



Access - **The Student Voice**

“I was once told that I wouldn’t be eligible in completing my Leaving Certificate let alone doing third level education because of my hearing loss, I never let my disability stand in my way, I hope anyone with a disability thinks the same.”

Róisín Ormond

Access - The Student Voice

Introduction

The CIT Access Service is committed to widening participation, increasing access and supporting positive educational outcomes for under-represented groups. The Service is strongly committed to the principles of social inclusion and working in partnership with key stakeholders. The main stakeholder being our students.

In the Access Service, we strive to provide the best possible service and supports to our students to ensure that they reach their full academic potential. Since being established, the Access Service has supported hundreds of students with their personal, academic and financial needs.

This publication allows Access students a voice, an opportunity to share their personal journey through education. Their honesty in highlighting the challenges they met along this journey and how, with adequate support, they overcame these challenges, is inspiring, refreshing and enlightening.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Institute Executive Board who has fully supported the development of the Access Service. CIT's leaders are fully committed to ensuring that the student body entering, participating and completing higher education reflects the diversity and social mix of the region.

The Access team has to be acknowledged and commended. They have worked tirelessly to provide necessary student centred supports. Their ongoing commitment to equity of access and student success has ensured that hundreds of students have benefitted from higher education and have achieved their personal educational goals.

I would like to thank Jamie Googan, who worked closely with the Access team to successfully compile this publication. Jamie, who recently graduated from CIT, took up the post of Access Intern in 2015. Jamie has been very open in sharing his personal story and in this way has been an inspiring role model for other students.

Finally, I would like to thank the students who willingly contributed to this publication. Their personal story gives the reader a unique insight not only into the struggles and the challenges that can face students, but also the supports available that can help students achieve their goal. I wish them well with their future endeavours.



Deirdre Creedon

Access Officer
Cork Institute of Technology

Foreword

The number of students from diverse backgrounds entering higher education has steadily increased in recent years in Ireland. Equality of access to education is a key strategic goal of Cork Institute of Technology (CIT). With the recently launched HEA National Plan for Equity of Access, there is renewed emphasis on higher educational institutions to meet targets in relation to access to education for mature students, students with disabilities, students who experience socio-economic disadvantage and students from the traveller communities.

The CIT Access Service spearheads the work in this area for CIT. Since its formal establishment in 2010, the Access Service has developed and grown its programme supporting hundreds of students each year. The Access team engages with prospective students, manages alternative entry routes and supports full time students to achieve their academic goals.

This book captures some of the voices of students who were supported by the Access Service. The students who volunteered their story, have been honest and open about their own personal challenges and achievements, inspiring other prospective students to think positively about the educational opportunities that are presented to them.

I would like to thank the Access Service team for the work that they do to support students. I would also like to thank the students who shared their stories. They are admirable role models inspiring other students to achieve their best possible learning outcomes. I wish them all the best with their future studies and careers.



Dr Brendan J. Murphy

President

Cork Institute of Technology

Foreword

On behalf of the Access Office of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) I warmly welcome the publication of 'Access - The Student Voice' by Cork Institute of Technology (CIT). CIT has led the way in developing innovative and inclusive academic practices and support services for students. This publication bears witness, through the voices of students themselves, on just how vital these supports are in enabling more young people and adults to fully realise their potential through higher education.

This publication is especially relevant as higher education institutions, the HEA and other stakeholder start work on the implementation of the third National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019. The aim of this new plan is, through continued investment and action, to grow participation in higher education from groups and communities who currently are under-represented in the sector.

One of the goals of the new National Plan is that work on access be a more integrated part of the everyday life of higher education institutions and the progress that CIT has already made in this area is of note. Measures focused on supporting the retention and participation of students, such as those described in this publication, play an essential role in supporting equality of outcome, as

well as access. In particular, the best interests of students are served where 'whole-of-institution' approaches to the delivery of equity of access are being advanced. These include each institution having an access strategy that is supported by staff or 'access champions' in every department and faculty.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the staff of the access and disability services of CIT, their dedication to supporting students is a credit to all involved and to the Institute. It is no exaggeration to say that the work by both CIT and other higher education access offices really does change lives. On behalf of myself and my colleagues in the HEA, we look forward continuing to support you in this.



Orla Christle

Head of Access Policy (Acting)
Higher Education Authority

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Jamie Googan

Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Sport and Exercise Graduate

As a child growing up with a severe stammer, I always wondered why I spoke in a different way from other students and why they would laugh at me when I tried desperately to pronounce my own name. I was always self-conscious of my speech, and what I was going to say. One of my biggest emotional struggles came from growing up without being able to say my own name without stammering. I always had a dream of becoming an eloquent public speaker, I just didn't know how.

