



VALIDATION AND FEASIBILITY OF OSOLAS

A resource that aims to connect students with careers that they are passionate
about

Katie Muldrew

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Abstract

OSOLAS aims to be a resource that connects students with careers they are passionate about. It is aimed at students aged between 15 – 20 years old that are in the process of making decisions about what career path they should follow. This project focused on identifying the students' biggest frustrations regarding career decisions and validating a potential solution to those issues. A business model was then created to determine how OSOLAS could financially sustain its ongoing growth and development.

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Executive Summary

There is a growing concern in Ireland in relation to the number of students that are dropping out of tertiary education after their first year. The percentage of student that do not make the transition from first year to second year is up to 26% of students in Institutes of Technology and 13% of students in Universities.

OSOLAS aims to be a resource that inspires and informs students in their decision making progress regarding different career paths. The target customer segment is students aged between 15 – 20 years old. These students plan to progress from secondary education to tertiary education but are not sure what career option is the best option for them.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is as follows:

- To validate the concept of OSOLAS and to determine the best fit business model for its growth and development. This was carried out through the Market Validation process and Business Planning.
- For the student to enhance the skills that were learnt throughout the MEM programme, particularly in the areas of communication, sales, marketing, market validation and business development.

Findings

In order to achieve its purpose, the project was broken down into a number of sequential tasks. Those tasks and their corresponding outcomes are provided in the table below.

Project Section	Project Task	Outcome
Market Validation	Market analysis	<p>The task identified a need for a product like OSOLAS and a gap in the market where the need wasn't being addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The size of the target customer segment is 209,999 students with an annual average growth rate of 54,421 students/annum.
	Validating the market	<p>This task involved extensive primary research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data was collected from 103 surveys and 25 face to face and phone interviews. • The information was used to develop a value proposition canvas. The outcome of the canvas was the following unique value proposition: "Connecting students with careers they are passionate about"
	Website prototype	<p>This task focused on creating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An uplifting brand, which has been started by creating a logo • An innovative way of organising career based information into a format that students could understand and relate to.
Business Planning	Marketing channel	<p>This task determined the most appropriate channels to use in order to get the information to the students. These channels include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career guidance counsellors that work with students in schools • Social media platforms
	Financial Analysis	<p>This task compared the cost of students dropping out with the cost of developing OSOLAS.</p>

	The cost of a student to attend tertiary education every year is approximately €20,000. The estimated number of first year dropouts is approximately 8,000 students. OSOLAS can be developed for less than the cost of putting one student through a four-year undergraduate degree.
Revenue	This task analysed the various form of potential financial backing that could be used to support OSOLAS.
Streams	Crowdfunding has been chosen as the initial source of funding following the development of a Minimum Viable Product (MVP).

Conclusions

This project involved taking a product from its initial concept to a viable business idea through the process of market validation and business planning. Although this process was not executed perfectly, all the project objectives and personal objectives were achieved.

There is a clearly understanding of all the elements involved in the market validation process and the potential pitfalls that hinder its success. It is a process that can not only be used by entrepreneurs but also by employees who have business improvement ideas, in order to make the idea a viable and credible one.

The key observations that were concluded during the project include the followings:

- Variations in a project plan are the result of different factors. In this project the main reason for project plan variation has been due to a lack of experience in market validation and business planning processes.
- The finished product will be different to the initial product. This will happen as a result of having a deep understanding of the customer and modifying the product or service to alleviate the customers most extreme frustrations.
- Market validation is an iterative process. Continually evaluate the information and make changes to improve the process.
- Market validation and business planning are processes that will test and improve numerous communication skills.
- One of the most valuable forms of communication when validating a product or service is face to face interviews.

The personal learnings of this project went beyond developing some of the skills learnt during MEM. This project offered me an opportunity to work completely autonomously which has had an extremely positive effect on my confidence. As someone who would rely heavily on others' opinions, the project forced me to trust my own opinions and abilities, and develop my own "best practise" in my approach and execution of tasks.

Recommendations

Throughout the course of the project there were a number of factors that contributed to the successful outcome of the project. There was also a number of factors that had a negative impact on the project plan and project implementation. The recommendations below are based on a GIDA approach applied to a SWOT analysis focusing on the strengths and weaknesses for the typical MEM student against the threats and opportunities present on a typical project.

Go	Create a sense of urgency to build up energy around task execution.
	Talk to as many people as you can about what you are doing - Talking to many people about an idea helps to get feedback from others. It can also result in valuable project leads.
Improve	Improve all forms of communication.
	Critical thinking – This ensures that you are asking the right questions and interpreting the answers in the right way
Defend	Have a plan and stick to it - The execution of a project may not be exactly as planned, but having a plan ensures that you stay focused on the project tasks.
	Find a way to maintain motivation
Avoid	Being biased about an idea or concept
	Focusing on too many problems at once

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1. Introduction

Each year tens of thousands of final year secondary school students in Ireland make a decision about their desired career path and what they think is the best way to get there. Of those that decide to enrol in tertiary education institutes thousands end up making a choice they later regret and drop out of tertiary education.

While the problem of dropout rates in tertiary education is an international one¹, this project focuses on Ireland. A successful "solution" will be one that works in Ireland but has potential to expand internationally.

1.1 Project Objectives

OSOLAS aims to be a resource that helps students make more informed decisions about their potential future career that reflect their passions, talents and job opportunities. The target customer segment are students aged between 15 – 20 years old that are in the process of making a decision about their potential career options. In order to achieve this the project had the following objectives:

- To research the factors influencing students dropping out of tertiary education
- Identify factors that can help students to make more informed decisions about their potential future career path.
- Validate a potential solution through the market validation process
- Confirm the best fit product/service for the target customer segment
- Create a product prototype
- Determine the best fit business model for the proposed best fit product/service
- To provide some advice on the start-up process for future MEM's

1.2 Learning Outcomes

Apart from the objectives that will be achieved as part of this project there are a number of learning outcomes for personal development including, but not limited to:

- Understanding the process of moving from a business concept to a viable business model
- ~~Learning skills associated with market validation and business planning that can be transferable to other businesses and industries~~
- Understanding how to work completely autonomously and develop my own 'best practice' techniques to successfully achieve the desired results
- Improving sales and marketing skills

1.3 Report Structure and Approach

The report has been broken into two main sections; market validation and business planning.

- Market validation is recognised as one of the most valuable processes a business can follow to determine if there is a market for a potential offering. The market validation process used in this project largely follows the one recommended by Rob Adams² (Ready, Aim, Fire). This report looks at the Market, Lifecycle and Trends, Competitors and Experts opinions outlined in the "Ready" phase. "Aim" involves Research, Interviews, Target Audience, Turning data into

¹ Liz Weston, Reuters, "OECD: The US has fallen behind other countries in college completion", Business Insider, September 2014, available from <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-us-falls-behind-in-college-competition-oecd-2014-9?IR=T>, accessed on January 15, 2016.

² Rob Adams, "If you build it, will they come?" (New Jersey: Wiley, 2010).

results (Unique Value Proposition) and Outside help. The unique value proposition was developed by following the process recommended through Value Proposition Design³.

- A viable business model has been put together using the Lean Canvas as a foundation. The information in the Lean Canvas relating to business planning has been developed based on the guidelines suggested by Guy Kawasaki⁴.

2. Defining the Problem (Literature Review)

2.1 Education and Employment Trends

Over the past 50 years' higher education has went from being a privilege of the few to tertiary degrees now being held by one in three young adults⁵. Even over the last 20 years the numbers students attending higher education has increased significantly. In 1995 the number of students that received higher level education in Ireland was 96,681⁶. In 2015 that number has risen to 182,623⁷.

The increasing number of students graduating from higher education has raised the bar in terms of employment standards. Many students now feel that a tertiary degree or another form of higher level education is the best option to secure a well-paying job⁸. However, there are many students with tertiary degrees, even those with first class honours, who are struggling to find work in Ireland⁹.

It is not only the increase in students in "Traditional" higher education that is leading to increased competition. Even those students that don't achieve the required points to get into a course directly are provided with alternatives routes to get to the same career field e.g. University access courses and Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses.

As the number of graduates continue to increase, employers will have more graduate job applications. With more and more students having the same skill set on paper, it is important for students to find a way to differentiate themselves from their competition.

2.2 Careers Guidance and Careers Choice

It is important to consider where and when students start make careers decisions. In the 5-6 years in secondary school, students choose subjects that reflect their interests and also reflect requirements for a particular course in higher education. If a student is interested in pursuing a career in Engineering they are advised to have at least one science subject, generally physics. Therefore, even students as young as 14/15 years olds are making choices that influence the direction of the career path.

A major influence during this time in their lives is the careers guidance they receive as part of their secondary education. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) guidelines recommend one careers guidance counsellor for every 500 students¹⁰. Since the economic

³ Alex Osterwalder, Yves Pigneur, Greg Bernarda, Alan Smith, *Value Proposition Design*, (New Jersey: Wiley, 2014)

⁴ Guy Kawasaki, "The Art of the Start 2.0", (Great Britain: Portfolio Penguin, 2015).

⁵ OECD, "Education at a Glance", 2011, OCEd Website, <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/48642586.pdf>, accessed January 10, 2016.

⁶ Department of Education and Skills, Statistical Report 1994-1995, <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Annual-Statistics-Report-1994-1995.pdf>, accessed January 10, 2015.

⁷ Department of Education and Skills, Statistical Report 2014-2015, <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports>, accessed January 10, 2016.

⁸ Deborah J. Kennett, Maureen J. Reed and Dianne Lam, "The importance of directly asking students their reasons for attending higher education", available from <http://www.iier.org.au/iier21/kennett.pdf>, accessed January 10, 2016.

⁹ Hugh O'Conner, "Youth Unemployment in Ireland: The Forgotten Generation", National Youth Council of Ireland, November 2010, available from http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Youth_Unemployment_in_Ireland_web.pdf, accessed January 10, 2016.

¹⁰ OECD, "OECD review of career guidance policies" OECD, April 2002, p 3, available from <http://www.ncge.ie/uploads/OECD.doc.pdf>, accessed January 15, 2016.

downturn in Ireland guidance counselling has been cut by 24% since 2012, with a 59% reduction in one-to-one counselling¹¹. The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) have compared this cuts to the “equivalent to 168 guidance counsellors being removed from the guidance service delivery”. As a result, students have less access to guidance counselling services.

The guidance service model itself differs from school to school and is influenced by how careers guidance is viewed by individual school principals. There is no “best practice” approach to careers guidance in secondary schools. The OECD is now encouraging the use of employers, alumni, parents, community members and role models to be used as advice and information resources to support career guidance strategies¹⁰.

One of the main problems identified with the transition from secondary to tertiary education is that students are making the wrong course choice¹². In this case ‘wrong’ is defined as a course choice that has resulted in the non-completion – or dropout - of studies before graduation. In Ireland, the word ‘course’ is reflective of what is referred to as ‘programme’ in New Zealand. Students in Ireland choose a course and complete modules within the course (or programme).

A research study on why students leave¹² collected information from 4,036 students that had dropped out of their chosen course. Course choice came out as the biggest reason students left with 2,042 out of the 4,036 saying they left for course related reasons. Out of that 2,042 students, 836 said they left because they made the wrong course choice.

2.3 Students decision making process should reflect their passions

One way students can differentiate themselves from the competition and increase their chances of completing their course is through having passion for their chosen field of study. A report issued from Deloitte University Press¹³ states that “passionate workers outlearn and outperform their peers because of their internal drive for sustained learning and performance improvement”. It is these qualities that will be invaluable in today’s rapidly changing business environment.

Lack of passion is a quality in students that has been noticed by education facilitators, commenting that students only care about knowing what they need to know to pass exams and meet requirements. They are not interested in wider research in their area of study¹⁴.

¹¹ IGC response to ‘why students leave’, IGC press releases, August 28, 2015, on IGC website, http://www.igc.ie/Events_Publications/IGC-Press-Releases, accessed January 15, 2016

¹² Niamh Moore-Cherry et al., “Why Students Leave: Findings from Qualitative Research into Student Non-Completion in Higher Education in Ireland”, July 15, 2015, available from <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Project-4.pdf>, accessed December 22, 2015

¹³ John Hagel III et al, Passion at work: Cultivating worker passion as a cornerstone of talent development, Deloitte University Press, 2014, available from <http://dupress.com/articles/worker-passion-employee-behavior>, accessed January 10, 2016.

¹⁴ Jessica Shepherd, What happened to the love?, The Guardian, March 2008, available from <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/mar/04/internationalstudents.educationguardian2>, accessed January 10, 2016

In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins identifies passion as an important factor in taking companies from being good to being great. He said that the 15 companies that went from good to great were all passionate about the industry they were in. This level of passion combined with an understanding of what they are the best at, and their economic drivers, was a key factor in making the transition from good to great¹⁵. Companies at their core are groups of people, these people are what make the company "passionate".

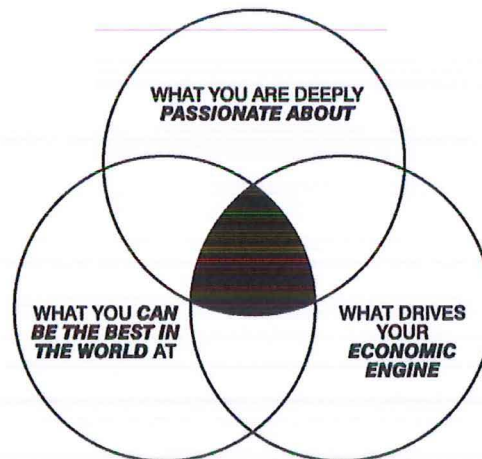


FIGURE 1 - THE THREE CIRCLES OF THE HEDGEHOG CONCEPT. SOURCED FROM JIM COLLINS - GOOD TO GREAT

If the same framework is applied to an individual and their career choice, then their decision should be influenced by the same combinations of factors. Apart from a job that is financially rewarding, students should be focusing on their strengths and an area of study that they are passionate about. It is those students who will go above and beyond what is expected of them. They will be the ones coming up with creative or innovative solutions to problems, enjoying their work and ultimately standing out from the rest of their competition.

The data researched as part of the literature review highlights the importance of passion in the workplace and as a way for students to differentiate themselves. There seems to be a lack of passion in students at the tertiary education stage, which opens up the question of, are many students choosing a career pathway based on job opportunities and job security alone. The number of students dropping out of tertiary education suggest that there is a disconnect somewhere.

If passion is an important factor, then there is an opportunity to create an offering that can help students connect their passions with different career paths. Such an offering would highlight the importance of passion for a high performing career and that successful careers can be built around doing the things you are passionate about. Is it possible to help students go from making wrong course choices to great career decisions?

¹⁵ Jim Collins, "Good to Great", (New York: Collins, 2001).

3. Project Plan Formation

3.1 Project Background

The idea for OSOLAS was inspired from a similar offering called Oompher. Oompher is a website that “create and share amazing stories that inspire young New Zealanders to take the first step on their own extraordinary pathway”¹⁶. Oomphers’ acquisition by Careers New Zealand validates the need and demand for such a business in New Zealand.

