



# Access

## *The Student Voice*

# Access



Access Service,  
Cork Institute of Technology,  
Bishopstown,  
Cork



# ***Introduction***



*Increasing diversity and inclusive access to education is a key strategic priority of Cork Institute of Technology. The CIT Access Service aims to widen participation, increase access and support positive educational outcomes for under-represented groups. The Access Service is strongly committed to the principles of social inclusion and working in partnership with key stakeholders, the main stakeholder being our students.*

It is a great honour for me to introduce this new The Student Voice publication. This booklet, the third edition, highlights the personal stories of 10 CIT students who were supported through their academic careers by the CIT Access Service. They highlight the challenges that they encountered along their educational path and speak of the supports that they received to overcome these obstacles. Their honesty, integrity and resilience is admirable and inspirational. They are true role models for other prospective students.

Some of the students portrayed in this publication, availed of support from the Third Level Access European Social Fund, i.e. Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities. These funds have been invaluable in allowing eligible students to remain in third level and reach their full academic potential. The Student Assistance Fund provides financial assistance for students in higher education who experience financial difficulties whilst attending college. The Fund for Students with Disabilities allocates funding for the provision of services and supports to full-time and part-time students with disabilities. Hundreds of CIT students are supported by these funds annually.

I would like to thank my colleagues within the Cork Institute of Technology. Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the support of the Senior Management in ensuring that the Access Service has necessary funding and resources to meet student demands and for pushing for equity of educational access to be maintained as a priority agenda item. Secondly, I wish to acknowledge the CIT Access team. The team work extremely hard to ensure that supports are in place to allow for student retention and success. Their ongoing commitment to equity of access and student success has ensured that many students have succeeded in reaching their goals.

My sincere thanks to Róisín Ormond, Access Intern, for initiating a new edition of this publication. Róisín has done a wonderful job in organising the student stories and bringing this book to fruition.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank the students who willingly contributed to this publication. Their personal stories give the reader a unique insight not only into the struggles and challenges that students can face, but also the supports available that can help students achieve their goal. I wish them all every success with their future endeavours.

**Deirdre Creedon**

*Access Officer, Cork Institute of Technology*





# *Foreword*



*At a national level there has long been a commitment to equal access to education with specific funding being made available to the Third Level/Higher Education sector. Locally within CIT this commitment is turned into real action by our very resourceful and professional team in CIT Access Service. The team in the Access Service, in turn, facilitates and energises the CIT community generally to enhance both access to and success in Higher Education for a broad spectrum of students who may face specific challenges in embarking on a programme in CIT, staying the course and successfully transferring the learnings and skills developed in CIT to a rewarding professional career. Pre-entry and admission supports are in place as precursors to academic and technical supports and success mentoring right through the student's journey in CIT.*

Pivotal within the CIT Access community are the trailblazers, the pioneers whose stories are told here in The Student Voice. We salute these outstanding CIT students and graduates who are role models for all of us in terms of their spirit and tenacity, their strength of character and academic ability, all of which has enabled them to successfully navigate the sometimes choppy waters of third level education. Having had the good fortune to catch up with many of our Access graduates over a number of years now, it is heartening to witness their continued personal and professional growth as they enter the professional world. They are a credit to themselves, their families and indeed to CIT. They give witness to President Obama's famous statement: "Is Féidir Linn!" Maith sibh uile!

In celebrating the success stories in this edition of The Student Voice it is important to acknowledge the leadership shown by CIT Access Service under the stewardship of Deirdre Creedon and her colleagues and also the tremendous support afforded to all our CIT students, as individuals, right across the CIT community. Externally, our active and unique partnerships with our colleagues in Cork Education and Training Board, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors, Cork Learning City, Cork Lifelong Learning Festival, University College Cork, Cork City Council, City of Sanctuary and the Irish Prison Service plus others, all speak to the commitment of CIT to ensuring access to education for all.

Tá a fhios agam go mbainfidh sibh taitneamh agus spreagadh as na scéalta ionsparáideacha atá faoi réir sa leabhrán seo.