When I got accepted into CIT I was both delighted and nervous. I always had a passion for sport and exercise from training Martial Arts, and knew the course was for me. My second class in college was an icebreaker session and we had to stand up and introduce ourselves, I stammered profusely on my own name and the whole room laughed. I always found it challenging to reach out and ask for support until I met with Ruth Murphy from the Disability Support Service (DSS). As I am also challenged by dyslexia, Ruth advised me of all of the supports available such as extra time, separate room for exams, and Assistive Technology.

The Access Service introduced me to a student called Shane O'Sullivan who also has a stammer. During our very first meeting he said "we who stammer support each other" and I never forgot it. We became very close friends and even lived together for two years during college. Having a culture of student support is what makes CIT so unique.

I heard about a programme which supports people who stammer, called the McGuire Programme, on The Late Late Show on 6th June 2008. For the first time in my life I could relate to people who had the same problem as I had. I knew that I was no longer alone. My first presentation in college was supposed to last five minutes, but it lasted twenty minutes and from that embarrassing experience I finally decided to join the McGuire Programme in Galway in August 2012. For the first time in my life, I found joy in speaking and communicating with others. With my new found voice the lecturers in the Department of Sport, Leisure and Childhood studies Noel Collins and Cian O'Neill gave me every opportunity to practice my speech by reading out loud, to giving presentations at the start of class, and really wanted me to succeed.

“my dream is now my reality”

I graduated from CIT with a Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Sport and Exercise in 2015, and during my time I availed of many supports from the Access Service that played a vital role in my recovery from stammering and achieving my degree. CIT Access Service has one of only thirteen Assistive Technology Labs in the country where I availed of supports from Mark Burleigh, the Assistive Technology Officer, such as Mind Manager, Ginger Online Proofreading Software, Read and Write Gold, and a place where I could practice my presentation skills. What makes Assistive Technology so good is that you can use it at home and in the workplace.

Some of my best experiences in CIT was being involved in the Martial Arts and Swimming societies where I met loads of new friends from different backgrounds and studies, with the same interests.

I am currently employed by the CIT Access Service where I support various Access initiatives and help other students to be the best that they can be. One of my proudest speaking moments was representing the Access Service at the launch of the National Plan for Access and Equality 2015-2019.

By pushing myself to speak in challenging situations I found myself slowly breaking down the mentality of stammering and doing what I thought was once impossible. I never thought I would make it this far and be in the position that I am. With the right support network and fantastic support from family and friends you can achieve anything you want, just believe in yourself. Never be afraid to reach out and ask for support. My dream is becoming my reality.





John Dunlea

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Social Care Graduate

I graduated from CIT in October 2014 with a Bachelor of Arts, First Class Honours Degree in Social Care. I came to CIT via a FETAC Level 5 course in Social Studies at the tender age of 48. Before applying for the course at CIT I had put a lot of serious thought and research into what I really wanted to do. Social Care ticked all the boxes for me.

The first challenge at college was accepting that, of all of the Mature Students, I was the 'most mature', in age at least! It did not stop at that; the challenges just kept on coming. But college is just like everything else in life, what one puts into it, one gets out of it. Other challenges faced were the volume of work, and the quality that work needed to be to achieve the grades I wanted to record. I always bore in mind that I was not going to get another swing at this. This was my one shot at this degree, and I wanted to give it my best. With six modules in a semester the assignments are issued at a steady rate and the best way to get them done is by not procrastinating. Hit the ground running and you stay on top of things.

There are many supports at the college to assist any student who identifies that they need them. The trick is to recognise the need early enough and go seek it. Personally

“revitalised – reinvented – flourishing”

I utilised many of them; I found the supplementary academic writing skills classes for mature students to be invaluable; I visited the wonderful people in Chaplaincy for a cuppa and a natter; I attended counselling to gain the skills to help me manage when balancing college, work and home life was becoming a challenge. Joining one of the many societies is a great way to socialise. And before I left college, the CIT Careers Service educated me in how to prepare a CV and cover letter; I have never been short of work since. Bear in mind the staff in the Access Service are only too willing to try and put in place supports to assist students if they are identified and reported.

The greatest resource for any student though is the lecturers. The lecturers at CIT want students to flourish. They will readily assist any student who shows commitment. That means, turn up for lectures and tutorials and engage.