Using elements thought throughout the MEM course, the concept of OSOLAS would be validated as a product for students in Ireland. An effective business model would support its growth.

3.2 Project Framework

From a business point of view, Jim Collins hedgehog concept framework outlines how great companies have developed a “simple, crystalline concept”. This framework has been the foundation for their business strategy and has successfully guided their operations¹⁵. This framework can also be used as the foundation to support the successful outcome of this project.

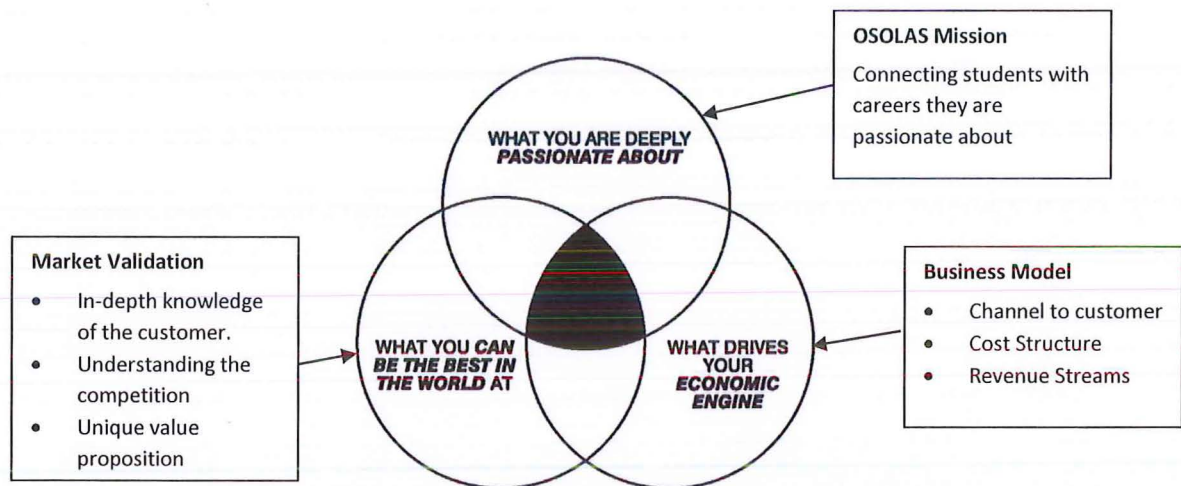


FIGURE 2 - CONNECTING HEDGEHOG CONCEPT WITH PROJECT OBJECTIVES

For OSOLAS to be great, it needs to have these three things:

1) the potential to “*be the best*” and this can be achieved through successful Market Validation. By having an in-depth knowledge of the customer and understanding the competition, the company can create a unique value proposition and niche in the market.

2) the potential to “*drive its economic engine*” and this will be achieved by Business Planning. By understanding the channels to the customer and the cost to develop and grow the product/service, the company can identify the most appropriate revenue streams.

3) to be “*passionate*”. Understanding what the company stands for. Connecting students with careers they are passionate about gives the company a purpose. Brands with a purpose do better and matter more because they have something they want to change. The connection with the customer becomes stronger because customers want to be part of that change¹⁷.

¹⁶Careers New Zealand, “Inspirational videos”, Oompher Website, <https://www.oompher.com/>, accessed January 15, 2016.

¹⁷ David Hieatt, “*DO/PURPOSE/Why brands with a purpose do better and matter more*”, (Wales: The DO book company, 2014).

3.3 Financial Position

The project did not have any initial financial backing. The student was willing to use personal saving to research and validate an offering that could help connect students to careers they are passionate about.

Following the development of a Minimum Viable Product (MVP), financial backing would be required to grow the product over a short timeframe. The business could be developed at a slower pace at the students' expense however, there is a risk that competition could produce a similar product at a greater speed. The preferred option is to secure financial backing once the website has started getting website traffic and user subscriptions.

3.4 Project Implementation Plan

In order to make the project manageable it was broken down into a number of sequential tasks as outlined in Table 1 below. Table 1 gives a comparison of the initial project implementation plan with what was actually done.

The implementation of the project has largely followed the initial plan with minor changes in the strategic positioning stage. The timeframes for the tasks varied significantly between what was planned and what was actually executed. This was largely due to set backs in the market validation process and an underestimation of how long the process takes to be executed effectively.

TABLE 1 - PLANNED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT V ACTUAL WORK DONE

#	Report Section	Actual Timeframe (days)	Initial Project Task	Planned Timeframe (days)
2	Literature Review	3	N/A	
3	Project Plan Formation		N/A	
4	Market Validation			
4.1	Market Analysis	4	1.1 Market Identification	18
4.2	Validating the Market	62	1.2 Market validation	30
4.3	Website Prototype	10	1.3 Build Website Prototype	14
5	Business Planning			
5.1	Marketing Channel	8	1.4 Marketing Plan	12
5.2	Financial Analysis	4	1.6 Strategic Positioning	9
5.3	Revenue Streams	3		
5.4	Lean Canvas	4	1.5 Business Model	8

4. Market Validation

This project involved extensive market validation to ensure the offering of OSOLAS has a viable place in the market. The components of that process are discussed in this section.

4.1 Market Analysis

4.1.1 Objective

The objective of market analysis was to define a target customer segment and to determine their size, growth and trends. Understand what the experts are saying about the target customer segment and what existing organisations are providing products/services that are addressing the customer segment needs.

4.1.2 Secondary Research

The secondary research was largely carried out based on Rob Adams "Ready" phase of market validation. This method was used as a way to determine if an idea is worth pursuing based on existing information. This statistical information on student numbers and growth rates were readily available through various government websites. Appendix A provides detailed information about the secondary research.

4.1.3 Primary Research

To learn more about the target customer segment, exploratory interviews were carried out. 15 interviews were conducted, mainly with careers guidance counsellors who work closely with the target customer segment. The objectives of the interviews were as follows:

1. Identify the structure of their interaction with the target customer segment
2. Identify what products/services they recommend the target customer segment use
3. Identify the different challenges and needs of the target customer segment
4. Build up a relationship that would support the future offerings of OSOLAS

4.1.4 Results

The results of the secondary research confirmed that there is a market need for an offering like OSOLAS. The overall size of the target market has been increasing over the last 11 years. The most recent figure was 209,999 students with an average growth rate of 54,421 students per year¹⁸.

The interviews provided some valuable data around how the potential offering of OSOLAS could fit into the career guidance sessions with the target customer segment.

Within that customer segment, 3 groups of students were identified during the interviews:

- GROUP 1 - Students who had a clear idea of what they wanted to do after secondary school and just needed help with the paper work side.
- GROUP 2 - Students who wanted to do something after secondary school but were overwhelmed with the process of choosing a tertiary level course.
- GROUP 3 - Students who did not think higher education was an option for them because of academic issues, limiting beliefs about abilities or demographic reasons.

Moving forward into the "Aim" phase of market validation, the offerings of OSOLAS decided to focus on Group 2.

¹⁸ Department of Education and Skills, "Education Statistics Database", available from <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Education-Statistics-Database/>, accessed on January 10, 2016.

4.1.5 Lessons Learnt

The market analysis phase involved reviewing a large amount of information. During the evaluation I made the mistake of trying to connect potential similarities between all three groups of students. I thought that if I could determine what is similar between the groups than I could create a product/service that each group could get value from. The outcome of that approach was a lot of time wasted trying to solve a number of problems instead of focusing on one.

The main lessons learnt include:

- **Pick one problem/issue to solve and run with it**
 - As the saying goes “Marketing to everyone is marketing to no one”. Not only do you risk creating a generic product or service that tries to relate to everyone, it is also a waste of valuable time.
- **Be able to filter information quickly**
 - While it is important to research a subject widely, I think it is even more important to quickly determine if the information you are researching can add value to what you are trying to achieve. This become easier when there is a clear problem statement because it helps maintain focus.

4.2 Validating the market

4.2.1 Objective

To build a profile of the customer that identifies their most extreme pains and gains i.e. the things that frustrate and benefit them respectively. Then use this information to create a product or service with the right set of features that has a unique value proposition, and excites the customer.

4.2.2 Information

The information used to validate a potential offering to students was captured over three stages. The information gathered was largely qualitative data to order to reflect the actual words of the customers, as suggested in Strategyzers’ Value Proposition Design³.

The first stage of data came from face to face interviews with senior (18+ years old) students and career guidance counsellors. This includes the information mentioned in the market analysis or “ready” phase, and 10 interviews carried out with senior students.

The second stage of data came from 103 surveys carried out on students currently attending higher education institutes. The structure and results of this survey are provided in Appendix B.

Data from the first two stages was used to construct a value proposition canvas, to determine a best fit product. Details of this process are provided in Appendix C.

This best fit product was then described to 10 senior students to get feedback and further validate the concept.

4.2.3 Results

Table 2 below highlights the main customer jobs and the most extreme customer pains and gains. Appendix C provides the full range of customer jobs, pains and gains.

TABLE 2 - THE MAIN CUSTOMER JOBS, PAINS AND GAINS

Customer Jobs	The main customer job is progress. Students use secondary level education as a platform to get a job or a career, whether it is through university or another form of training.
Customer Pains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students don’t feel compatible with the course they have chosen.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students don't know what careers in certain fields look like.
Customer Gains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing there are career opportunities when they are finished their course. • Knowing they are enjoying what they are studying.

The results of the value map concluded the best fit product to alleviate customer pains and create customer gains. Table 3 below outlines the best fit product and how it will alleviate customer pain and create customer gains.

TABLE 3 - SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS IN THE VALUE MAP

Best fit product	Website containing information about career options that connects students with careers they are passionate about.
How will it alleviate pain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students get a sense of what careers look like in certain career paths. • The information is linked to categories that reflect students' interests/capabilities so they can make a connection between interests/capabilities and career options.
How will it create gains?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information will expand on other career opportunities in certain career paths. • By linking interests/capabilities with career options students increase their change of enjoying their area of study.

The evaluation of all the components of the value proposition canvas lead to the following unique value proposition:

“Connecting students with careers they are passionate about”

During the third or late stage interviews, students were visibly excited when the concept and proposed features of the website were explained to them. Some of the feedback comments were:

“When will it be finished”

“Can you please send the link to the school so that we can view it”

“That’s a really cool idea. That is definitely something I would use”

Overall the objective of the “Aim” phase was achieved. The process varied slightly with that outlined by Rob Adams. Adams recommends 100 face to face interviews, however given the size of the target market this number was reduced. In total 103 surveys were carried out along with 25 face-to-face and phone interviews.

4.2.4 Lessons Learnt

This stage of the project took far longer than expected, however, the result was a concept that students got visibly excited about, which was the ultimate objective. Market validation is a long process and the following are some key lessons learnt from that process.

- **Pretend you have no product or service in mind and just aim to seek out valuable information.**
 - Eliminating bias was the most difficult part of the market validation process. I wanted my idea to be the right one and sometimes focused on information that supported my idea. It took a number of attempts to finally just focus on the important themes coming through without thinking about how my idea could provide a solution.

- **Market validation is an iterative process, don't expect your questions to be perfect first time.**
 - The great thing about the staged interview process is that it gives you time to adjust your thinking and refine the information you are looking for. Test whatever you can on a small group of people before communicating with a wider audience. This is to ensure your message is easily understood by others.
- **Before you communicate with someone ask yourself "what is in this for them"?**
 - While there are some people that are genuinely happy to give up some of their time, there are a larger portion that don't have a lot of 'free' time. Constructing emails took up a lot of time because each email was essentially a sales pitch highlighting what my offering could do for that person.
- **The squeaky wheel gets the most oil**
 - It is easy to assume that a lack of response means that people aren't interested in what you are offering. In reality, people are busy and a follow up call can get you the information you need or at least organise a set time to meet/talk. Don't be afraid to poke a little bit, just not too much.

During the MEM coursework, the class were briefly introduced to the concept of market validation, applying some of the concepts to short (1-2 day) assignments. Having gone through an entire market validation process I now feel confident about how a successful process should run and where the pitfalls are.

4.3 Website Prototype

4.3.1 Objective

The objective of developing a website prototype was to produce something tangible that could be used as a visual aid when explaining what OSOLAS was trying to achieve. It also provided a way of getting feedback and gauging interest from the target customer segment.

4.3.2 Innovation

The market validation process helped to define a unique value proposition – connecting students with careers they are passionate about. However, the format through which this value proposition would be delivered was not defined. Creating a prototype provided an opportunity to experiment with new and innovative ideas to determine the best way to connect with the target customer segment.

Drawing on information gathered from careers guidance counsellors, competitors and other research, the website prototype focused on the following:

An uplifting brand - Not one of the other organisations providing similar services to students had tried to make a connection with them through branding. Guy Kawasaki recommends that companies should establish an uplifting brand¹⁹. That is what OSOLAS aimed to do, starting with what the target customer segment would consider a "cool" logo.

A new delivery format for the information – Generally when students are provided with information about various careers options it is categorised into broad fields e.g Science, Engineering, Arts, and Humanities for example.

¹⁹ Guy Kawasaki, The Art of Branding, April 2015, available from <http://guykawasaki.com/the-art-of-branding/>, assessed January 17, 2016.

They are just words that convey very little meaning to students. When asked to come in and talk to a class of senior students in the secondary school I had attended, I was asked “what actually is engineering?” No one in the classroom was able to give any input to defining what engineering is, and to be honest, it was not something I could define easily myself. So to get students to connect with the information, they need to be lead to it through categories they understand and can relate to.

Through the interviews with careers guidance counsellors, they described the structure of the sessions they have with their students. A number of them would use aptitude tests as means of determining particular areas where students have natural abilities, as a starting point for exploring career options. So this is where OSOLAS would start too because “one can only perform with one’s strengths”²⁰.

While it may seem obvious that people tend to success by doing what they are good at, in areas that fit their abilities, it is not the case. Most students I talked to did not factor their capabilities into their decision making process when choosing a course. This lack of personal insight is something also observed by Peter Drucker who says, “very few people actually know—let alone take advantage of—their fundamental strengths”²¹.

4.3.3 Results

The logo was created through a website called 99 designs²². This website allows clients to submit a design brief, describing what the logo would be used for and what kind of customer is being targeted. The client offers a prize money amount and a number of designers provide designs over a staged process. Details of the process are provided in Appendix D.

Aptitude profiles such as O’NET Ability Profiler²³ and General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB)²⁴ measure nine job-relevant abilities that are outlined in Table 4. These abilities were used as a base to create categories for students, however the names were changed to reflect categories that students could relate to more easily. These are linked with the profiler abilities in Table 4. The table also includes categories for new disciplines that are now being valued more and more in our economy such as innovation and entrepreneurship.

TABLE 4 - THE CATEGORIES USED FOR OSOLAS AGAINST THE STANDARD APTITUDES

O’NET and GATB job-relevant abilities	Categories for OSOLAS	Incorporating new disciplines	
Arithmetic reasoning	Problem Solver	Innovation as Bright Ideas	Entrepreneurship as Do your own thing
Computation			
Spatial ability			
Form perception	Visual Voodoo		
Verbal Ability	A way with words		
Clerical Perception			
Motor Coordination	Hands on		
Finger Dexterity			
Manual Dexterity			

²⁰ Peter F. Drucker, “Management Challenges for the 21st Century” (Harper Collins: New York, 1999).

