

# Bridge to Employment Success Story

## BTE Success Story

Limerick, Ireland

March 2023

### Why BTE?



The BTE Limerick, Ireland program focused on two schools with Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) designations due to the high level of disadvantaged students they serve. The BTE Limerick program commenced in 2019 and was designed to help second-level students foster a positive attitude about the science/healthcare industry and to create pathways for them to enroll and succeed in university, other third-level colleges and/or further education such as apprenticeships. It also aimed to support the education of at-risk students through providing them with enhanced

academic and real-world experiences and post-secondary education preparation.

The 50 participating students gained skills, knowledge and insights into pursuing higher levels of academic progress. In addition, they were exposed to a broad array of careers to inform their future trajectories. The BTE program supported the students to:

- Apply to third level education.
- Increase their interest in pursuing careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Manufacturing, Design (STEM2D) and/or Healthcare sectors.

One BTE partner talked about how numerous students in Limerick do not typically have exposure to businesses in the region or the opportunities within those businesses. The students “have ambitions” but they “just don’t see a place for themselves.” The BTE program aimed to help the students see that whatever goals they wanted to achieve, BTE was there as a source of support, encouraging them stay in school and equipping them with tools and knowledge to create a plan for their future.

BTE is designed specifically to provide these types of college and career readiness exposure opportunities to students. Working together, Johnson & Johnson, secondary and postsecondary schools, and community organizations develop programs that feature academic enrichment, career exploration and readiness activities, and post-secondary education preparation activities. They aim to increase the number of students enrolling in post-secondary education and pursuing careers in STEM2D or health care.

## BTE: A Catalyst for College & Careers

The BTE Limerick program recruited 50 students to become participants in the program – 25 from Ardscoil Mhuire (ASM) and 25 from Thomond Community College (TCC). All students who were in Year 4 or a transition year at both participating schools were invited to apply to the BTE program. Participants were then selected by lottery.

In order to improve students’ academic achievement, BTE Limerick provided academic supports and enrichment, including Leaving Certificate subject revision courses to prepare for exams. To encourage students to consider pursuing higher education, the program offered skill-building workshops, recorded lectures from universities, and provided introductions to third-level admission processes. To assist students in exploring their education or career paths, the students received support in career planning, interview skills, and motivation. BTE Limerick students also had the opportunity to interact with the local Johnson & Johnson company site through workshops and week-long work experiences to get exposure to healthcare and science fields.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine occurred during the majority of the program’s duration, the BTE partners also emphasized the importance of checking in with students to find out what they needed. One partner commented, “I would really encourage any site to do that, to try and learn [from students]... I think we can get carried away with, ‘Oh, we're going to get this done’ and then along the way, students can kind of get lost in the noise of it all. I think it's really important to engage with them and ask them what they need.”

## SITE PROFILE

**Location**  
Limerick, Ireland

**Grant Period**  
2019 - 2022

**Sponsor**  
Johnson & Johnson  
Vision, Limerick

**Coordinator**  
Junior Achievement  
Ireland

**Community Partners**  
University of Limerick,  
Thomond Community  
College, Ardscoil Scoil  
Mhuire

**Volunteers**  
26 volunteers

**Students Directly Served**  
50 students  
100% completion rate

## Impact of BTE

Of the 50 students who started BTE, all 50 (100%) completed the program. Almost all (98%) took the Leaving Certificate Examination, which is used in Ireland to determine university matriculation. Eighty percent of BTE students were accepted into the 3rd level institution of their choice.

Due to the pandemic, BTE Limerick partners were not able to provide many of their planned activities to students. However, students were able to participate in a one-week work experience opportunity at J&J before quarantine. One of the BTE partners explained that this opportunity enabled students to see how J&J STEM careers were possible for them. She mentioned how one student became fascinated by robotics as a result and plans to study it in third level. Another student became interested in the business side of a STEM company.

Other areas of growth included students' soft skills, such as communication and presentation skills, and increased confidence. A BTE partner stated that it was "extremely rewarding" to see the students' confidence grow and witness them seeing a place for themselves in future careers.

The BTE students shared, in focus groups, that being a part of BTE informed them of the wide variety of career options that are open to them in the health/science sector and also made them more aware of the options available to them after secondary school. They found the site visits, work experience, and Birkman assessment (to determine careers best suited to them) to be some of the most beneficial program components.

All of the BTE students in both schools indicated the program increased their awareness of jobs in math, science, and healthcare. The surveys and focus groups indicated their increased interest in pursuing further education or an apprenticeship after their second-level schooling.

## STUDENT OUTCOMES

**100%** of BTE students completed the three-year BTE program

**98%** of BTE students undertook a Leaving Certificate Examination

**Over 15%** of BTE graduates are eligible for Level 8 (an Honors Degree HE course)

**100%** of BTE graduates reported being aware of health careers

**76%** of BTE students reported that they plan to pursue a health or science related career

**80%** of BTE students were accepted to a 3<sup>rd</sup> level education institution of their choice

*“We did a lot around building confidence...it helped get the students to believe that they can do what they want to do.”*

- BTE partner

## Sustainability

At the time of the interview, the BTE partners did not have formalized plans for sustaining the BTE program. However, one partner acknowledged the need and intent to plan together in order to continue the work and relationships between J&J and the two schools, which were established through the BTE program.