Although I found the work very challenging at times, I loved my course and never doubted that attending CIT was exactly where I was supposed to be at that time in my life. What I liked about the college is that it is not an impersonal place, even with so many students it is so easy to get to know a vast amount of people, staff and

students. Although I was never short of company within my own group of classmates, the monthly coffee mornings arranged for mature students was a fantastic opportunity to meet fellow matures, and trade stories.

I am grateful to CIT for the education that I received there and the employment I was afforded due to it, which commenced following practice placement in year one. Today I am employed as a Youth Worker with Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services and I am also employed by Cork Education and Training Board as an Assistant Coordinator with a Local Training Initiative based in Mallow.

Truthfully, I have made some dodgy choices in my life (be honest, haven't we all) but choosing to attend CIT was not one of them. If I had to go around again it would be my first choice! If you choose to go there I have no doubt that you will enjoy the experience that Cork Institute of Technology is.

Elena Canty

Bachelor of Business in Business Administration Year 3

I am currently on work placement as part of my degree programme. I chose to study Business Administration because of the versatility of the modules it has to offer. The great thing about my course is that it is very practical, as well as theoretical; many of my modules are lab-based which I love.

I decided to study at CIT because of its wide range of courses and services that are available to students. I did not know what I wanted to do after I graduated from secondary school however, so I decided to study at Cork College of Commerce first. I obtained FETAC Level 5 and 6 in Business Studies (Marketing and Event Management) from Cork College of Commerce. I loved my time there, but most importantly the lecturers and staff at College of Commerce provided me with support, encouragement, guidance and knowledge that I needed in order to embark on to the next chapter in my life. Once I completed my studies at College of Commerce I felt ready and confident enough to progress on to CIT.

Naturally I was nervous about embarking a new chapter in my life. It was daunting stepping into the unknown and in an unfamiliar environment. My greatest concern was accessibility because I am a wheelchair user, so I needed to find out how accessible the CIT campus really was. Before I began my studies at CIT, I met with the Disability Support Officer who informed me of the support services that they have on offer to the students. Thankfully, all the staff and lecturers at CIT were very approachable and friendly. The Disability Support Officer, Laura O'Rourke, assigned me with a lovely Personal Assistant who assisted me with note taking and personal care. It did not take me long before I felt right at home and comfortable in the ambience of CIT.

My greatest enjoyment about studying at CIT so far is the people. I love the many personalities and nature of all the staff and lecturers. Every day you are greeted with a smile and everyone is so helpful.

Possibly one of the best things about CIT is the fact that every student is seen as a person first and foremost, and not just an academic statistic. The student-lecturer relationship is very evident from the start and you get to know one another on a first-name basis. As the class size

“disability is not an inability”

is not as large as other universities and there are a lot of contact hours, you have a greater opportunity to get to know your lecturer on a personal level so this improves your academic capabilities because you can easily receive feedback.

Being a part of CIT has made me a stronger person. I learned a lot while studying here, not just academically but personally as well. The challenges I faced and overcame while at CIT made me more positive about life in general and my academic capabilities. A major challenge I face daily is fatigue due to my physical disability. As a result, this has caused me to be unable to venture out on college nights because I will be unable to attend lectures the following morning. So because of my fatigue I have to sacrifice some extra-curricular activities in order to attend lectures without feeling physical strain on my health.

I am fortunate to have had a positive experience overall at CIT so far, but it has a lot to do with the support and encouragement from the staff and lecturers, in particular from the staff at the Disability Support Service. Once you are under the care of the DSS you have an opportunity to avail of the many of services they provide to students, for example, Assistive Technology which I avail of regularly.

This computer lab is a lot quieter and calm in compared to the CIT Open Access because it has fewer students and all of whom are highly motivated. I would strongly recommend any student who struggles in some way to seek support and expert advice from the DSS; they are there to help and are very accommodating.



Leanne McDonagh

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Fine Art • Higher Diploma in Arts for Art & Design Teachers



Once as a young and naïve Leaving Certificate student of Loreto, Secondary School, Fermoy, I had no intentions of attending college or even perusing a career. As a member of the Travelling community it was never really expected of me and I was not inclined in the slightest. It was only due to the encouragement of my parents and teachers that I decided to give it a go. I began thinking nothing ventured, nothing gained and I headed off to the CIT Crawford College of Art & Design with an open mind.

College was not what I expected and I loved every minute of it. The staff and students were very friendly and helpful and I was soon introduced to Deirdre Creedon in the CIT Access Office. I was told she was always there if I needed help or advice and she most certainly was! From very early on she recognised my passion and commitment and she persuaded me to get involved in various initiatives during my time at CIT. I was so excited to be part of these initiatives and to be learning as much as I could about Art that the initial ordinary degree soon developed into more. I finished up in 2012 with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art as well as a Higher Diploma in Arts for Art & Design Teachers.