²¹ Peter F. Drucker, Managing Oneself, Harvard Business Review, January 2005, available from <https://hbr.org/2005/01/managing-oneself>, accessed January 17, 2016

²² 99 Designs, “Great Business Starts with a Great Logo”, available from <http://99designs.com/>, accessed January 29, 2016.

²³ O*NET Resource Centre, “O*NET Ability Profiler”, available from <https://www.onetcenter.org/AP.html>, accessed January 17, 2016.

²⁴ Career Research, “General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB)”, available from <http://career.iresearchnet.com/career-development/general-aptitude-test-battery-gatb/>, accessed January 17, 2016.

From these categories students are linked to information about career paths that reflect each category and areas students might be passionate about. Further details of the proposed site map are provided in Appendix E.

4.3.4 Lesson Learnt

The development of the website prototype was definitely the most enjoyable part of the entire project. The concepts and ideals developed during the validation process started to take shape, capturing the vision that OSOLAS is trying to achieve. The main lessons learnt during this stage of the project include the following:

- **Online services are a start-ups best friend.**
 - The days have past where the budding entrepreneur needs to pay hundreds of dollars for a website developer. New 'flat pack' website building solutions like Webley, Squarespace and most recently PageCloud facilitate the creation of beautiful websites at affordable prices. The same can be said for graphic design services.
- **Critical thinking is a key part of the design process.**
 - When you start creating something, especially something you are passionate about, there is a tendency to focus on all the things that make the idea great. That was why critical thinking is so important. By looking at the idea from different angles and perspectives, that creative idea can be transformed into a realistic idea.
 - Walt Disney had three stages for his design process: The dreamer, the realist and the critic. This process gave Walt Disney "the ability to take something that exists in the imagination only and forge it into a physical existence that directly influences the experience of others in a positive way"²⁵.

4.4 Summary

The objective of the market validation process was to take an idea and transform it into a product that has a unique value proposition in a specific market segment.

An overview of the process can be summarized using Bloom's Taxonomy framework²⁶ as follows:

Remembering the principals of market validation that were thought in the MEM coursework.

Understanding the market validation process in more detail in order to implement it into the project timeline. Researching and understanding the education system and how students make careers decisions as well as the wider implications of career decisions.

Applying the market validation principals to the project using surveys and interviews.

Analysing the results of the information and data gathered so that themes and relationships are recognised. In this case, analysing the severity of customer pains and gains.

Evaluating how to judge the value of the information to determine a unique value proposition.

Creating a product that addresses the unique value proposition for the target customer segment.

At this stage the market validation process has identified a product type that can be used to determine if there is a viable business case for such a product. These will be evaluated in the next section.

²⁵ Robert Dilts, "Walt Disney: Strategies of Genius", 1996 available from <http://www.nlpu.com/Articles/article7.htm>, accessed January 10, 2016.

²⁶ David R. Krathwohl, "A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview", 2002, available from http://www.unco.edu/cetl/sir/stating_outcome/documents/Krathwohl.pdf, accessed February 10, 2016.

5. Business Planning

Transforming a good idea into a great business opportunity requires an understanding of the “language of business”²⁷. This means determining the size of the opportunity or business value proposition in order to get potential supporters or investors on board.

One tool for validating an idea to ensure that it can effectively transition to being a viable business is through developing a well-thought out business model.

In this section, the business planning stage builds on the information evaluated during the market validation stage to create a complete business model that will identify:

- How to get the product to our target customer segment
- How much it will cost to develop, and
- How it could be financed

5.1 Channel to Market

5.1.1 Objective

To understand the key distribution channels to get the product ‘into the hands’ of the target customer segment, and to create a plan that details how to get it there.

5.1.2 Results

The information gathered during the “ready” phase of market validation provided insight into the lifecycles and trends of the target customer segment. This information was combined with knowledge of key events and dates in order to create a marketing plan that would build up the relationship between OSOLAS and its users. The proposed marketing plan for OSOLAS is provided in Appendix F.

The two key channels to market are through:

- Careers guidance counsellors that work with students in schools
- Social media platforms

The interviews carried out with careers guidance counsellors during the market validation stage has led to valuable relationships. Careers guidance counsellors provide a direct route to the students and their sessions allow time for students to use websites to search for careers related information.

Outside of direct sessions with careers guidance counsellors’ social media is the next most relevant platform to create brand awareness and connect with the target customer segment. The top 4 social media sites used by Irish teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 are Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter²⁸. The same social media sites are favoured in the USA with 92% of teenagers reportedly using social media daily²⁹.

5.1.3 Next steps

With the launch of the website planned for September, the next steps including the following:

- Build a minimum viable product by May 2016 and test it with a group of career guidance counsellors and senior students.
- Set up social media profiles, starting with Facebook and Twitter.
- Start building up interview database

²⁷ Wendy Kennedy, “So what? Who cares? Why you?™: The Inventor’s Commercialization Toolkit”, 2006, Canada.

²⁸ Slide Share, “The use of social media by Irish Teenagers” available from <http://www.slideshare.net/connector/social-media-survey-connector360-31-01-14-ar>, accessed January 23, 2016.

²⁹ Pew Research Center <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>, accessed January 23, 2016.

- Start developing a process for linking passions and capabilities with different career paths.
- Start collecting and sharing information that can be used to help give students practical steps for working towards a career goal such as exercises to get into the right mind-set and exercises for goals setting.

5.2 Financial Analysis

5.2.1 Objective

To estimate the financial impacts of student dropout rates on:

- The Irish government
- Tertiary education institutes
- Students and their family

To estimate the cost of developing and growing OSOLAS

5.2.2 The estimated cost of the students dropping out

Table 5 outlines the various expenses relating to a student attending tertiary education.

TABLE 5 - ESTIMATED COSTS OF STUDENTS DROPPING OUT

Source of finance	Estimated costs	
The Irish Government	Tuition for EU nationals are paid for by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) ³⁰ . The fees vary depending on the course type and tertiary education institution. They can vary from €5,873/year for courses in Law, Business and Psychology to greater than €14,000/year for courses like Medicine and Veterinary Medicine ³¹	
Student/Students family	Student contribution charge	€3000/yr. (Fixed) ³²
	Living expense including rent, travel, food, books, social etc.	€8000/yr (Variable) ³³
Tertiary Education Institutes.	Most undergraduate degree programme last for four years. When a student accepts a position on a course another student misses out on that position. If that student drops out after first year, the institute loses the opportunity cost of having a student there for the additional three years. That's three years' worth of fees as well as the student contribution charge.	

The figures provided are general estimations. They not do take account of any grants that may be awarded to a student. Apart from the students' contribution charge of €3000, all other student expenses will vary per student.

These figures do not take account of the unemployment benefits provided to students who drop out and can't find a job. This would be an additional expense on the government.

³⁰ Education in Ireland, "Tuition Costs EU (undergraduate)" available from <http://www.educationireland.com/en/How-Do-I-Apply-/Tuition-Costs-Scholarships/Fees-for-EU-Students/Tuition-Costs-EU-undergraduate-.html>, accessed January 20, 2016.

³¹ University College Dublin, "EU Undergraduate fees 2015", available from <http://www.ucd.ie/students/fees/undergrad2015.html>, assessed January 20, 2016.

³² University College Cork, "What will it cost", available from <http://www.ucc.ie/en/study/undergrad/cost/>, accessed January 20, 2016.

³³ Irish Examiner, "Cost of going to college to top €11k", July 2015, available from Irish Examiner website, accessed January 20, 2016.

5.2.3 The estimated costs of developing OSOLAS

The cost structure for running and developing OSOLAS is relatively straight forward.

The main costs for development will include:

- **Travel** – Depending on where interviewees can be sourced, travel could be the greatest expense. This expense will vary from interview to interview.
- **Recording and editing video** – This becomes expensive if it is done on a contract basis. To hire a person to record and edit the video has been quoted as up to €500 per interview. This expense could total €30,000 if the website contains 60 video interviews. This cost could be reduced significantly to approximately €3,000 if OSOLAS owned and operated the equipment.

The main costs for running and maintaining OSOLAS include:

- **Updating social media accounts** – At least 5 hours a week
- **Managing email enquiries** – This depends on how many enquiries come through but potentially 2 – 3 hours per week.
- **Networking events** – It will be important to have a social presence and constantly look out for new interview material.

The costs to apply for funding and to market the product will vary depending on type of funding being sought. These costs will be outlined in the next section.

5.2.4 Results

Based on the figures collected above OSOLAS could be developed for less than what its costs to put one student through a 4-year undergraduate degree.

5.3 Revenue Streams

5.3.1 Objective

To determine the best fit source of finance to grow and support the company.

5.3.2 Potential sources of finance

A wide range of financial options were explored for this stage of the project. A summary of the main state grants and private fund options are provided in Table 6 below. The financial options were evaluated based mainly on:

- Value of the fund
- Eligibility

The initial development of OSOLAS would be carried out in New Zealand. Is it possible to build the website prototype, create and manage social media platforms and gather and share information from New Zealand. A trip to Ireland would then be planned to market and sell the concept to students and careers guidance counsellors, and to carried out additional interviews.

A number of the state grants were discounted because there would be eligibility issues if OSOLAS was largely operated and maintained in New Zealand.

TABLE 6 - POTENTIAL SOURCES OF FINANCE

	Funding name	Funding value	Eligibility
Local Enterprise Offices (LEOS)	Feasibility Study/ Innovation Grant	€10,000	Do not qualify
Enterprise Ireland	Innovation Voucher	€5,000	Do not qualify
Social Entrepreneurs Ireland	Elevator Programme	€20,000 direct funding	Yearly commitment to attending Bootcamp and

			workshops. May not get awarded funds.
U.S Embassy in Ireland Fund	Cooperative Agreement or Grant	US\$500 – 3,000	Need to include American element.
The Irish funds	Providing access to education	Undisclosed	Qualify

Other sources of financial backing include:

- Advertising – Through ads on the website
- Sponsorship – Funds from different entities in return for promoting their business on the website
- Crowdfunding – Organisations such as fundit and kickstarter provide a platform that gives people an opportunity to donate to causes they want to support.
- Personal fund – It is an option to use personal funds to build the business up at a much slower pace.

5.3.3 Recommended source of financing

After weighing up all the potential finance options, OSOLAS will use crowdfunding as the initial method of financial backing, after a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) has been user tested.

Given that the product is in its infancy, there is a higher degree of risk associated with external investment. If OSOLAS can start developing its service with a small amount of finance, then it can start to gain traction. When the website starts to encounter more website traffic and free user subscriptions, it will be in a stronger position to seek out additional investment. The free user subscription will provide any users with the opportunity to subscribe to OSOLAS if they are interested in its offering and would like updates. When the website gets to this stage the level of risk for potential investors will be reduced, increasing the chances of getting investors on board.

Using crowdfunding as an initial source of finance also serves an additional purpose, such as the following:

- External validation – The product was validated through a small percentage of the target customer segment. By using crowdfunding as an initial method of funding, OSOLAS can introduce its concept into the wider community. If it is backed by the community, it will confirm the market validation even further.
- Connection with the community - It gives the community a sense of ownership over the project which will increase the feedback and help OSOLAS refine its offering.

5.4 Summary

Information from the market validation stage and the sections analysed in the business planning section has been the basis for the proposed business model. A lean canvas is provided in Appendix G.

While the proposed business model is not perfect it provides an initial framework to test the assumptions and findings during the course of the project. The business model will be refined and updated as the venture develops.

6. Conclusions

Overall the project was successful. The project objectives outlined at the start of the project have been achieved, some more thoroughly than others.

The project was planned out based on assumptions about how long tasks would take, without a real appreciation of what is involved in those tasks. As a result, the market validation stage took three weeks longer than originally planned, reducing the time allocated for business planning.

While there were set backs during the market validation stage, the main reason for the variation in planned time came from a lack of experience in those processes. It is hard to plan something you have never done before, which highlights the importance of 'learning by doing'.

The business planning stage yielded some good results in relation to the channel to the customer and financial analysis. However, there is still more work required to refine the costs associated with developing a MVP and applying for financial backing.

While the results of both the market validation and business planning are not perfect, I have gained valuable learning experience by going through the process. The project has served as an excellent application of theory learnt during the MEM programme.

The key observations during the project include the following:

- **The actual outcome will be different from the expected outcome** - The outcome of this project, in terms of the value proposition, is very different to what was initially planned. This highlights the merits of market validation and business planning to gain a deeper understanding of the target customer.
- **Market validation is an iterative process** – The market validation process takes a lot of time because it requires time to evaluate the information being send out as well as the data being received. The value is in the information. If you don't ask the right questions or interpret the data well, then the end result will be useless. This can be overcome by continually evaluating what information you need and improving the methods of getting it.
- **Market validation is the ultimate communicate test** - As a skill, market validation is the ultimate communication test and development tool. Any good market validation process will use the majority of communication methods and will test your verbal, written and interpretation skills. At the start of the project, I could see the puzzled look on people's faces as I explained what I was trying to achieve. There was also a lack of email responses. Through the market validation process my ideas became clearer and my argument became better articulated. As a result, conversations with people yielded more valuable information and the email response rate improved.
- **Face to face interviews are a must** - Face to face interviews really are the "gold standard"² for market validation and business planning. Supported by structured questions, face to face interviews facilitate a freer flowing conversation that leads to valuable insights. A good example of this related to the competition analysis. Information on competitors was research online as well as asking careers guidance counsellors and students what they current use as supporting guidance. Not one person mentioned Slingshot Academy³⁴. That organisation came up in a random conversation with one of the college students that filled out the survey who asked me what the survey was for. As it turns out, Slingshot Academy would be considered the main competitor and a big threat to funding options for OSOLAS.

³⁴ Slingshot Academy, available from <http://www.slingshot.ie/>, accessed January 30 2016.

7. Personal Insights

From a personal perspective, the overall purpose of this project was to have an entrepreneurial experience and explore entrepreneurship as a potential career path. The personal growth from this experience has been the most rewarding aspect of the entire project. The following personal insights are a reflection of my experiences during the project.

What I have learned about myself

A big part of this project was working completely autonomously, it has taught me a lot about myself and the way I work. As a person who relies strongly on others for advice and guidance, during this project I had to figure issues out on my own most of the time. That lack of a hand to hold was one of the best experiences of the entire project because it forced me to trust my own competencies. As a result, I am so much more confident in my ability to work autonomously.

Getting to that stage involved evaluating the processes I use to get the desired results. Oftentimes I found that those processes were ineffective or inefficient. I research or talked to people that execute those processes successfully, learned how they did it and applied their principals to my project tasks. This improved the outcome of the project tasks and milestones.

What I have learned about others

Understanding other people and the ability to reach out to other people successfully has been the biggest challenge during the project. It was a process that required a lot time and thought to improve the chances of a successful outcome, because people have different personalities, motives and values. Being aware of this helped me improve my communication skills on an ongoing basis.

