy that it will not accept students who are "unmotivated, unwilling to work or who have unrealistic expectations." To assess the suitability of a student, the College has an interview process where it asks applicants for their Junior Certificate results, fifth year reports and Leaving Certificate results in the case of repeat candidates. Other colleges operate similar interview processes.

In terms of tuition, grind schools tend to cover the whole Leaving Cert curriculum in one academic year. This ensures that repeat students or first time candidates coming from fifth year in another school are adequately prepared for the exams in June. The range of subjects covered depends on the school but most of the main Leaving Cert options are taught. Some grind schools have extra tutorial hours in addition to the normal timetable, however in some

AT A GLANCE

Things to consider.

Additional facilities.

League tables.

IRISH GRIND SCHOOLS

Institute	Tuition fees (€)	Email	Web
Institute of Education, 82-85 Leeson St, Dublin 2	6,950	info@ioe.ie	www.ioe.ie
Yeats College, 40-41 Parnell St, Waterford	6,600	waterford@yeatscollege.ie	www.yeatscollege.ie
Yeats College, Fr. Griffin Road, Galway	6,600	galway@yeatscollege.ie	www.yeatscollege.ie
Bruce College, Audley House, Patrick's Hill Cork	6,500	susan@brucecollege.ie	www.brucecollege.ie
Dean College, 36/37 Mary Street, Cork	4,900	deanecollege@eircom.net	www.deanecollege.ie
Hewitt College, Hewitt House, St Patrick's Hill, Cork	6,000	admin@hewittcollege.com	www.hewittcollege.com
Limerick Tutorial Centre, 12/14 The Crescent, Limerick	6,400	limericktutorial@eircom.net	www.limericktutorial.ie

Useful contacts

State Examinations Commission
 Cornamaddy
 Athlone
 Co. Westmeath
 tel (090) 6442700
 fax (090) 6442744
 www.examinations.ie

cases these must be paid for on top of the annual enrolment fee. Limerick Tutorial College offers grinds on Saturdays and in the evenings which can be taken at different stages throughout terms. These range in price from €15 to €22 per hour and must be paid for in addition to the €6,400 annual enrolment fee. However, the enrolment fee of some colleges includes extra tutorials and revision courses. In the case of Bruce College the fee of €6,500 includes Christmas and Easter revision courses and any extra tutorials.

It's important to remember that tuition time in grind schools is treated as a commodity and so any classroom disturbances may be treated more severely than in a regular school. For example, in its description, Yeats College states that "students must be punctual, as latecomers disturb class and will not be admitted. Any breaches of discipline will result in immediate expulsion from the course without any refund of fees."

Additional facilities

Most grind schools recognise that tuition time alone can only do so much to improve a student's Leaving Cert performance. Unless the hours of study and revision have been put in, it is likely that students will underperform in the exams. To this end, grind schools provide supervised study facilities. In most cases supervised study facilities are free, as in the Institute of Education which operates a supervised study hall between the hours of 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday, 9am – 2pm on Saturday and 1pm – 6pm on Sundays. However, in the case of Limerick Tutorial College, supervised study facilities are not included in the annual enrolment fee. This college charges a weekly rate of €20 for three hours of supervised study per night, or €25 for five hours. Obviously, use of this facility can significantly bump up the overall cost of a school year.

Aside from supervised study facilities,

most grind schools offer dedicated career guidance services along with their regular tuition. The careers guidance officer in Limerick Tutorial Centre meets students on a one-to-one basis to advise them on which courses to apply for and aids students in filling out UCAS and CAO forms. As part of their career guidance programmes, some colleges invite guest speakers throughout the year from various professions who will give talks to students to enable them to get a more realistic idea of what their job entails. However, this would not be dissimilar to the way in which a careers service would operate in a normal school.

In relation to accommodation, many grind schools also facilitate students in finding suitable lodgings if their chosen college is located at a distance from their home. Both Limerick Tutorial College and Yeats College have accommodation officers who help students to find housing. Accommodation is approved and subsequently monitored on a continuous basis. These arrangements would be similar to university 'digs'. The Institute of Education in Dublin doesn't have any specific accommodation service other than offering information on general accommodation resources available to enrolling students. Bruce College, Cork provides a list of suitable accommodations which are exclusively reserved for use by the college's students.

What about league tables?

The use of league table in selecting schools is hotly debated but they can give some indication as to the success of a school's students in the Leaving Certificate.

Following a ruling by the High Court which deemed the publication of each school's exam results unlawful, there is no official information available as to which school produces the best results. In fact, Ireland is one of the few countries in the OECD that has a national exam but does not publish a school league table.

However, newspapers such as the *Sunday Times* and the *Irish Independent* have published their own tables based on assessing which 'feeder schools' are most successful at getting university places for their students.

Grind schools are not included in the 400-strong list of top schools produced by the *Sunday Times*. However, the 2007 *Irish Independent* league table showed that 100% of students in the Institute of Education and Yeats College, Galway were successful in gaining places in one of the country's universities or 14 institutes of technology. The other grind schools to feature on the list were Limerick Tutorial College with 88.5% of students winning university or institute places, Yeats College, Waterford (83.5%), Bruce College, Cork (80.5%), and Hewitt College, Cork (72.2%).

Report by
 Mark Channing 

choice comment

Getting a place in college, particularly on certain courses, remains almost 100% dependent on how students fare in their Leaving Certificate. To this end, grind schools are seen by many as the logical step in achieving those all important points. However it should also be remembered that getting an education is about more than just exam results. The tunnel vision approach of most grind schools may not be suitable for everyone, particularly first-time candidates. These schools are also expensive and despite how they may rank in school league tables, come with no guarantee of success. *Consumer Choice* also noted that in our research, many of the grind schools we contacted were reluctant or unwilling to share information on the nature and performance of their institutes. This lack of transparency makes it hard for the average consumer to make an informed choice. It could also be reflective of an ethos where only certain questions are worthy of a response and maybe that is not the best lesson to learn.