I always had a passion for Art and I couldn't believe that after 5 enjoyable years of college, and at the age of 22, I was now qualified to teach the subject myself. My love for teaching was born out of the initiatives I had worked on with Deirdre, where we put together programmes and talks for second level students with the intention of igniting a spark in them, showing them that there is access for all in education if you are willing to give it a go, just like I had.

“nothing ventured, nothing gained”

Since completing the diploma and registering with the Teaching Council I have also registered with the Education & Training Board (ETB), which has enabled me to work all over Cork city and county. Working with children and adults of all ages completing different art projects, and presenting exhibitions to the public. However, after working and collaborating on so many group exhibitions I began to crave something that was more uniquely mine and I longed to have my own solo exhibition.

In 2014 I was given that opportunity in the form of a TV documentary ‘Norah’s Traveller Academy’. I was initially apprehensive about taking part in a show about Travellers based on what had already been aired in the past. I have lived through the frustrations of people making assumptions about my family and I, and I feel the negative stereotype that is so often portrayed in the media does nothing to help the situation. Hence it took some persuasion but I decided to take part and give it a go, thinking once again nothing ventured nothing gained!

During the time spent filming for the show I worked alongside businesswoman and mentor Norah Casey learning about the world of business and the business of art. It was an intense six months but I enjoyed every

minute of it and the knowledge I learned from Norah was invaluable! The show resulted in the opening of my first solo exhibition and the feeling of pride I felt on that night was like no other. It made me want a successful art career more than ever but it also made me realise that I have the unique opportunity to represent and record my community from within.

I have since found a nice balance between teaching and creating my own work and I could not be happier. I owe my success to many and will be forever grateful for all those that helped and encouraged me along the way no matter how big or small. Once I had opened my mind to the world of possibilities and decided to give things a go, opportunities seem to fall into my lap. In a very short space of time I grew from being young and inexperienced to a driven, ambitious and hardworking woman. However, I am still very young and I know that I have much more to achieve hence my advice to those who may be reading this is to remember: nothing ventured, nothing gained!

Róisín Ormond

Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) in Biomedical Engineering Year 2

I am currently in my second year studying Biomedical Engineering, it's a very challenging course but I'm enjoying it. I've always had an interest in maths and helping other people, by combining the two, I will hopefully be designing hip and knee implants for patients in the near future.

As I am challenged by a hearing impairment, I use two digital hearing aids. At first I was very apprehensive about going to college, with the large classrooms and the large numbers of students was very daunting for me, since I was used to small settings in secondary school. I heard about the DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) scheme in CIT and I knew that it would be ideal for me so I applied.

With my hearing loss I have always relied on my lip-reading skills and a FM system which my teachers in secondary school wore to enhance sound into my hearing aids. I knew going into college I wouldn't be able to rely on my lip-reading skills to get through hour long classes. I did some research on the CIT Disability Support Service (DSS) and found that I would be eligible for an interpreter and a stereotype. I chose stereotype, which means that during my lectures, I have someone typing everything being said onto a laptop and I can read along during the lecture from

a small screen, I was apprehensive about using it at first, but I got used to it pretty quickly. I would be lost without my stereotypists in college now, Rose, Liz, Lucia and Dearbhal. They are a huge support to have in the lectures, without them I don't think I would have done as well as I have so far.

In my course I have a number of different labs, which range from biology to CAD, Inventor to workshop. I have my stereotypists in most labs, they will come in with lab coats, overalls and steel cap boots with me. But some labs are more hands on with very little theory, in these classes I use my FM system which was provided by the Assistive Technology Service as part of the DSS. This allows me to hear my lectures more clearly in the labs. Although the first few weeks were challenging using the device in the workshop labs, I learned pretty quickly to turn off the FM when lectures were demonstrating how to use drills and lathes, they are loud noises but when amplified through the device they are unbelievably loud.

The lecturers in CIT are extremely helpful especially in the beginning of first year while getting used to all the new surroundings. In some of my classes, videos are sometimes shown, and unfortunately most have no subtitles, I struggle to understand what's being said in

“never let your disability stand in the way”

the videos when it's shown in a classroom environment. As a result, my lecturers send me emails with links to videos after classes so I can go through them in my own time.

During exams, I used to dread having to try and listen out for the supervisors making announcements, in case I missed any important information, I found out a few months into college that I was also entitled to exam supports. I now take my exams in a separate room on my own. This is a huge help for me as it allows me to focus entirely on the exam.