As a result, the project has been very successful in terms of networking and building relationships. Many of the people I talked to were happy to recommend or provide details of other people who would be good sources of information. I think, personally, this reflects the quality and improvement in my communication skills during the project.

What I have learned about entrepreneurship

The sense of ownership and responsible that comes with being an entrepreneur defiantly encouraged me to work longer hours and even through weekends. It was a good indication of what life as an entrepreneur would potentially be like. I found that I asked myself the questions like "Would I be willing to do this long-term?", "how would this work if I had children?" and "how would this affect my other relationships?".

Asking those question was valuable because it helped me to evaluate not only what I want to achieve but to understand what I would be willing to give up to get it.

Overall, entrepreneurship is something I will pursue in the future. MEM has been an amazing catalyst for a new found drive and hunger for professional and personal growth. I know that the more I practice the teachings from people like Wendy Kennedy and Guy Kawasaki, the more I will improve professionally and personally.

8. Recommendations

Reflecting back on the project, there are a number project tasks that were executed well and a number where improvements could be made. The recommendations in Table 7 are based on a GIDA approach applied to a SWOT analysis focusing on the strengths and weaknesses for the typical MEM student against the threats and opportunities present on a typical project. See below for the top two recommendations of what to; go, improve, defend or avoid in your project.

TABLE 7 - PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

GO	Create a sense of urgency	This phrase is being used in the Kotter change model ³⁵ as the first step in the process of change management for companies. I would argue that it is also a great first step in any individual task or project. This is because time is precious and it moves quickly and before you know it, you are out of time. Creating a sense of urgency around a task can give you the push you need to start getting things done.
	Talk to as many people as you can	The people you meet on a daily basis could be potential customers, investors, partners or supporters so take any opportunity you get to share your ideas. Yes, there is a risk that someone could steal your idea but there is a greater risk that nobody thinks the problem is being addressed and might decide to address it themselves.
IMPROVE	Improve all forms of communication	Effective communication is the most important factor in the market validation process and the business planning process. This ranges from emails, phone calls, face to face interviews, survey creation, data interpretation and pitching business ideas. The most appropriate form depends on the situation and the person being communicated to. It is likely that any entrepreneur will need to use each form of communication at some point so each form should be practiced and improved.
	Critical thinking	Take the time to critically evaluate what you are trying to achieve. This is particularly important during the market validation process because the data is useless if you don't ask the right questions or don't interpret the information well. Always ask yourself, "What am I trying to achieve by asking/doing this?"
DEFEND	Have a plan and stick to it.	Every project is unique. The only surety we have is that each project has a start point and finish point and a series of tasks to achieve in between. You can estimate what is involved in each of the tasks but that is all it is, an estimation. The market validation in this project was about 3 weeks longer than planned. My plan gave the project structure which helped me refocus my efforts to ensure the tasks got done.
	Find a way to maintain motivation	There were times when I felt extremely positive about what OSOLAS could achieve and other times a felt like OSOLAS was a terrible idea. It was during the low points where having a 'higher purpose' was important because purpose feeds motivation. When I wasn't motivated to do it for myself I became motivated to do it for the students.
AVOID	Being biased about an idea or concept	Eliminating bias was the most difficult part of the market validation process. I wanted my idea to be the right one and sometimes focused on information that supported my idea. It took a number of attempts to finally just focus on the important themes coming through without thinking about how my idea could provide a solution.
	Focusing on too many problems at once	As the saying goes "Marketing to everyone is marketing to no one". Not only do you risk creating a generic product or service that tries to relate to everyone, it is also a waste of valuable time. Focus on solving one problem well.

³⁵ Kotter International, "The 8-step Process for Leading Change", 2016, available from <http://www.kotterinternational.com/the-8-step-process-for-leading-change/>, accessed February 10, 2016

APPENDIX A – Sub-report 1: Market Analysis

Executive Summary

The objective of the market analysis phase was to determine if there is market potential for OSOLAS; a resource that inspires and informs students about different career paths.

The research suggests that there is a market need for a product like OSOLAS.

The process used to analysis the market was the one recommend by Rob Adams in his “ready” phase of market validation. The key factors analysed and the results are outlined below.

Factor	Outcome
Domain knowledge	Comes from research into the topic and not experience in the industry
Market size	The current market size is 209,999 students
Lifecycles and trends	An average of 54,421 students join the target market segment annually
Competitive analysis	OSOLAS has 2 direct competitors and 4 indirect sources of competition.
External data sources	Enough to confirm that there is a problem relating to student progression from secondary to tertiary education.

The competitive analysis highlight gaps in the services of the existing competition. These gaps included:

- Information that gives students a vision of what their career could look like in the future.
- Practical tools and exercises that help students take the first steps towards achieving a career related goal.

Information from external data sources highlighted that there is a problem related to the decision making process students go through when determining what to do after secondary school.

The offering of OSOLAS will be validated further and refined during the next phase of market validation, the “aim” phase. The “aim” phase will focus on:

- The gaps in the existing services
- The problem around students choosing a college course they later regret, resulting in the student dropping out.

Introduction

OSOLAS aims to be a resource that inspires and informs students about different career options that are available to them.

In order to decide whether OSOLAS is an idea that is worth pursuing, an initial analysis of the market should be carried out. This purpose of this analysis is to identify factors and can support or threaten the idea.

Rob Adams refers to this process as the “ready” phase of market validation. He recommends that the key factors that should be analysed during this phase include the following:

- Domain knowledge
- Market size
- Lifecycles and trends
- Competitive analysis
- External data sources

This report analyses those factors to determine if there is a market for an offering like OSOLAS.

Background

Second level education in Ireland consists of two cycles: a three-year Junior Cycle and a two or three year Senior Cycle. The overall aim of second level education is to prepare students for some form of higher level education or entry into the workplace³⁶

In the third year of the Junior Cycle, students have an exam called the Junior Certificate. The Junior Certificate exam is used as a guide for the Senior Cycle. Students generally choose subjects and subject difficulty levels in Senior Cycle based on their Junior Certificate results.

Domain Knowledge

The concept of OSOLAS came from news reports and other literature that was researched relating to the issues students face in the education system. Another influencing factor was a website called Oompher. Oompher aims to “create and share amazing stories that inspire young New Zealanders to take the first step on their own extraordinary pathway”¹⁶. There is no product similar to Oompher in Ireland so a similar option was explored during this analysis.

Having little experience working in the education sector, apart from going through it as a student, there is a disadvantage towards knowledge of the area. This lack of knowledge highlighted the need to research the subject well and build up relationships with people were are experienced in the education field.

Market Size

The target market include students aged 15-20 years. This age range starts with those students in their third year of the Junior Cycle³⁷, where students start thinking about potential career options. The remainder of the age range covers those students in the Senior Cycle as well as those repeating their final year.

³⁶ Department of Education and Science, “A Brief Description of the Irish Education System”, 2004, p. 13. Available from <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/> assessed January 2, 2016.

³⁷ State Examinations Commission, “The Junior Certificate Examination”, available from <https://www.examinations.ie/?l=en&mc=ca&sc=sc>, assessed January 2, 2016.

The statistics show a fluctuation in the number of students in Junior Certificate but an overall growth rate in the Senior Cycle over the last 11 years. The latest figure is 2015, estimated the target market to be 209,999 students. Details of these numbers are provided in Table 7.

Growth Rate and Lifecycle

The growth rate of the target market is 54,421 students per year. This is an average of the number of Junior Certificate students over the last 11 years.

Trends

The growth in students in the Senior Cycle and the increase of students attending tertiary level education have highlighted the importance of career guidance services for students.

Competitive Analysis

There are a number of organisations that provide services to students that help them with their decision making process regarding course choice.

The competitive analysis identified:

- 2 direct competitors
- 4 indirect competitors

Details of these organisations is provided in Table 8.

The services provided by these organisations are available to the students for free. They are largely sponsored by state enterprises and local businesses.

Expert Opinions

Data collected and shared by others, especially from high-profile sources, helps an idea gain credibility. Any credible data that supports a new idea will strengthen a business case.

There was extensive data available relating to the subject of education. The two main areas looked at were:

1. The current issues in the education system.
2. Reasons for students dropping out of higher education

Richard Branson³⁸, Ken Robinson³⁹ and David McWilliams⁴⁰ have discussed how the current education system is outdated. Not only does it not cater to the skills needed in today's world, but it also favours a linear intelligence and lacks creativity.

The most substantial piece of research on why college students' dropout in Ireland has come from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. A key finding on why students dropout was related to students course choice¹². The findings were based on qualitative data from students that has dropped out of tertiary education institutes.

³⁸ London School of Business and Finance, "Entrepreneurship and Education: Richard Branson speaks to LSBF", available from <http://www.lsbfi.org.uk/press-and-media/news-on-lsbfi/2013/june/entrepreneurship-education-richard-branson>, accessed January 3, 2016.

³⁹ Ken Robinson with Lou Aronica, "Finding Your Element", (Penguin: UK, 2013).

⁴⁰ David McWilliams, "Our outdated education system is failing us", October 2012, available from

<http://www.davidmcwilliams.ie/2012/10/09/our-outdated-education-system-is-failing-us>, accessed January 2, 2016.

TABLE 8 - DETAILS OF THE TARGET CUSTOMER SEGMENT SIZE⁴¹

	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Junior Certificate (3rd year)											
Secondary schools	31,815	32,526	32,851	32,428	32,242	31,756	32,135	32,398	33,599	33,588	33,085
Vocational schools	13,193	13,294	13,023	12,776	11,791	11,731	11,534	12,134	11,963	12,540	12,091
Community and Comprehensive schools	9,511	9,760	9,569	9,431	9,072	9,215	9,030	9,209	9,480	9,300	9,234
<i>Total number of students at junior certificate level in second level education institutions aided by the Department of Education and Skills</i>	54,519	55,580	55,443	54,635	53,105	52,702	52,699	53,741	55,042	55,428	54,410
All Senior Cycle*											
Secondary schools	89,405	87,624	85,499	83,757	83,740	83,698	83,904	83,611	82,603	81,393	82,257
Vocational schools	39,959	38,267	36,304	34,347	33,186	32,008	31,445	30,505	29,683	29,073	29,796
Community and Comprehensive schools	26,116	25,300	24,286	23,945	23,795	23,805	23,366	23,176	22,593	21,934	22,442
<i>Total number of students in senior cycle in second level education institutions aided by the Department of Education and Skills</i>	155,480	151,191	146,089	142,049	140,721	139,511	138,715	137,292	134,879	132,400	134,495
Total number of students in target user group	<u>209,999</u>	<u>206,771</u>	<u>201,532</u>	<u>196,684</u>	<u>193,826</u>	<u>192,213</u>	<u>191,414</u>	<u>191,033</u>	<u>189,921</u>	<u>187,828</u>	<u>188,905</u>

⁴¹ Department of Education and Skills, "Education Statistics Database", available from <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Education-Statistics-Database/>, accessed on January 10, 2016.

TABLE 9 - ANALYSIS OF THE COMPETITION

Competitor	Brief Description	Target Market	Strengths	Weaknesses
DIRECT COMPETITION – These organisation provide services similar to proposed concept of OSOLAS				
Slingshot Academy	Aims to educate, mentor and inspire the next generation of young people to pursue a path in life that will make them truly happy	Students aged 15 - 19	Connects students with mentors	No online platform (yet). Students need to attend set events which have limited spaces Main focus is in the STEM disciplines
Careers Portal	Ireland’s National Career Guidance resource. Provide information to a range of different user groups each with different guidance requirements	Everybody	Provides “a day in the life of” career videos	Website has too much going on. Generalised and targets everyone.
INDIRECT COMPETITION/POTENTIAL PARTNERS – These organisation provide services that are different to OSOLAS and complement its objective.				
Qualifax	Provide the most comprehensive information on further and higher education and training courses	Everybody	Helps students find information on different courses	Not much information about specific careers
Spunout	Provide information on a range of different topics broken down into sections; education, employment, health, life and opinion	Students aged 16 - 25	Helps students develop skills in day to day issues	Not much information about specific careers
CAO	Information on how to apply for higher level courses. Facilities the online application process.	Anyone applying for higher education	Helps students view all the course options available to them in higher education	Not much information about specific careers. Most of the detailed information about various courses is linked to external websites.
Various college Websites	Most college websites	Mainly students aged 15 - 20	Gives students an idea of the course content and requirements	Not much information about specific careers after graduation.

Conclusions

Information gathered and evaluated during the market analysis phase has confirmed the following:

- A problem does exist and there are many people talking about it. Some of those are even putting initiatives in place to tackle the problem e.g. Richard Branson and Virgin Disruptors where people debate the future of education.
- There is a consistent market size and growth. One the benefits of the target market lifecycle is that there is annual turnover of numbers as the students' progress. This turnover will be valuable if OSOLAS decides to expand. The students that have already been exposed to the product could potentially be early adopters for an expanded service for students in tertiary courses other parts of the education system.
- There are a number of organisations providing career related services to students, however they focus on what students need to know about attending tertiary education. There is a lack of information about where certain career paths can lead to. There is also a lack of practical tools and exercises that students can use to start working towards career related goals. These are the gaps that OSOLAS will explore during the "aim" phase.

The market analysis phase has confirmed that there is a market for a product such as OSOLAS. The "aim" phase of market validation will focus on:

- The gaps in the existing services
- The problem around students choosing a college course they later regret, resulting in the student dropping out.

APPENDIX B – Sub-report 2: Survey creation and data interpretation

Executive Summary

Up to 8000 thousand students that have enrolled in a full-time undergraduate degree in Ireland are anticipated to drop out after their first year. One of the main reasons for this is that students feel that they have made the wrong course choice at the application stage.

This sub-report looks at the factors that influence the decision making process in order to construct a survey that will provide valuable information about the issue. This report evaluates the data obtained for the survey.

Under the theme of course choice, the survey was constructed using three sub-themes:

1. Influences on course decision
2. The quality of information students have access to at the application stage, regarding the course content and requirements, as well as information regarding potential future careers in their chosen area of study.
3. The factors that motivate students to progress from year to year.

A total of 103 surveys were completed by students currently enrolled in tertiary education. The results for each sub theme are as follows:

- When deciding on which course to choice, students were mainly influenced by what they thought was right for them as well as getting advice from others.
- Students mainly used websites to find information about their course, however their level of satisfaction with the information was slightly above average.
- Students were marginally more motivated by their potential future career.

These factors will be incorporated in the value proposition design to create a product that addresses some of the issues students face when deciding on a potential career path.

Introduction

In Ireland, up to 26% of students in Institutes of Technology and 13% of students in Universities do not make the transition from first year to second year. These figures drop down to 7% after secondary and 4% after third year⁴². There were 42,464 students that enrolled into a full time undergraduate programme in 2014/2015⁴³. Based on the dropout rate figures it is anticipated that 8,020 students will drop out after first year, with a further 2,411 and 1,281 dropping out in second and third year respectively.

In order to gain insight into the factors that influence how students successfully make the transition, a survey was carried out on students currently attending higher level education.