**Dr Barry O'Connor**  
President, Cork Institute of Technology

*"Well... this is my  
college life, and I  
am still living it"*

**Anne Valaydon**

*Bachelor of Business (Honours) in  
Accounting*





After the graduation of my son Ashvin in CIT with an Honours degree in Accounting, I came in on a quest for any vacancy in the Administration field in CIT. Elaine from Linked Schools Programme advised me to apply for the Higher Certificate in Business Studies, since there was no job vacancies at that time. It was an opportunity for me to fulfil a dream! I was a little unsure about how I would fit into CIT, as I was assuming that I would be the most mature student in CIT, but Elaine encouraged and reassured me that no matter the age it is not impossible for me to complete a Degree in Accounting. All I had to do was just get started. This dream is now becoming reality.

I thank all those amazing friendly people in the Access Service who devote their time to students – mature and young. I was welcomed even before being granted my Irish Citizenship, not as a stranger coming from Mauritius.

These past few years have been like an adventure and I'm making lots of memories gifted to me to cherish for a lifetime. It is the best part of everyone's life, it is certainly not easy to describe my college life in a small part here, but I will do my best. I was just fascinated by the idea of going back to education. During the semester, breakfast mornings and lunches are organised for mature students by Christine, the Mature Student Officer, giving us an opportunity to share our experiences so far and get acquainted with new friends.

Once I got started in class, it was amazing how comfortable I was, being prepared by our mentor. It was awesome how the younger students treated us mature students as part of their world. I felt young again... no differences, no bias about age, races or religions. It is fundamental for me to feel accepted in this society, to be able to build positive identities and develop this sense of belonging. Being a mature student, I felt proud to be considered fully as a student of CIT.

The supports available via the Mature Student Officer – moral, financial, advice, counselling - I received from Access Service open doors to make my studies easy without unnecessary stress. The lecturers are wonderful, helpful and very supportive, giving good advice on how to do as many past exams papers as possible and practice... as 'practice makes perfect'. Listening to the suggestions of my lecturers, I get good grades. I also participated in workshops in areas such as Academic Writing Skills provided by the Mature Student Office. To the young and mature students, I would advise - never hesitate to ask for help if needed. Never forget that 'procrastination is the thief of time'. If you must do an assignment or revision do not postpone, just go for it, and get it done!

In CIT, if you keep saying to yourself that 'where there is a will, there is a way', you have a goal, an objective to achieve, and you will find yourself on the ladder to success receiving your well-deserved award.

You must use opportunities that come your way, attend panel discussions on issues, get connected to society in your new environment. This might help to discover new areas of your interest and learn about new fields.

And pass on the legacy. Help your juniors too! Let them learn from your experience, while making their own experiences in college. And similarly, help people you may not even know. This can automatically make you feel good.

Try to be a part of a society in college. It could be any society that gains your interest or involves work you are good at. Working with people you do not know even from different courses will help you feel more confident and a great way to maintain your social circle and most importantly, it is one step in the right direction of discovering yourself. So even if it is for two months, try to be a part of some society. Make good use of your time.

This is a great way of keeping track of your goals and ambitions - a world in which your thoughts have priority. One must know his/her priorities in life. It was a very fruitful experience, a great challenge, to go back to college after so many years. Today, already in my third year of my studies I am finding myself doing my work placement in the Finance and Project Department in CIT as an integral part of the second semester. Is it not amazing... I came for work, and I am finishing the last part of this journey working and all this is happening due to the good suggestions of Elaine, ex-mentor of my son, from the Access Service.

As a young student, my son received the same support and guidance from the Access Team. His journey in CIT ended with a Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Accounting. He made lots of friends, participated in several activities, was a Student Leader, got involved in the Creative Writing Society, developed lots of skills and much more. He did his work experience during summer time in the CIT Finance and Project Department- where I am now. Just after college he got a position as Trust Fund Administrator in an American worldwide bank and financial services.

Well...this is my college life, and I am still living it! As my son wrote....'it runs in the family'...it surely does! I am a very proud mother of two accountants, and I am so grateful for having been given the opportunity to complete what I was not able to do in my youth. Thank you to the Access Team! This college has rightly given me the three most beautiful years of my life...








*"I am proud of  
who I am"*

**Breda Hogan**

*Bachelor of Business (Honours) in  
Business Administration*





I am a member of the Travelling community and I'm currently in my final year of Business Administration. I always felt like I wanted to make something of myself but didn't always want to go to college. In secondary school, a lot of my friends began to leave at the age of fifteen or sixteen which still today is a normal thing to do in my culture. It was a big decision for me to decide to stay on and do my Leaving Cert, especially when a lot of my friends were at home getting married and having kids.