The Assistive Technology Service is a huge asset to CIT, I have used it frequently over the past few years, Mark is a fantastic help. The combination of all the support services here in CIT is vital for students like me. I would advise anyone interested in coming to CIT to get in contact with the Disability Support Service; they will do everything they can to help out during your time in college.

I was once told that I wouldn't be eligible in completing my Leaving Certificate let alone doing third level education because of my hearing loss, I never let my disability stand in my way, I hope anyone with a disability thinks the same.



Anthony O'Callaghan

Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Analytical Chemistry with Quality Assurance Year 3



In 2013 I completed my Leaving Certificate. Knowing my next step was either a course in a PLC college or CIT I waited patiently for my exam results to come out. I felt I had put in a considerable amount of time and effort into preparing for my Leaving Certificate exams. When my Leaving Certificate results came out I got offered a PLC course plus my first choice in CIT Analytical Chemistry with Quality Assurance. Unfortunately that year my first choice went up 10 points but luckily I got accepted on the CIT Linked School Progression Scheme. That day, I got a phone call from Louise O'Callaghan, Project Coordinator, in the Access Service who informed me that I was offered my first place on reduced points. I was the first in my family to attend college and thanks to the CIT Progression Scheme I got my first choice on the CAO. I couldn't have been happier.

The life of a college student is really unbelievable, it's fun and enjoyable, you get to make new friends while still keeping in touch with your old secondary school friends. The atmosphere in college is great there is always something going on. The course I chose is a very intense course. I have 4-5 labs a week with reports to write up weekly. My timetable varies from year to year.

“you can’t beat hard work”

As semesterisation is an element of the way CIT runs its courses, we have continuous assignments and exams due every few weeks. I have learnt it is important to stay up to date with my studies. On days I finish early, I go to the library and study, a method I find useful is flash cards.

I am currently in third year and about to embark on a 3 month work placement in France. I have learnt that college takes effort, time and dedication but students need to have a balance between college work and their social life. College work can be challenging but I get great support from the CIT Access Service. Through our regular meetings I find support with any issues or problems I am encountering. The people working there are wonderful, kind and just nice to deal with. No matter what your academic strength is you will succeed in college once you work to your full potential. I have learnt I am the only one who can achieve my degree by being honest with myself and putting in genuine hard work. My time in college has been truly wonderful; from parties, to nights out, and the CIT Balls, it has been a blast. Through my college experience I have learnt so much about myself.

As the course I am studying is science based at times it’s truly amazing what you can learn and discover in the world. So this is my story, a snapshot of my time here in CIT. I hope you enjoy it and good luck to all students.

Carol O'Mahony

Master of Arts in Public Relations with New Media

Becoming a student at CIT has been one of the best decisions of my life. I know that seems a very big statement to make but my life has completely changed because of my journey in CIT.

I left school after completing my Leaving Certificate in 1989 and went into full time employment. I enjoyed my job and worked there for nineteen years. In 2009 I was made redundant like many people around the country. I was at a loss as to what to do, so I decided to start a FETAC Level 5 course in a local school, Coláiste an Chraoibhín in Fermoy. The course I chose was a Business and IT course. From the first day I loved it and I really surprised myself on how I settled into academia.

In September 2010, two of my tutors on the course approached me about applying for college and the seed was planted. I researched the courses that I was interested in and Business Administration in CIT was my top choice. In June 2011, to my delight and shock I was accepted onto the course!

The best thing about going back to college as a mature student is all the support that is in place. For example, the

Mature Student Orientation Programme which happens before college begins, in my opinion, is a must. It gives you a chance to get your bearings, get a tour of the college, meet fellow mature students, and find what resources and courses are available for mature students to help with college life. Listening to current mature students on how they were getting on inspired me and helped to calm my nerves.

In my humble opinion CIT has amazing supports in place for all students but especially for mature students. When I started I realised I wasn't alone, because there was so many mature students in CIT. My classmates were great and never saw my age but always knew who to go to for lecture notes. I thought that college had passed me by. Over the years, watching my three siblings achieve their degrees, a small bit of me always felt a little sad that I had missed out. But now I hold an Honours Degree in Business Administration!

I am currently studying a Master of Arts in Public Relations with New Media. It has been through the support and guidance received while in CIT and my own determination that I have got this far. Sinéad O'Neill the CIT Mature

“new beginnings”

Student Officer and all the staff in the Access Service are a huge support, and if they can help, they will.