A survey was created to capture information relating to students expected or desired gains associated with their course choice. Under the main theme of course choice the survey focused on three sub-themes:

1. Influences on course decision
2. The quality of information students have access to at the application stage, regarding the course content and requirements, as well as information regarding potential future careers in their chosen area of study.
3. The factors that motivate students to progress from year to year.

This report evaluates the results of a survey carried out on 103 students on 16th December 2015 at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). The aim was to understand how students, that successfully progress through a higher education programme, choose an area of study.

The results will be used to create the best fit product or service that helps students pick an area of study that connects them with careers they are passionate about.

Background

During the market analysis phase there was a clear problem identified regarding student retention numbers in higher level education institutes. The main reason for this related to students being unhappy with their choice of course⁴⁴.

A research study was carried out with information obtained from 4,036 students that had 'dropped out' of higher education programmes⁴⁴. Overall there were five key themes that related to the "non-completion" of a student studies. These five key themes, in order of importance, were:

1. Course
2. Personal
3. Financial
4. Health/Medical
5. Family

⁴² Oliver Mooney, Dr. Vivienne Patterson, Muiris O'Conner, and Dr. Abigail Chantler, "A Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education", Higher Education Authority, p. 63, available from Higher Education Authority website, accessed January 3, 2016.

⁴³ Higher Education Authority, "New Entrants" 2014/2015, available from <http://www.hea.ie/node/1557>, accessed January 3, 2016.

⁴⁴ Niamh Moore-Cherry et al., "Why Students Leave: Findings from Qualitative Research into Student Non-Completion in Higher Education in Ireland", July 15, 2015, available from <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Project-4.pdf>, accessed December 22, 2015

Course choice came out as the biggest reason students left with 2,042 out of the 4,036 saying they left for course related reasons. Out of that 2,042 students, 836 said they left because they made the wrong careers choice⁴⁴.

The research study includes quantitative data from students that have dropped out of their course, provided by a number of higher education institutes. The data largely highlights the students 'pain points' or areas of concern, frustrations and challenges relating to their choice of course.

Before creating products or services that could alleviate the problem it was important to capture the students' 'gain points' i.e. those aspects of choosing a course that benefit the student or led to a desired outcome.

Making contact with students who had dropped out of higher level education to get additional information on their experience was difficult. There was however access to students who are currently studying in higher level education institutes.

Students who are currently studying in higher level education institutes provided an opportunity to capture the 'gain points'. Students that continue to progression from year to year indicate that they are happy with the course they are doing. Whatever process they used to choose their particular area of study has had the expected or desired gains for those students.

Survey Objective

The objective of the survey is to get insight into the factors that influence students to progress in their field of study from year to year.

This information can be used to make a comparison between the factors that influence students to leave higher level education and those that influence students to continue to progress from year to year. Hopefully, there is an inverse correlation between the factors that influence students to stay in higher level education and those that influence them to leave. If there is, this information will be invaluable in helping to create a best fit product or service that will connect students with careers that they are passionate about.

Survey Structure

The survey consisted of 11 questions which were structured as outlined in Table 9 below.

TABLE 10 - STRUCTURE OF MARKET VALIDATION SURVEY

Sub Category	No.	Question	Data Type
Influences on course decision	1	When deciding on my course I relied on my own opinion and what I thought was right for me	Quantitative
	2	When deciding on my course I was influenced by others e.g. parents/guardian, friends, careers guidance counsellor etc.	Quantitative
	3	I am doing this course because it was all I could do with the points I got	Quantitative
	4	Have you got anything else to add about what helped you make your course choice?	Qualitative
Availability of information	5	Before choosing my course I researched the course content and requirements	Quantitative
	6	Before choosing my course I researched potential career options in that field	Quantitative
	7	Where did you find the most valuable information on your course?	Both
	8	How would you rate your satisfaction with the information you received?	Quantitative
Motivation factors	9	I am motivated by knowing that I am enjoying learning about my chosen area of study	Quantitative
	10	I am motivated by wanting to achieve a good result and pass my exams	Quantitative
	11	I am motivated by the future career I want to have/think I can have at the end of my course	Quantitative

The questions that collected quantitative data have an answer range between 1 and 6 and generally represented the following:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Marginally Disagree
4	Marginally Agree
5	Agree
6	Strongly Agree

Testing the Survey

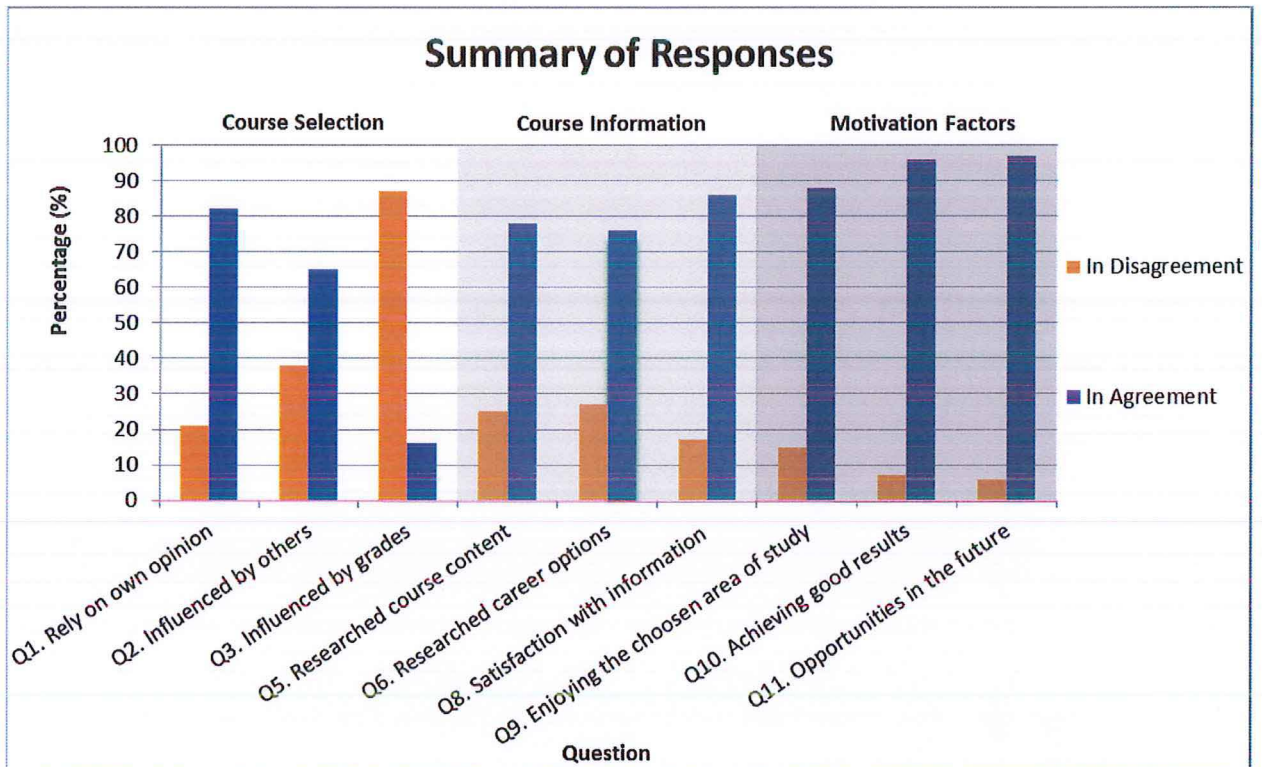
The survey was then tested on 5 students currently attending higher education institutes. The students were asked to read the questions out loud and state what they understood the questions to mean. This was to ensure that the question implied the same meaning to each student.

There were a few minor changes to the questions after the surveys were tested out on the 5 students.

The surveys were then distributed to students around a University campus.

A total of 103 students were surveyed. These students were all currently enrolled in NUIG and varied from first year to final year students. The students were doing exams during the time the surveys were conducted, as a result, there were many students who did not feel they had time to participate.

The chart below summaries the positive and negative responses of the quantitative data. “In disagreement” include those that strongly disagreed and disagreed (points 1 and 2). “In agreement” include those that strongly agreed and agreed (points 5 and 6). The responses that were marginal, points 3 and 4, were omitted from the chart.



Overall the data shows a definitive response, either “in agreement” or “in disagreement”, to all of the survey questions. These show that each of the questions relating to each of the sub themes are factors that influence students to progress in their field of study from year to year. The detailed discussion of each of the sub-themes is provided in the sections, “Course Selection”, “Course Information” and “Motivation Factors” below.

Where one student leaves because they realise that they only picked a course because a friend was doing it or a parent suggested it; another student stays because they picked a course based on what they thought was right for them.

Where one student leaves because the course wasn’t what they expected; another student stays because they researched what was involved in the course.

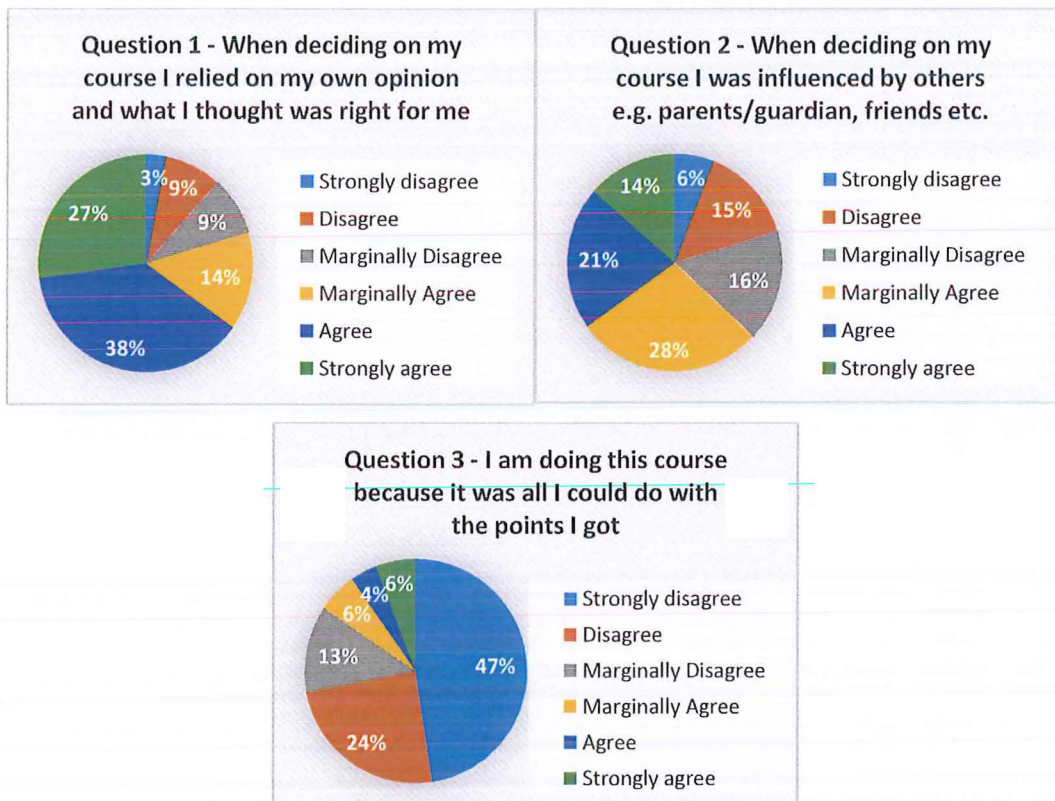
Course Selection

When it came to students choosing a course, 79% agreed that they made their decision based on their own opinion. There was a large portion, 65%, that were also influenced in some capacity by others. Only 16% agreed that their choice was controlled by their academic results.

Although the majority of students agree that they relied on their own opinion when choosing a course, they still valued or considered input from others. This could suggest the following:

- It is important for students to know that they are not making the decision on their own. Students have access to numerous resources that they can use to help them clarify their potential career options.
- Before asking for advice or assistance students should have some idea of their own interests and abilities in relation to different areas of study.

When asked about other factors that helped students make their course choice the most prominent factors included: “*job opportunities*”, “*course offered a broad range of options*”, “*best job options after college*”, “*I tried to choose a course that didn’t limit me to one career because I didn’t know what to do*”.



Course Information

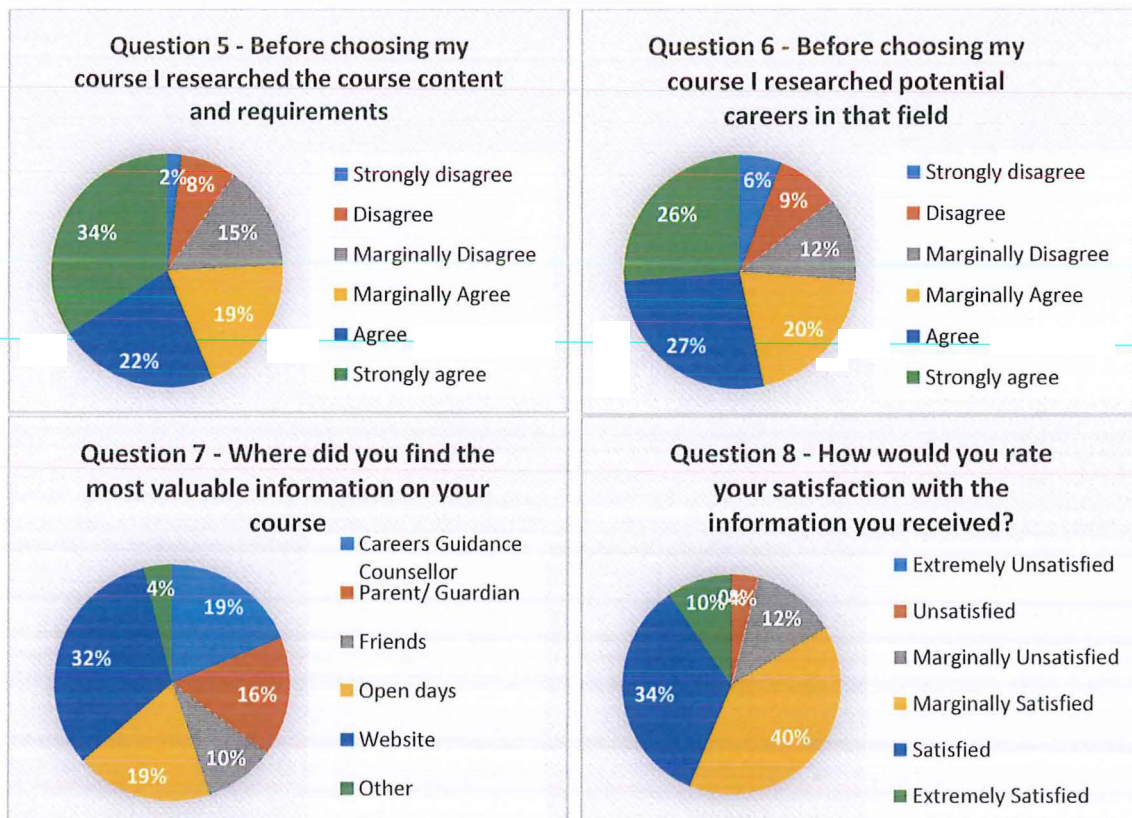
For those students currently attending a higher education institutes:

- 75% of the students agree that they researched the course content and requirements before choosing a course.
- 73% of the students agree that they researched potential future careers before choosing a course.