One day I was asked by someone 'Why are you here?' and 'why aren't you at home like the other girls?' Simple comments like these can really demotivate you if you let them, but instead, I chose to do everything in my power to prove her wrong. When Leanne McDonagh (CIT Traveller Educational Coordinator) came to my school to do Art classes, as part of the Cork Traveller education inter agency programme, she made me realise that I could go to college - that it could be my reality. Taking her advice on board as well as my brothers who also went to CIT ahead of me, I made the decision to go to CIT and I am glad I did.

In school, business was always something I had seen as a second nature to me, or as I called it my common-sense subject. When I first started college, I can still remember feeling like I was in 1st year of school again and I had to make a whole new group of friends. I wasn't sure what area of business to go into, which lead me to business administration, a course that covers a lot of different topics under the business sector. I am the first girl in my family to go to college and hold a level 7 degree, and for that I thank my mam and dad as they have been my biggest supporters through it all.

Soon I will have a level 8 degree and fingers crossed that's not where I'll stop! I am proud of who I am and where I am today, I didn't intend to be a role model to the people around me but it's great to see that they are looking up to me and they know I am here for advice whenever they need it. I never realised that having someone to guide you is important but as a member of the Travelling

community our young people do not have very many role models to look up to and most of the time a nudge in the right direction is needed. I find college relatively easy, but it is hard to balance my life commitments as a Traveller woman with college life. Not a lot of people in the community go to college, but it is something that has become extremely important to me. College is hard, but I am determined, and I have got to stick it out!

I first met Elaine Dennehy (Linked School Coordinator) in secondary school and Elaine has been a great support through my years in CIT, I used to ring Elaine constantly looking for information or any excuse really to talk about college! Elaine also informed me about financial assistance in CIT called the SAF fund to help with maintenance expenses during my time in CIT. Without this support I wouldn't be able to attend college.

I've been lucky that I find Business second nature to me, I have been sailing through my exams and assignments. It has been a tough year, but I am passing everything. There is a lot of pressure put on students to be a success but at the end of the day you can't be successful at everything. People need to realise you've got to fall before you can walk and to count your blessings by counting each day as a step in the right direction like I do.


I am looking forward to graduating again and the aim for my future is to open my own Event Management Company. This is something I've been planning for years now, someday in my future I will have the job of my dreams and it is all because I chose to do better than what was expected of me as a person and not crack under to the pressures of those who didn't believe I could do more. Hopefully this will make me an even bigger role model for my younger cousins but also perhaps other Traveller girls as well.

*"The Leaving Cert  
isn't the end"*

**Craig Conroy**

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





I am currently studying Analytical Chemistry with Quality Assurance. I went to Terence MacSwiney Community College. In secondary school I knew I always wanted to go to college but I didn't know what I wanted to study - I was thinking something along the lines of pharmaceuticals. For my Leaving Certificate I studied biology; I found it to be my best subject. I never studied chemistry or physics before as the subjects were not taught in my school. I wasn't doing well enough in all my subjects to get the points I needed to go onto third level and study something that I felt passionate about. There came a time where I knew I couldn't get straight into CIT or any other third level college.

I arranged a meeting with my Career Guidance Teacher in 6th year and she told me that if I wasn't confident about getting the course that I wanted, then use other routes into third level - use a stepping stone - and apply for another course that could help me progress into the course that I wanted. We discussed all the possible options like going to Colaiste Stiofáin Naofa to study Science or St John's Central College for Science & Laboratory Techniques. Eventually I decided that I would try the St John's route, I applied and in my interview they offered me a place in the course there and then. I was absolutely delighted because I knew I had a plan in place once I finished my Leaving Cert. I did my Leaving Cert and unfortunately didn't get the points to go to CIT. I wasn't disappointed as I knew I had a second chance to try and get into CIT after doing the Science & Laboratory Techniques course.

When I went to St John's it was a completely different atmosphere to what I was used to in Terence MacSwiney; I was studying Chemistry, Physics, a higher level of Maths compared to the Maths that I was used to, and we had a communications class where we had to give presentations based on science-related topics. I struggled for the first few months because I had no idea about any of these new topics that we were covering. It was a big hurdle for me to try to jump, not having any background in these topics. Nevertheless, I was driven, motivated and

determined to try the best that I could and get out of my comfort zone and succeed in this course. The staff in St John's were very helpful in explaining how to understand the concept of chemistry and physics; they made it sound logical and once I got what they were trying to explain, it opened my eyes and I had so many questions.