Actually I cannot express in words what coming to this college means to me every day. No matter how tired or stressed I am about course work, I still can't but smile every morning I walk through the doors. The number of mature students seems to be rising every year, there are so many of us now on campus. I am involved with the Mature Student Society, we run coffee mornings every couple of months so mature students can meet up, make new friends, share tips and advice about college. I have a few tips of my own for any prospective student reading this; go to all lectures, ask questions, believe me, no question is stupid! The lecturers are only delighted to be asked questions. If you keep on top of the work I promise you won't be overwhelmed, and if you do become overwhelmed there is always help available.

I will finish my course in CIT in May and it will be with great sadness. However, I must go back to join the work force. CIT has given me the tools, the confidence and ability to do so. For me it has been the perfect fit, it has been one of the best adventures of my life. Remember it is never too late to go back to education!





TJ Hogan

Bachelor of Arts in Community Development Year 2

I am a member of the Traveller Community and a person who is challenged by dyslexia. I never would have thought that third level education would be a viable option for me. When I was in primary and secondary school I spent most of my days watching the clock counting down the hours till I finished. I didn't know what was happening in class as I didn't have the reading ability, and believed that it was better to do nothing about it. I was ashamed to admit that I wasn't strong at reading and writing. In school, I was the type of person who didn't even bring a school bag or even a pen on the best of days to class as I felt it was pointless. Growing up, teachers in school were the only ones who knew that I was a traveller. I didn't want people to know as I've seen first-hand what discrimination of other minorities faced, even by my friends. Education was not something that I thought would be a future option for me due to financial and personal barriers, due to the disabilities I have, and the background in which I came from.

A turning point for me was handing in endless CVs just gone 17 years old, and trying to get a job with a poor Leaving Certificate and very little skills besides unskilled labour work which was even very difficult to secure. I started to volunteer within my community with an organisation called Traveller Visibility Group (TVG) and also Foróige traveller

“education is a powerful weapon”

youth groups, and community events. Community work was a path I wanted to follow and explore as a future career as it came naturally to me. From that moment on I applied to CIT in an off chance to study Community Development and found myself in college that September.

With help from the Access team, supporting me around my dyslexia and the Student Assistance Fund I settled into student life pretty quickly. That year I was rewarded with the Garda Síochana Youth Award for my involvement within my local community. I have achieved academic success since the word go because of the support which I received at CIT. People think that because of the background and barriers they face on a daily basis it stops a person pursuing third level education. I believe the best thing to do is to keep working and moving forward, to make positive changes in your own life for the right reasons, and to choose a course that is right for you. I am a full-time student and also volunteer and work around the clock and it doesn't feel like work, I enjoy every moment of the time spent within the community.

Since I became a student in CIT, I work and volunteer with the Travelling Community and work toward issues such as human rights, education, health and accommodation.

I also work with the Education Training Board in Cork supporting travellers with literacy. I work with the Access Service going around to schools sharing my experiences and telling people that education is possible. With a bit of hard work and support, anybody can successfully do well in third level education.

With the recent support I have found myself looking forward to the future, setting goals and targets to achieve along the way. My confidence and knowledge have grown immensely and with technology, essay writing and studying is not an issue for me. This has given me the chance to make myself a better person and focus on the career that I have a great passion for. Hopefully I will have great success from the learning and personal development I've had as a student at CIT.

I am glad that I am in education especially with the way things are in Ireland at the moment, and the fact that my degree is recognised around the world I know that I can always travel and work in communities abroad where I'm needed. For me to be in the position that I am currently in I am privileged and will work towards change with the skills and knowledge I am continuing to learn at CIT.

Peter Glavin

Bachelor of Business in Culinary Arts Year 2

I was motivated to take up a course in CIT when after thirteen years working in security, I lost my job. I always wanted to study as a chef as I had a genuine passion for cooking all of my life. I applied through the CAO in 2014 and a few months later I secured my place in college.

I was very apprehensive when I started college as I was much older than all of my classmates and it was quite difficult for me to mix with them. It took me a few months but when I organised a night out to go bowling and playing pool I made lots of new friends with common interests.

At the beginning it was hard for me to study as I had not done it in such a long time. One of the biggest challenges I faced returning to college was my academic writing skills as I am challenged by dyslexia. I have availed of many supports here in CIT and I would not be studying in college if I did not have that support network. I actively went looking for the supports as I knew I needed help. When I started college I met with Laura O'Rourke the Disability Support Officer where I was introduced to the rest of the Disability Support Service (DSS) team. On DSS Orientation Day I spoke with Mark Burleigh, the Assistive Technology Officer, where I was amazed to find various software

programs to help me with my studies such as Mind Manager, Read and Write Gold, and Dragon software which I now use all the time. Mark is a fantastic support to all DSS students and encouraged me to use these supports in college and at home.