According to the results, the most valuable information came from websites, open days and careers guidance counsellors. Of the websites that were mentioned, the university websites were most prevalent.

This information indicates that students have taken a level of responsibility to do their own research into potential study options. The reason of this could be that students actively want to know more details about the course or that students are dissatisfied with information received from other sources.

84% of students were satisfied with the information they received, however, 40% of that 84%, were only marginally satisfied. The quality of the information provided to, or absorbed by, the students does not seem to adequately prepare them for the reality of what is actually on offer. This indicates that there is potential for improvement in the quality of information students have access to.



Motivational Factors

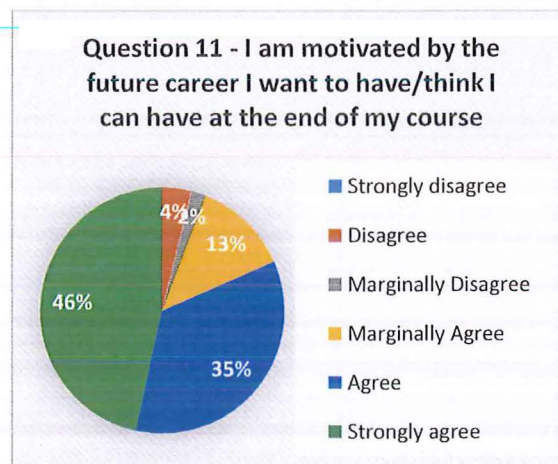
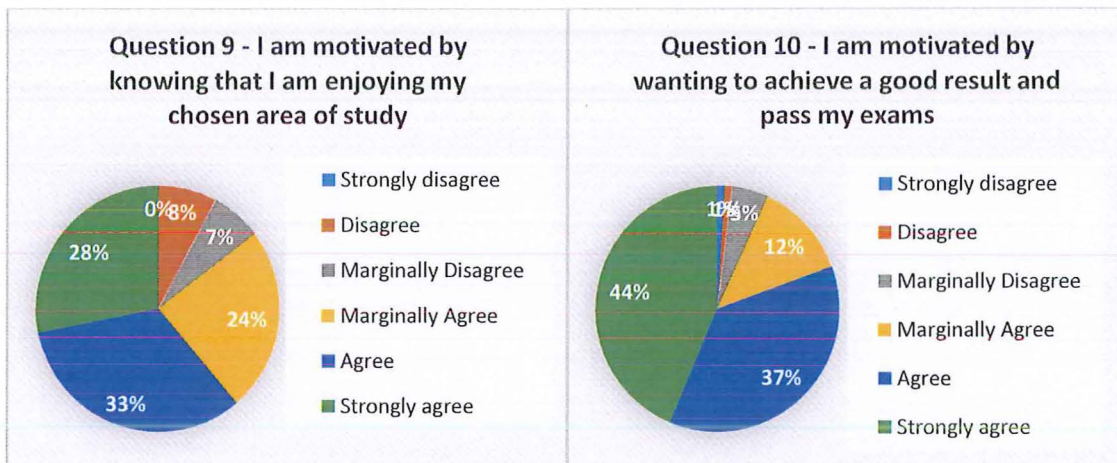
Apart from influences during the decision making process or how informed students are, it is important to understand the factors that motivate them to progress from year to year. The aim behind the motivation questions was to determine if students are more motivated by the present or the future.

From the results:

- 85% agree that they are motivated by enjoying their chosen area of study
- 93% agree that they are motivated by achieving good results and passing exams
- 94% agree that they are motivated by the potential career they could have/want to have in the future.

Overall, the students are marginally more motivated by a vision or a goal in the future.

There is potential that the results of question 10 indicate a higher level of agreement given that the survey was carried during a week of exams. Students were likely to be more motivated by passing exams this time of year than other times.



Conclusions

Overall the survey provides some insight into the factors that students use to choose an area of study successfully. These factors can be used to create products and services that help those students who don't have the same clarity.

Under the sub-themes, the main conclusions have been the following:

Students can benefit from knowing their own 'core competencies'.

Any good business will have a set of core competencies. They know what they are good at; they are aware of their abilities and limitations, and what areas require growth in order to achieve their vision or goals.

Similarly, it is important for students to understand their core competences. That way, when exposed to others opinions or advice, students can filter the information appropriately and compare it with their beliefs about what is right for them. They could also use the information to challenge or question their own beliefs. Whatever way they filter the information they need to have something to compare it to; a database of their own interests, abilities, aptitudes, values, beliefs, wants, and preferences.

Websites are good but they need to be better.

Students agree that they do research the course content and requirements as well as careers in that field of study. Students mainly do this research online, through websites, however those sources are not fulfilling those student's needs fully. Not only does this information highlight additional competition in the market, but it provides an opportunity to analyse what areas the competition is failing in.

Students benefit from having a vision or a goal in the future.

Students agree the they are more motivated by the future career they want to have/think they can have after their course. This is supported by quantitative data that suggest that students value having job opportunities after they graduate.

If students associate a particular career with good job opportunities are they more likely to choose that career? Alternative, if students associate a particular career they could be great at with poor job opportunities, they may avoid choosing that career. If job opportunities are a key factor in students choosing a course, then they should be exposed to people with successful careers in the areas they are interested in.

APPENDIX C – Sub-report 3: Value Proposition Design

Executive Summary

Through the market validation process a problem statement has been identified.

Problem Statement – *Students are overwhelmed with the process of choosing an area of study because they don't know enough information about what they want and where certain areas of study can take them.*

The purpose of this sub-report is use the information gathered through primary and secondary research to create the best fit product to address the problem statement.

A value proposition canvas was created following the process outlined in Value Proposition Design³. The most significant factors of the customer profile are outline in the following table.

Customer Jobs	The main customer job is progress. Students use secondary level education as a platform to get a job or a career whether it is through university or another form of training.
Customer Pains	Students don't feel compatible with the course they have chosen. Students don't know what careers in certain fields look like.
Customer Gains	Knowing there are career opportunities when they are finished their course. Knowing they are enjoying what they are studying.

The most significant factors of the value map are outline in the following table.

Best fit service	Website containing information about career options that connect students with careers they are passionate about.
How will it alleviate pain?	Students get a sense of what careers look like in certain career paths. The information is linked to categories that reflect students' interests/capabilities so they can make a connection between interests/capabilities and career options.
How will it create gains?	The information will expand on other career opportunities in certain career paths. By linking interests/capabilities with career options students increase their change of enjoying their area of study.

The evaluation of the data has led to the following unique value proposition:

Unique Value Proposition - *"to connect students with careers they are passionate about"*

Based on the current behaviours of the target customer segment and the current technology trends, this unique value proposition will be delivered to the target customer segment as follows:

Introduction

The value proposition canvas provides an opportunity to get a better understanding of the customers by breaking them down into their jobs, pains and gains⁴⁵. These factors are evaluated and categorised in order of importance or severity, giving a detailed understanding of the customer profile.

Products and services that relieve customer pains and create customer gains can then be identified, and through a value map they address how value can be created for the customer.

Fit between the customer profile and value map happens when customers get excited about the value proposition. This implies that the extreme pains and essential gains have been addressed well.

The product and service deemed the best fit can be prototyped and tested on the customer segment to determine if it works in the market.

This report describes the steps taken to create a value proposition canvas and determine the best fit product for the customer. The resulting “fit” will be used as the bases for developing and testing a product/service prototype in the market.

Customer Profile

The target customer segment is students aged between 15 – 20 years old. These students want to progress onto some form of further education but they are not sure what they should do.

***Problem Statement** – Students are overwhelmed with the process of choosing an area of study because they don't know enough information about what they want and where certain areas of study can take them.*

Based on the problem statement, information was gathered to construction a profile of the customer. This information was sourced from:

- Interviews carried out with students in the senior cycle of secondary school,
- Quantitative data from students who have dropped out of higher level education
- Data gathered from a survey completed on 16th December 2015 by students currently attending higher education institutes.

The information reflects the students' own words and thoughts. It was used to identify what students perceived to be their jobs, pains and gains when deciding what area of further study to choose. A summary of the customer profile is provided in Figure 3.

Customers Jobs

The information in the customer jobs section reflects what students see as their role or job in the education system. It also describes what students are trying to achieve by progressing from second level education to tertiary level education.

This information was gathered from 10 interviews with senior students currently attending secondary school. A summary of the customer jobs is provided in Figure 3.


Customer Pains

The information in the pains section reflects the bad outcomes, problems and obstacles students face when making a decision on which area of study to pursue.

⁴⁵ Alex Osterwalder, Yves Pigneur, Greg Bernarda, Alan Smith, *Value Proposition Design*, (New Jersey: Wiley, 2014)


Pain severity was ranked based on the occurrence of pain, as a way to distinguish between extreme and moderate pains. Out of data received from 4,036 students who had dropped out of their course, their reasons for leaving/pain points were ranked as follows:

TABLE 11 - LIST OF PAINS IN ORDER OF SEVERITY

Pain	Severity (based on occurrence of pain)	Extreme
Course	2,042	
Personal	737	
Financial	623	
Health and Medical	610	
Family	462	
		Moderate

Of the 2,042 students' responses that identified course as the reason they left, the associated pains with course included the following:

TABLE 12 - LIST OF MAIN PAINS IN ORDER OF SEVERITY

Pain	Severity (based on occurrence of pain)	Extreme
Wrong course choice	836	
Transferring to a different course	590	
Course interest and expectation	476	
Course difficulty	267	
		Moderate

Some of the more detailed pains associated with course and why students felt like they made the wrong course choice are provided in Figure 1.

Customers Gains

The information in the gains section reflects the positive outcomes and benefits that have lead students to choose a course they progress through from year to year.

Gain severity was ranked based on the results of a survey carried out on 16th December 2015. 103 students were surveyed regarding elements that influenced their course choice. The majority of the questions required students to choose a level of agreement towards a particular statement. The gains have been ranked based on the percentage of students that agreed and strongly agreed to the statements in the survey as follows:

TABLE 13 - LIST OF CUSTOMER GAINS IN ORDER OF SEVERITY

Gain	Severity (based on % of agreement)
Motivated by the future career they want to have/think they can have	81
Motivated by achieving good results/passing exams	81
Choose the course based on own opinion of what was right for them	65
Motivated by knowing they enjoy their chosen area of study	61
Researched the course content and requirements	65
Researched potential careers in that field	53
Other people help influence course choice	35

These gains along with some other detailed gains are provided in more detail in Figure 1.

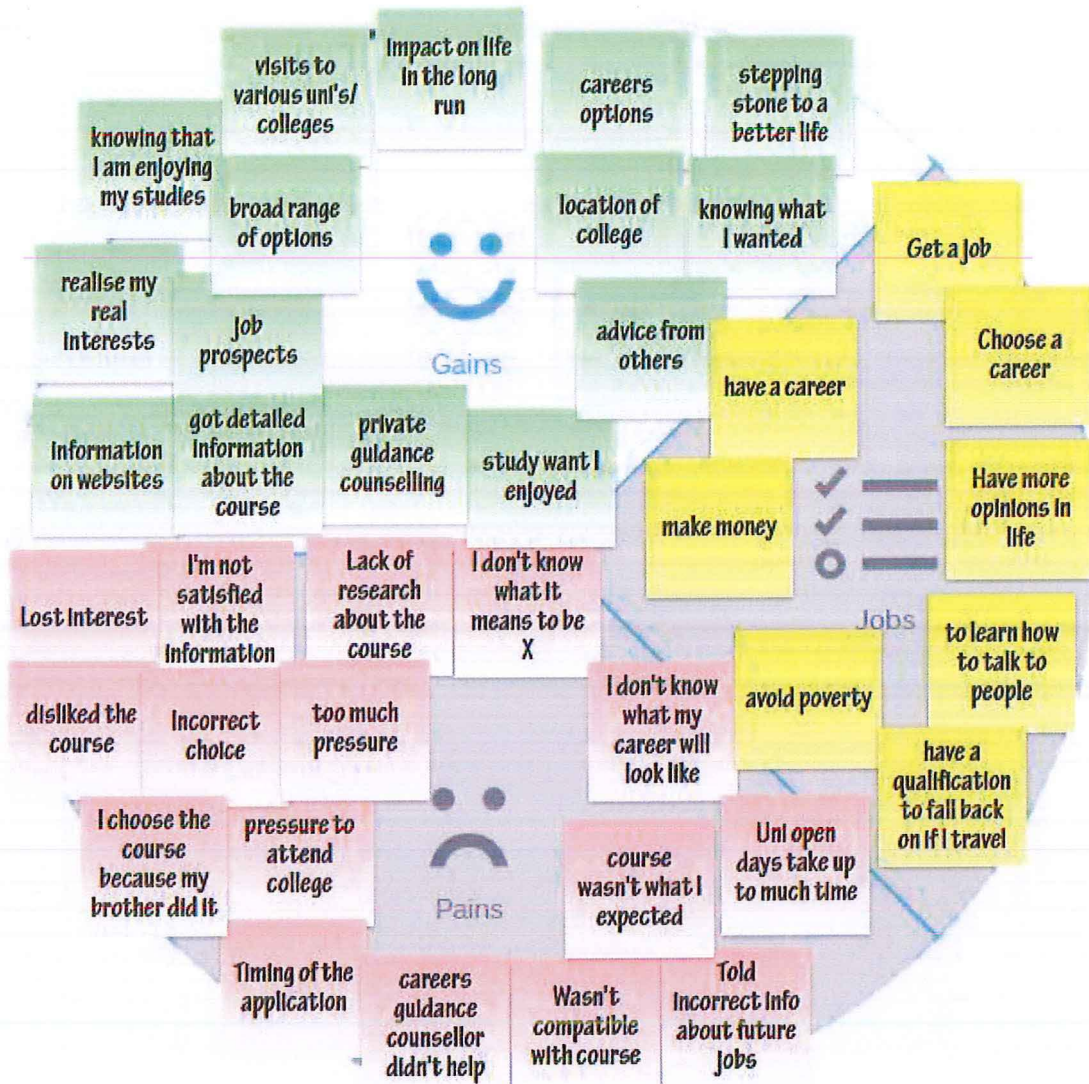


FIGURE 3- CUSTOMER PROFILE

A value map produces a list of products and services that create value for a specific customer segment by creating gains and relieving pains³. Built on from the customer profile, the value map helps determine what product/service is the best fit to alleviate the customers' problem.

Products and Services

Based on the market validation data, the products and services can be broken down into three areas:

- Products or services that help students realise their interests, areas of study they would enjoy or what they value in a future career. These products and services focus on helping the student choose an area of study that *they* want or think is right for them.
- Products or services that provide students with detailed information about their course content or course requirements. These products and services help students become more aware of what they should expect from their course.
- Products and services that provide a vision of the future. These products and services help students get a sense of what careers in a certain field look like and could look like in the future. What are the opportunities in those fields and where are the areas for growth.

These products and services are a combination of online tools, mobile apps, on-site learning experiences (workshops), and online learning experiences. A list of these products and services are provided in Figure 2, the value map.