A few months down the line I got my results and achieved the result that I needed to get into the course Analytical Chemistry with Quality Assurance in CIT.

If you had asked me when I was in 6th year - Craig could you see yourself doing a chemistry course? I would have thought you were mad for asking as I had never studied chemistry before. Now I'm in my second year of CIT's Analytical Chemistry with Quality Assurance course with a Science and Laboratory Techniques Certificate from St John's also in my pocket.

The key message I want people to take away is that the Leaving Cert isn't the end, it can be a beginning in a new educational journey, and there are always different ways to get into college.

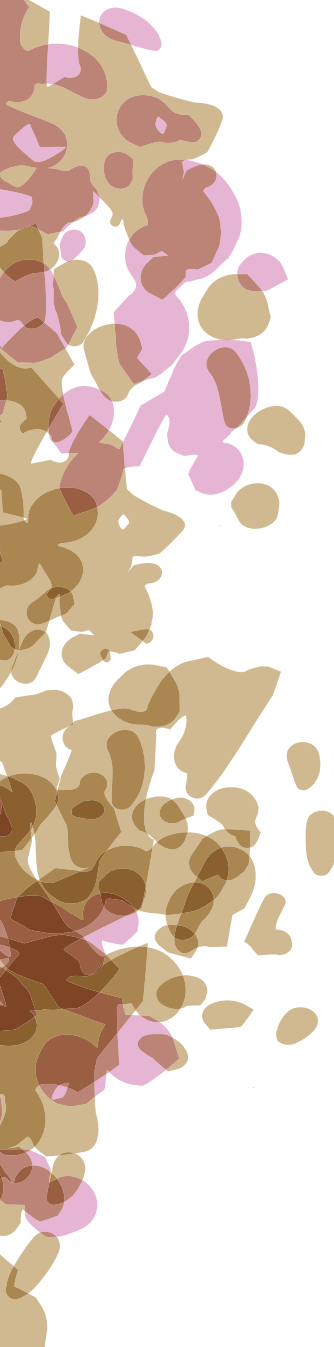


*"No obstacle is too  
big"*

**Kain Caulfield**

*Bachelor of Business (Honours) in  
Business Information Systems*





I am in third year of Business Information Systems (BIS) in CIT and I am currently on my work placement from college. If you had told me 3 years ago that I would be in the position I am in now I wouldn't have believed you. I knew getting into BIS in CIT was going to be a challenge. It is such a popular course and the points at the time were very high. College itself seemed like a long shot for me. Financially, I didn't think my family could afford to put me through college. Regardless, I studied hard for my Leaving Certificate. Despite many late nights of hard work, I fell short of the points needed for BIS.

Like many people, I didn't know what I wanted to do after school. The CIT Access service run various different services with schools around Cork City and county, I took part in one of the initiatives in fourth year of secondary school. In collaboration with Johnson & Johnson, I participated in the Access to Education, Bridge to employment (ATE BTE), this programme was so helpful to me, it included site tours of Johnson & Johnson sites, workshops, career talks and mentoring by J&J staff were all provided by CIT Science for Life and the Access to Education, Bridge to Employment programme. A bursary was also provided to three students who would go onto higher level education. This helped me decide on the career path I wanted.

When the Leaving Cert results came out, I had unfortunately fallen short of the CAO points needed. This is when another CIT Access service helped me significantly. The CIT Linked Schools Progression Scheme is put in place to increase participation rates at third level among students who can succeed academically but may require the economic means or necessary social support to do so. Deirdre Creedon, the Access Officer in CIT, was recommended to me by Ms Cronin, my Guidance Counsellor in my secondary school, the North Mon. I will never forget how emotionally down I felt after missing out on the points I needed. I rang Deirdre about my situation and to say she was kind and understanding would be a massive understatement. A few days passed, and Deirdre rang me to let me know I had got my place in BIS on reduced points through the Progression Scheme. I am the first in

my family to attend college and not only did college mean so much to myself personally - my family couldn't have been any prouder.