I have also used the counselling service as I suffer from depression and it was nice to talk to somebody impartial. I have availed of a scribe and separate room for exams, I did feel a bit weird the first time I had a scribe as I had never taken an exam that way before - it took a bit of getting used to. I have found these supports very useful in college.

I've enjoyed studying the many types of cuisines of the world and also cooking them, I learn when I'm doing something other than sitting in lectures as my mind tends to wander if the lecture lasts longer than two hours. The advantages of returning to college as a mature student is that you have more life experience - my fellow classmates often ask me questions, and I am more than happy to help them if I can.

The tips I would give to anyone who is applying to study at CIT as a DSS student is to find out what supports, if

“I’m more focused on my goals”

any, that you need and whether or not you are entitled to them. Go over the module descriptors of all the modules in your course. Get involved in the Mature Student Society as you will meet with other mature students on the same path. All students should get involved in various sports and societies clubs. I was involved with the power lifting club, although I had to give it up for medical reasons but I’m still friends with some members of the club. I think that you should go for it and do something that you have always wanted to do.

When I finish this course I hope to get a job in the hospitality sector. Whether it’s in the kitchen as a commis chef, front of house staff, or in hospitality management. I hope to earn enough to keep me and my young family supported for the future, and to be comfortable for the rest of our lives.

Personally I’ve grown to love studying in CIT, my partner Pamela says that I’m a lot happier and more focused on my goals. I have achieved one of them by doing this course and here’s hoping that by next year I will have achieved a Bachelor of Business in Culinary Arts.



Valentina Ivanova

Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Herbal Science Year 2



I decided to explore the opportunity of going back to college when I was made redundant from my full time job two years ago. I have always had an interest in herbal medicine, natural products and their application in healthcare, so when I came across the Herbal Science course in CIT (one of its kind in Ireland) I opted to apply and see what happens. I did not have a plan set in stone but when I got accepted I went with the flow.

I knew that being a student is a challenge, being a mature student is an even bigger challenge, even more so if English is not a first language. However, when I attended the Mature Student Orientation Day organised by the CIT Mature Student Officer, Sinéad O'Neill, I realised that the help is out there and all I need is to ask for it and take the first step.

So here I am in my second year and enjoying pretty much every moment of it. Of course, there are many ups and downs, many questions arise constantly, most of them driven by fear; will I manage, what about finances, what about coping with full time studies and balancing them with family life and a part time job, will I succeed in my studies, will I be able to “digest” the science element of it? This is

“never be afraid to take that first step”

where the support of the Access Service is invaluable. I came here for support, initially to avail of the Student Assistance Fund. I also availed of the Academic Writing Skills and IT skills courses for mature students and some tutorials, such as mathematics and chemistry.

All of the support that I received was very beneficial. It is comforting to know that support is available and that I am not alone. Furthermore, I am lucky to be in a group of highly motivated, talented, competitive and friendly people, with whom I share the college experience. This can include frustration (yes it comes to that sometimes!) and hardship, but some laughs as well of course! The best times are in the lab sessions when all the theory is tested in practice, while it is all science it is still magic!

That is why I love it here, and while it is tough at times, I know that my family is proud of me, I am proud of myself, and I intend to keep it that way. If I were to give any advice it would be; never be afraid to take a first step and never be afraid to ask for help.

Ashvin Valaydon

Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Accounting Year 4

When I was studying for my Leaving Certificate in secondary school I was quite nervous about attending college and being in a different environment. It wasn't possible for me financially to attend college so I met with Elaine Dennehy, Project Coordinator, from the Access Service who informed me about the supports and financial aids. If it wasn't for the help and support of Elaine and the Access Team through the Student Assistance Fund I wouldn't be in CIT.

College is an opportunity more than anything else; a stepping stone towards what you want to be in life. I choose to study Accounting in CIT because it was the course that I was interested in, the one that I could understand and that was more appealing to me. What motivated me to do a course in CIT was my quest to get a degree and to be a qualified accountant in the future. I guess another reason why I want to become an accountant is because it runs in the family. My older brother is an accountant in Perth, Australia, and he inspires me every day to achieve my dream and become an accountant.

One of the hardest moments when I started college was getting past this idea that I would not be able to do it. I never thought that I would make it this far and it was hard for me to believe that I could go through with it. I didn't believe in myself enough but there were so many other people believing in me, giving me the motivation and inspiration to keep going. As I go to college each day, I realise that it isn't as hard as I thought it would be because of the supports from my lectures and the staff of the Access Service.