Pain Relievers

Part of creating the value map involved making a connection between the customers' pains and how any offering can relieve those pains or annoyances. Pain relievers outline how potential products or services intend to eliminate or reduce customers' pains. These pain relievers are outlined in Figure 4.

Gain Creators

Similar to pain relievers, gain creators make a connection between the customers' gains and how any offering can benefit the customer. Gain creators outline how products or services can create, expected or desired gains.

Both pain relievers and gain creators focus on the most extreme pains and gains and how they can be addressed extremely well.

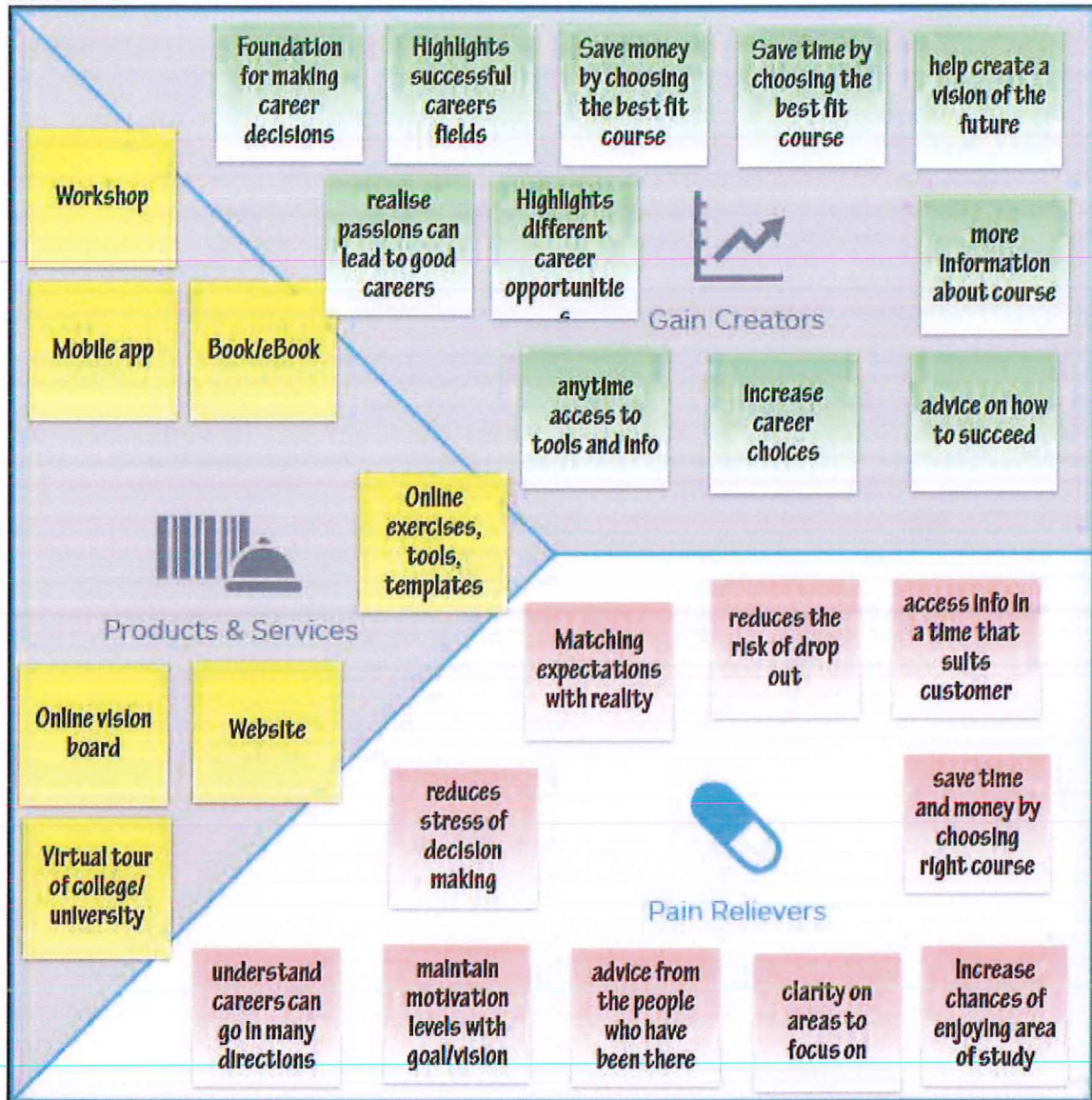


FIGURE 4 - THE VALUE MAP

Achieving Fit

Ultimately the best fit product/service is the one that addresses the essential customer pains and gains and customers get excited by the value proposition. There were additional factors that were considered to ensure that the product/service didn't limit accessibility and that it clearly differentiated from other competing products. These factors include:

- Channel to customer
- Customer behaviours
- Competition

Channel to customer

The list of products/services ranged from workshops with customer segment, ebooks, mobile apps and website offering.

Services like workshops meant reaching out to one school at a time. There are 732 secondary schools in Ireland⁴⁶ which means it would take 732 workshops to reach every student in the target user group.

A website based resource increases the chances of reaching the majority of the target user group. From the 16th December survey results we know students are using websites to find information about potential career options. Therefore, students actively looking for information are likely to use website based service as a preference over other services.

Interviews carried out with careers guidance counsellors gathered information about the structure of their interactions with students. Their sessions generally included time spent in a computer lab surfing through websites that provide information about higher level education and the courses they offer. This is a beneficial channel to get to students who lack self-motivation to start looking for information.

Customer behaviours and habits

Social media will be a key resource to create brand awareness and connect with the customer. A website based resource can be easily linked to various social media sites. The top 4 social media sites used by Irish teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 are Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter⁴⁷. The same social media sites are favoured in the USA with 92% of teenagers reportedly using social media daily⁴⁸.

One of the customer pains identified was time pressure, particularly during the final year in secondary school and the lead up to exams. During an interview one student said, "University open days take up too much time". To gather information about different courses at university open days' students need to free up hours of their time to travel to the event and find the appropriate information. A website based resource means students can access the information at a time that fits in with their schedule.

The competition

Another important factor to consider when choosing the best fit product/service is understanding the competition. What are they doing, how well are they doing it and most importantly, what are they not addressing. A competitive analysis was carried out during the market analysis stage and has been further developed from information received during the primary research.

⁴⁶ The Department of Education and Skills, "Annual Statistics Report 2014/2015", available from <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/>, accessed January 10, 2016.

⁴⁷ SlideShare, "The Use of Social Media by Irish Teenagers", 2014, available from http://www.slideshare.net/con_nector/social-media-survey-connector360-31-01-14-ar, accessed January 10, 2016.

⁴⁸ Pew research Center, "Teens, Social Media and Technology Overview 2015", available from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>, accessed January 10, 2016.

Development of the value proposition canvas has led to the following:

Value Proposition – *Connecting students with careers they are passionate about*

Getting students to think about their capabilities and what they are passionate about, and linking those capabilities and passions to various careers.

Table 13 below highlights the main customer job and the most extreme customer pains and gains used to determine the unique value proposition canvas.

TABLE 14- LIST OF MOST SIGNIFICANT COMPONENTS OF THE CUSTOMER PROFILE

Customer Jobs	The main customer job is progress. Students use secondary level education as a platform to get a job or a career whether it is through university or another form of training.
Customer Pains	Students don't feel compatible with the course they have chosen. Students don't know what careers in certain fields look like.
Customer Gains	Knowing there are career opportunities when they are finished their course. Knowing they are enjoying what they are studying.

A results of the value map concluded the best fit service to alleviate customer pains and create customer gains. Table 14 below outlines how.

TABLE 15 - RESULTS OF THE VALUE MAP

Best fit service	Website containing information about career options that connect students with careers they are passionate about.
How will it alleviate pain?	Students get a sense of what careers look like in certain career paths. The information is linked to categories that reflect students' interests/capabilities so they can make a connection between interests/capabilities and career options.
How will it create gains?	The information will expand on other career opportunities in certain career paths. By linking interests/capabilities with career options students increase their change of enjoying their area of study.

The information will be collected through interviews with people seen as successful in various careers, as the best fit people to pass on such information. The information will capture:

- Why they started.
- How they started
- Where they are now
- Advice or first steps for students thinking about a career in that area

Unexpected gains

The unexpected gains are what Professor Randy Pausch refers to as "head fake", which is the hidden objective of teaching someone a valuable lesson under the pre-tense of learning something else⁴⁹. Understanding the importance of being passionate about what you do and personal determination or resilience will be the "head fake" lessons that come through in the interviews.

⁴⁹ Randy Pausch and Jeffrey Zaslow, *The Last Lecture*, (Great Britain: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008).

Information delivery method

There are a number of methods that can be used to deliver the information to students, however the preferred method of delivery is through video. Information will be recorded and made available through video.

The following statistics highlight how video is an important trend to utilise:

- The average internet user spends 88% more time on websites with video.⁵⁰
- Using videos on landing pages can increase conversion by 80%.⁵¹
- Using the word "Video" in an email subject line boosts open rates by 19%, click-through rates by 65%, and reduces unsubscribe rates by 26%.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Steve Olenski, "Using Video In Marketing: Why Wouldn't You," Forbes September 2015, available from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/steveolenski/2015/09/10/using-video-in-marketing-why-wouldnt-you/#2715e4857a0b64844f996a9f> accessed January 10, 2015.

⁵¹ Unbounce, "The Benefits of Video on Landing Pages", available from <http://unbounce.com/landing-page-articles/the-benefits-of-using-video-on-landing-pages>, accessed January 10, 2015



APPENDIX D – Logo Design Process

Logo Design Process

The logo was created through an online website called 99 designs. This website is a medium through which anyone can launch a design contest where any designers interested in the project can put forward designs. The main stages in this process were as follows:

1. Create a design brief – This includes what you intend to use the logo for, colours you are interested in, target audience, styles you like etc.
2. Client selects the value of the prize – This prize packages range from €279 to €1,099 and reflect the experience level of the designers.
3. The first round of the contest is launched
4. Client picks favourite designers
5. Favoured designers compete in final round
6. Client picks a winning design.

First Round

The first round allowed multiple designers to read the brief and put forward a design. This stage lasted 5 days. Over the course of the 5 days the designers get feedback on their designs and make some changes to their design.

In the first round there were 38 different designs submitted from 13 designers.

Final Round

After the 5 days, up to 6 designers can be chosen to be finalises. If you confirm finalises you guarantee the prize money will be awarded to one of the designers. If you don't like what you see in the first 5 days so can cancel your contest and get your money back.

Once finalises are chosen, they have 3 days to submit new logos or modify old ones.

I picked 4 designers for the final round.

Picking a Winner

After those 3 days the designers cannot submit any more work. The client has 14 days to select a winner. In this time, or anytime beforehand, the client can run a poll. This allows friends, family, colleagues etc. to help the client make a decision.

The final designs I choose for the poll are provide in figure 5 below.



FIGURE 5 - LOGO DESIGN FINALISTS

Winning Design

The winning design was the favourite among those that took part in the poll. This is the logo in Figure 6 below.

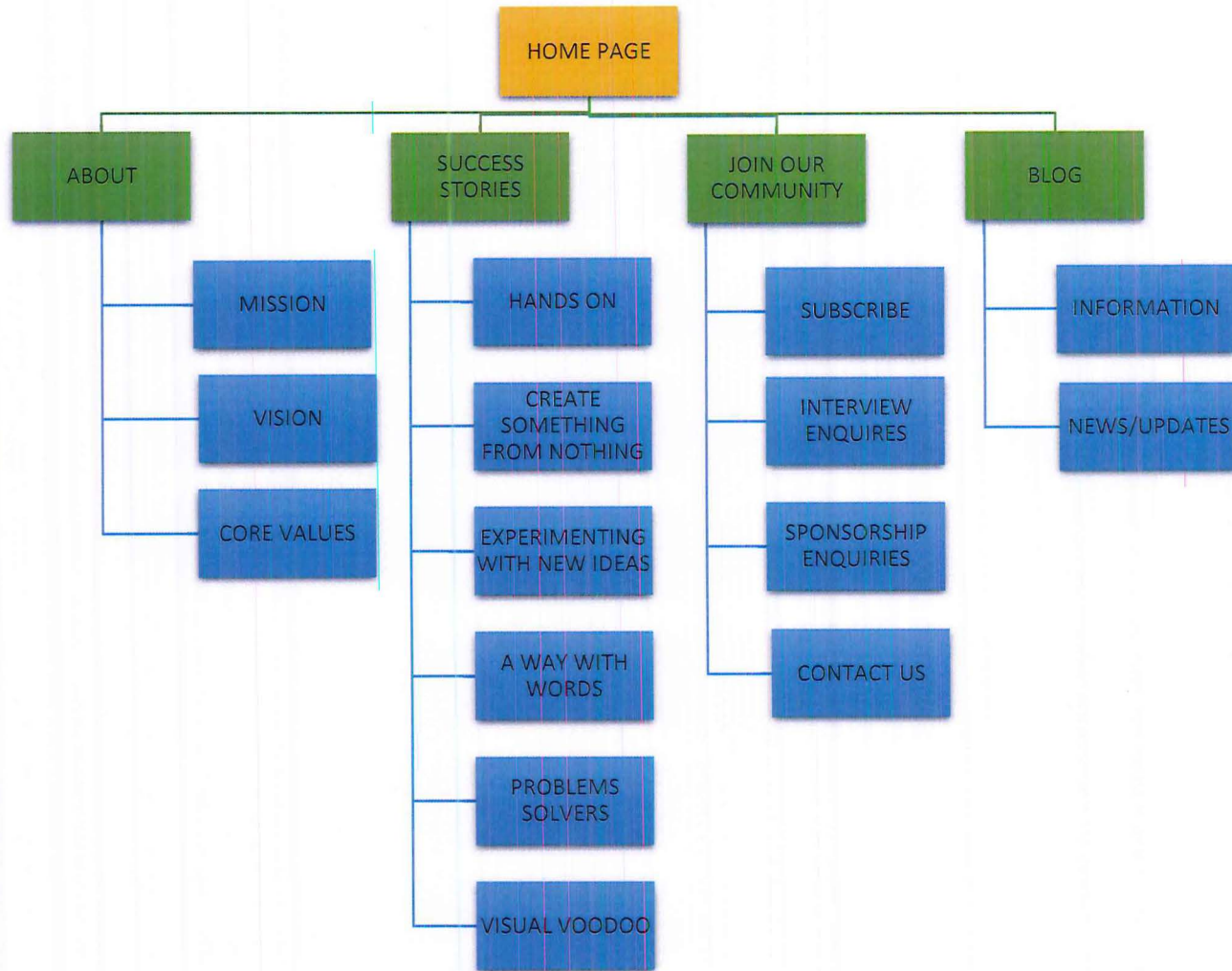


FIGURE 6 - LOGO FOR OSOLAS



APPENDIX E – Website Prototype

THE SITE MAP FOR THE OSOLAS WEBSITE





HOME PAGE – WELCOME VIDEO

Albert Einstein wrote, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

Not everyone is built to do the same thing. Some of us are good with words, some of us think in pictures and some of us just need to get in there and start doing things.

Whatever it is that you are good at and that you are passionate, there is a career worth fighting for.

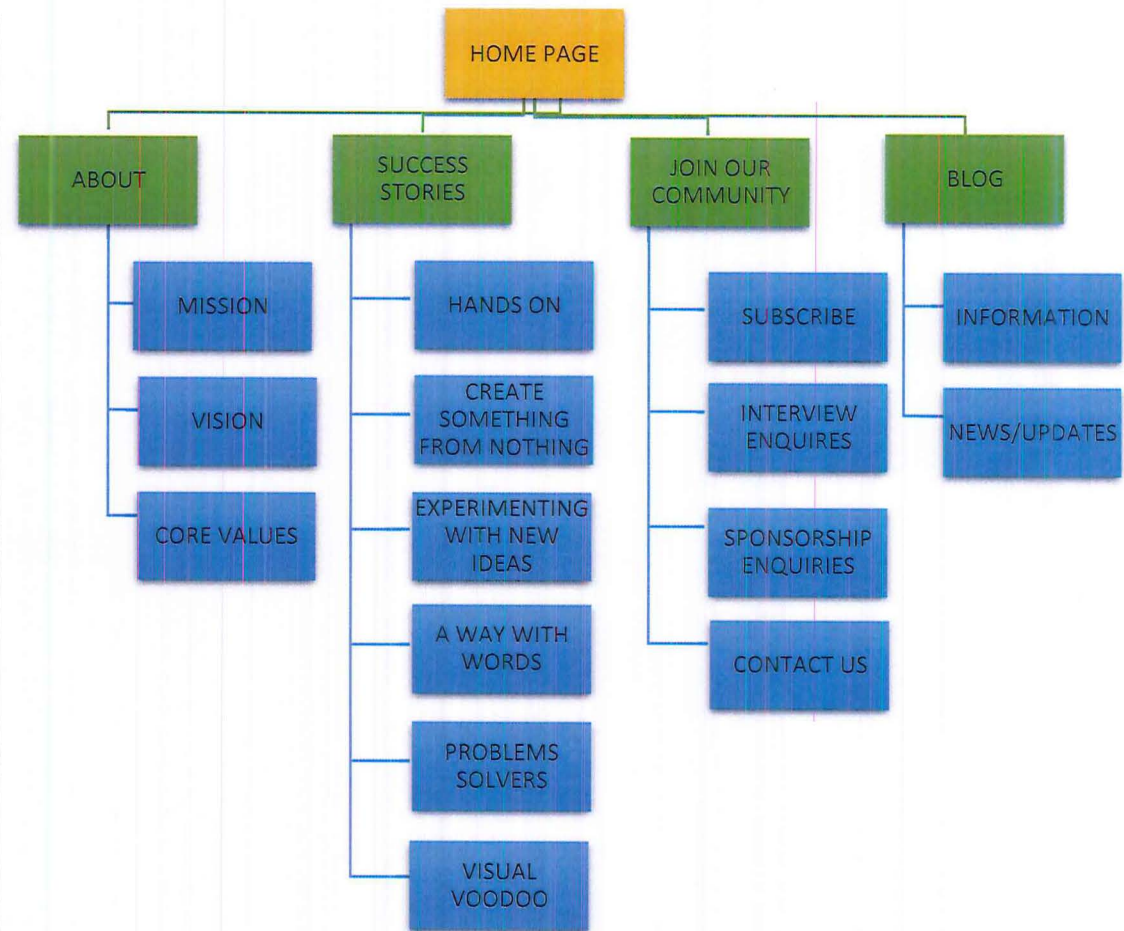
OSOLAS provides a vision of what your career could look like in different fields.

Learn from those who have been successful, where they started from, where they are today and the important lessons they learnt along the way.

These stories provide a vision of where your passion can take you. It is just one route of many to get to where you want to be.

Once you have a better idea of where you would like to go, you can make the most of the opportunities available to get you there.

All it takes to start is one step forward, test the water and dive in if it feels good.





OSOLAS – DETAILS OF WEB PAGES

OSOLAS



ABOUT

MISSION

Connecting students with careers they are passionate about by sharing advice from those who have succeeded in their chosen field.

VISION

For students to choose a career path that reflect their capabilities and passions so that they can have a successful career they enjoy.

CORE VALUES

The world around us is changing. There have never been so many opportunities for students to chase. To choose the opportunities that suit them best, it is important to have:

Vision, Passion and Determination

OSOLAS can help you better define and achieve yours.

SUCCESS STORIES

While most career fields are organised by discipline, OSOLAS aims to connect students to careers (or disciplines) through different capabilities.

Instead of trying to understand every course in Science or Business or Humanities etc. start by playing to your strengths and interests so you can link those factors to a suitable course that utilises those strengths in different fields.

Each capability category has interviews with people in a broad range of careers fields.

They share why they started, how they started, where they are now and what they have learnt along the way.

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

OSOLAS exists for students, to connect students to careers they are passionate about. We are committed to continuous improvement and growth.

In order to do that, your feedback is invaluable. Get in touch with your ideas or thoughts about who we could interview or career fields you want to explore.

Everything in life is more fun with someone to share it with and we want people to join this journey with us. Get in touch if you want to team up or support the OSOLAS community.

Stay connected to new and exciting stories from OSOLAS. Subscribe to get all the latest news and updates.

BLOG

This is a space where we share what we are up to.

The blog space will also provide information to help you take those first steps, like understanding yourself, getting into the right mindset for the best start, and how to set goals.



OSOLAS



OSOLAS – FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL TOOLS

The videos provide a potential vision of the future for students. They are a guide to show them the careers they could have in a certain areas and the ones they never though existed.

The videos are proof that people can make careers out of their passions.

The ideal situation is for students to view a video that matches their criteria and for them to be inspired to aim towards a certain career.

When that happens it will be important to give students advice/tools/exercises to help them take the first steps. Otherwise the career in the video is just a dream. Helping them take the first steps will help students to start planning and give their goal some momentum.

The advice/tools/exercise will cover topics such as:

- Getting in the right mind-set
- Identifying strengths
- Goal setting
- Changing prospective of failure

ADDED EXTRAS

To increase the website traffic and user subscription numbers, OSOLAS will aim to offer a small scholarship.

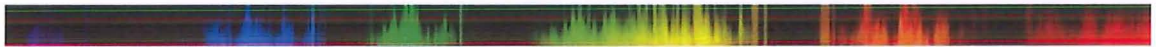
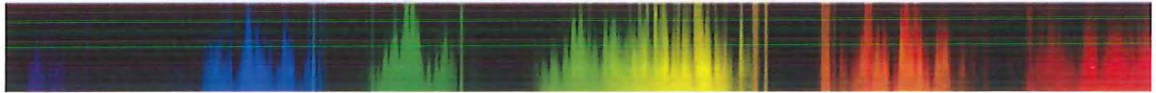
This will be a sum of money that will go towards helping a student on a path they are passionate about.

For example, if a student wants to pursue a career in sports and has taken steps towards that goal already or has proven talent in that field. OSOLAS will provide money towards that goal so that the students can get invest in something that supports that goal.

APPENDIX F – Marketing Plan



Marketing Plan



OSOLAS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Students in Ireland aged between 15 – 20 years old are making decisions about further education after secondary school. One of the main decisions students make is what course they should select as a potential future career option.



Many students find this decision overwhelming and their lack of knowledge around course choice is reflected through an increasing number of students dropping out of tertiary education.



OSOLAS provides a way to help connect students to careers they are passionate about. This will be achieved through a website-based resource that contains advice from people who have made their passion their career. The advice is portrayed through video interviews.



The website is free for students' access and use.



The main channels to the students will be through:

- Their careers guidance counsellors, and
- Social media

The website aims to be launched in September and this will be supported by a series of post-social media "hype". The website will be launched with 12 interviews. Following that, one interview will be realised each week until there is a database of 60 videos.



TARGET MARKET



The target market is students in secondary schools, aged between 15 – 20 years old, that are making decisions about potential career options.



These students are interested in progressing on to tertiary education or some other form of training, but are overwhelmed by the decision making process.



Market Size - The current total target market size is approximately 209,999 students. This covers 3rd year to final year of secondary school.



Life Cycle and Trends

- 54,000 students (approximately), entering 3rd year of secondary school, will join the target customer segment each year.
- 54,000 students (approximately) leave secondary school each year
- 42,464 students enrol in full time undergraduate courses (2015 statistic)
- 8,020 students will drop out after first year (based on dropout %).
- 2,411 students will drop out after second year (based on dropout %).
- 1,281 students will drop out after third year (based on dropout %).



CUSTOMER PROFILE



The students in the target customer segment are at a stage in their education where they need to start making decisions that influence their potential career path.



One of the major decisions is choosing a course in a tertiary education institute. The majority of students find this task overwhelming and pick course for the wrong reasons. The result is high drop out rate between first and second year.



MAIN CUSTOMER SEGMENT **PAINS**

- Students don't feel compatible with the course they have chosen.
- Students don't know what careers in certain fields look like.



MAIN CUSTOMER SEGMENT **GAINS**

- Knowing there are career opportunities when they are finished their course.
- Knowing they are enjoying what they are studying.



OSOLAS



VALUE PROPOSITION

“To connect students with careers they are passionate about”

- Students can connect the things they love doing with successful careers in that field
- Covers a broad spectrum of careers fields, including those outside of Universities and other colleges
- Supported by practical tools and exercises that students can use to take the first steps towards their ideal career

OSOLAS



MARKETING MIX

PRODUCT

A website based resource that contains a series of video interviews with people who have made a career doing something they love. They will provide advice that help students aim for something similar.

PRICE

FREE for student to access and use.

PEOPLE

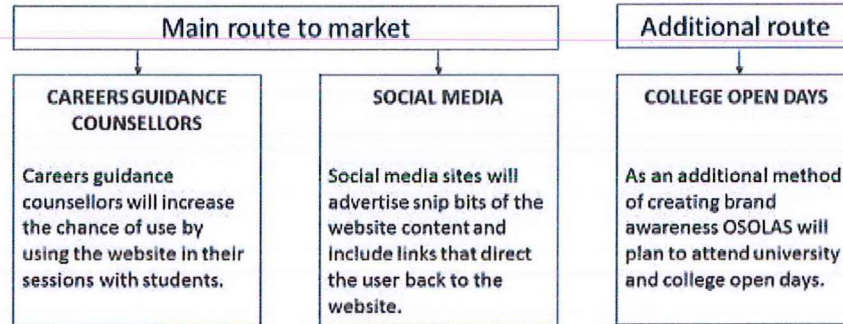
Our mission and vision is centred around our customers. We will ensure that we have the right people giving the right advice to students.

PROCESSES

The website will contain an option that students can use to provide feedback so that the site can continually improve its service.

ROUTE TO MARKET

The key resources that will be used to create brand awareness and connect with the target customer segments are highlighted below.



COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

Competitor	Brief Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
DIRECT COMPETITION – These organisation provide services similar to proposed concept of OSOLAS			
Slingshot Academy	Aims to educate, mentor and inspire the next generation of young people to pursue a path in life that will make them truly happy	Connects students with mentors	No online platform (yet). Students need to attend set events which have limited spaces Main focus is in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) disciplines
Careers Portal	Ireland's National Career Guidance resource. Provide information to a range of different user groups each with different guidance requirements	Provides "a day in the life of" career videos	Website has too much going on. Generalised and targets everyone.
INDIRECT COMPETITION/POTENTIAL PARTNERS – These organisation provide services that are different to OSOLAS and complement its objective.			
Qualifax	Provide the most comprehensive information on further and higher education and training courses	Helps students find information on different courses	Not much information about specific careers
Spunout	Provide information on a range of different topics broken down into sections: education, employment, health, life and opinion	Helps students develop skills in day to day issues	Not much information about specific careers
CAO	Information on how to apply for higher level courses. Facilitates the online application process.	Helps students view all the course options available to them in higher education	Not much information about specific careers. Most of the detailed information about various courses is linked to external websites.
Various college Websites	Most college websites	Gives students an idea of the course content and requirements	Not much information about specific careers after graduation.



OSOLAS

MARKETING STRATEGY



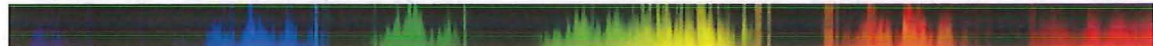
The website will be launched in September, when students in Ireland return to school after their summer break.

The website will be launched with two interviews in each category. Following the launch, one video interview will be added to the categories each week until there are 10 interview in each category. There is be additional videos added around January/February 2016. This is when students apply for tertiary education.

The time between March and September will be used to collect the interview contain as well as information to provide online exercises and tools.

During the time between June and September, OSOLAS will realise snip bits of what is to come in September through the social media sites. The aim of this is to build up a curiosity and interest around the website.

Social media posts will be supplied weekly between June and September, and then twice weekly from September onwards.



OSOLAS

MARKETING STRATEGY



Schedule for marketing activities

Marketing Activities 2016 - 2017	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May
Website launch with 12 videos				X								
Weekly video realises				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Additional video realises								X	X			
Social Media	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Communication with careers guidance counsellors			X	X	X			X	X			
College open days									X	X	X	



APPENDIX G – Lean Canvas

OSOLAS - Business Model – Lean Canvas

<p>PROBLEM</p> <p>Students don't know where certain careers can take them</p> <p>Students don't know where to begin the process of choosing a career path</p> <p>Students don't have the practice tools to work towards a career goal</p>	<p>SOLUTION</p> <p>Show students, through video interviews, what careers in certain fields can look like</p> <p>Help students start the process of making a decision starting with their abilities and passions</p> <p>Provide students with tools and exercises</p>	<p>UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION</p> <p>Connecting students with careers they are passionate about</p>	<p>UNFAIR ADVANTAGE</p> <p>unique video footage and website content</p> <p>Interviewees</p>	<p>CUSTOMER SEGMENTS</p> <p>Students aged between 15 - 20 years old that are trying to decide on a career path</p> <p>Careers Guidance Counsellors - user</p>
<p>EXISTING ALTERNATIVES</p> <p>Careers Guidance Counsellors</p> <p>College open days</p> <p>College websites</p>	<p>KEY METRICS</p> <p>Website traffic</p> <p>User Subscriptions</p> <p>Reduction in number of students dropping out of college</p>	<p>HIGH-LEVEL CONCEPT</p> <p>Career based Ted talks for teenagers</p>	<p>CHANNELS</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Career Guidance Counsellors</p>	<p>EARLY ADOPTERS</p> <p>Students curious about career options</p> <p>Students confused about what to do</p> <p>Students overwhelmed with the process</p>
<p>COST STRUCTURE</p> <p>Camera Equipment - 2,000 euros (Fixed)</p> <p>Workshops on video editing - Fixed cost</p> <p>Travel to and from interviews - Variable cost</p> <p>Managing websites and social media platforms - Variable Cost</p>		<p>REVENUE STREAMS</p> <p>Crowdfunding - Initially</p> <p>Advertisement/Sponsorship - Long term</p>		

Lean Canvas is adapted from The Business Model Canvas (BusinessModelGeneration.com) and is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Un-ported License.