What I enjoy the most in college are the non-academic activities that it offers. There are plenty of activities and events that you can take part in. Above all, what I really enjoy is making friends, contacts and socialising. I like the fact that in CIT you are in a calm, friendly and compact environment where you get to know people very easily.

One of my best experiences in college was getting involved in the creative writing society. I took up the role as the Public Relations Officer where I had the opportunity to meet other students from different backgrounds and courses. During my time in college, Elaine is always in

“it runs in the family”

contact and encourages me to get involved in different activities such as Student Leader activities, and tutoring in Mayfield Community School homework club by assisting students from my background achieve their goals, and giving back to my community.

My advice to other students is to choose a course that they enjoy and to follow their dream. The Access team will help you make your dream come true - if you try hard enough, you will succeed.

Becoming a CIT student has changed my perception about life. I can see and understand things differently now and find joy in helping others. It has helped me to understand that college is not only about academia but is also the whole process of adding value to one self. If I can go forward and achieve my dream, so can you.



Adam Crean

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Social Care Graduate



To this day all I can do is thank the members of the Access Service in CIT. I feel the staff in that office do an absolutely amazing job supporting students. In 2010 I sat my Leaving Certificate at the age of sixteen. Before the Leaving Certificate, my school was visited by Louise O'Callaghan, Project Coordinator, in the Access office. Louise introduced me to the thought of attending CIT. I knew I wanted to go to college but I did not think I would ever make it there, as I felt I was below the average standard of a typical college student. Louise assured me if I really wanted it then I would have to work hard to get a place.

In the Leaving Certificate I got 195 points below what was required to be accepted for my course and the CIT Progression Scheme. When I received my Leaving Certificate results I was devastated, I felt like all hope was gone, and in a way I felt like I would end up drawing the dole, but after a phone call to Louise, I was back on track. Within 24 hours of that conversation I had applied for a FETAC Level 5 course in the Cork College of Commerce to study Early Childhood and Education which Louise recommended as it was linked to Social Care.

“failing was not an option”

During my time in the Cork College of Commerce I felt that I matured and learnt how to meet deadlines while working as part of a team. Throughout the year Louise kept in contact with me which meant an awful lot. I was becoming more motivated and failing was not an option. Thankfully at the end of the year after my exams and all the assignments my results arrived in the post and I got 9 distinctions which secured my place in CIT.

I refused to give up on myself even though my friends would laugh when I would say I want to go to college. All I can say is now I am the one laughing as I am now a graduate of CIT.

I found fourth year in CIT tough but with a lot of hard work and leaning on the good people I surrounded myself with - it got that bit easier. Once again the Access Service played a part in me completing my honours degree as Louise was constantly checking in with me, and anytime you would pass an individual from the office on campus, no matter how busy they appeared, they would stop and ask how you are going.

Knowing there was support available from the Access Service it made me more confident in my own abilities. In the end, my CIT journey was nothing but remarkable - I met some wonderful people and made many new friends. When I started CIT I was a nervous 18 year old not knowing where life was taking me and it was terrifying. I graduated from CIT with an honours degree in Social Care. I am currently working with the Brothers of Charity as a care assistant for adults with autism and intellectual disability, and also have a 3 year old son.

During my time in CIT I struggled with assignments and personal problems but by using the services (counselling services, doctor, and extra tutorials) I learned how to cope and bounce back stronger.

My course taught me the most valuable things anyone can learn and that is how to look at problems from a different angle. I feel my time in CIT gave me the skills to be great in this area, and I am now exploring various employment opportunities. With a little bit of support and hard work you can achieve anything.

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We would like to thank all students past and present who willingly contributed to this publication. Their personal story gives the reader a unique insight not only into the struggles and the challenges that can face students, but also the supports available that can help students achieve their goal. Thank you to Jamie Gogan and Anne Twohig who gave up their time to ensure the successful delivery of this new publication.

CIT Access Service Team

“every student is seen as a person first and foremost and not just an academic statistic”

Elena Canty

About the CIT Access Service

The CIT Access Service is committed to widening participation, increasing access and supporting positive educational outcomes for under-represented groups. The Access Service is strongly committed to providing a high quality, professional and student-centred service. This is achieved through a strong commitment to the principles of social inclusion and by working locally, regionally & nationally in partnership with key stakeholders.

The Access Service provides a range of supports for student groups who are under-represented at third level. We support:

- students with learning differences, health conditions and disabilities,
- mature students,
- students who experience socio-economic disadvantage, and
- members of minority ethnic groups.

At post entry level the Access Service provides a wide range of supports that enhance the academic experience and learning outcomes of the students who engage with the Service. Supports include personal, academic, and financial needs.

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