However, financially I was still worried. Then I found out about another service CIT provides - the Student Assistance Fund. This service provides financial assistance to people who are struggling financially in college. I cannot stress how accommodating the Access Service team in CIT are. Despite dealing with thousands of students, they'll always work hard for any student who has a problem. With the help of the Access team, I was given financial assistance from the Student Assistance Fund. This was so beneficial to me. As well as the Student Assistance Fund, I had also been informed that I was be one of the students to receive the Bridge to Education Bursary. There may be difficulties with you getting the course you want to do but do not let finance be one of them!

College life speaks for itself. Many people say that college is the best years of your life, and although stressful at times with exams and assignments, I would agree with those people! Between the education you receive and the people you meet along the way, college is an amazing experience. I can't believe I will be in my final year next year. So, one bit of advice, enjoy it while you can because it flies!

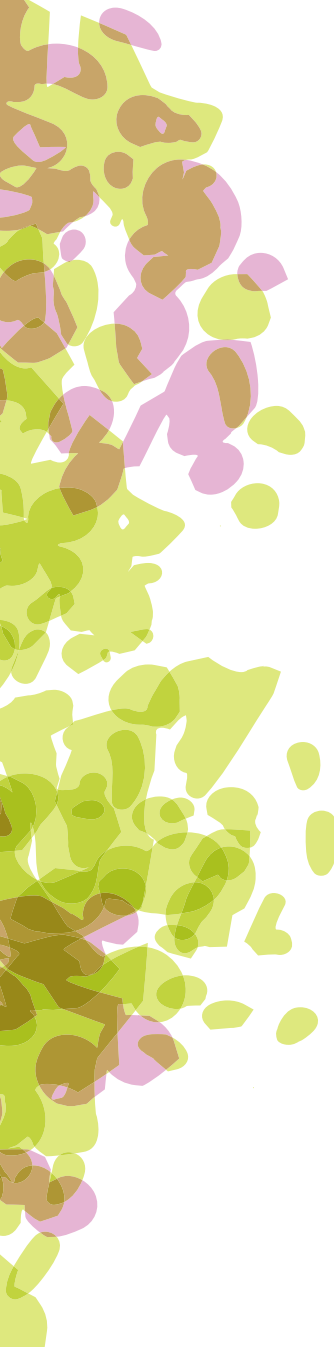
A special thanks to all the Access Service staff in CIT and especially Deirdre Creedon. She has been with me since the beginning of my college term and she's been always there if I needed anything.

*"Nothing stood in my way and that gave me hope, encouragement and belief"*

**Boris Iduhayeneza**

*Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) in  
Chemical and Biopharmaceutical Engineering*





I am currently studying Chemical & Biopharmaceutical Engineering. I am a refugee from an eastern African country called Rwanda and I have been living in Ireland since 2013. I went to school in Douglas from fourth year and in 2017 I did my Leaving Cert. I always knew I wanted to go to college and do a chemical engineering course. I had a strong belief that I was going to get the required points for the course.

One thing, however, was never certain throughout my secondary school years, I always questioned how I was going to be able to go or afford college as I was living in Direct Provision at the time. Direct Provision is a system that refugees have to go through as they wait for their residency to be processed. A person is put in an accommodation centre, sometimes for a number of years with no right to work or attend third level education. As much as I wanted to do this course, I was often discouraged by the fact that there was nothing I could possibly do about the situation.

Luckily, I was granted refugee status in the country before I did my Leaving Cert. This was a huge relief as this meant I was allowed to stay in the country and had the right to work and go to college to chase my dreams of becoming a chemical engineer which gave me even a further push to work harder in school. I had to move out of the provision centre and get my own accommodation and start a normal life in the society.

Throughout the summer I waited patiently for the results with nervousness and excitement. In August when the results came out, I achieved the points for Chemical & Biopharmaceutical Engineering in CIT. I was looking forward to this new challenge and meeting new people, but the question now was "how will I afford college, rent, transport and all the daily needs?". Once again, my future was not certain and I had fear and disbelief.

While still in the centre, I decided to come to college with no idea of how I was going finance everything that was needed. After talking to one of my lecturers, I was advised to visit the CIT Access Service. My visit to the Access Service changed my life. I met Deirdre Creedon who truly understood my situation and did not hesitate to give me the support I needed both financially and emotionally. I was given enough financial support to afford my rent, transport and all other needs through the Student Assistance Fund. The Student Assistance fund is part of an initiative to tackle educational disadvantage, an ESF aided Student Assistance Fund has been made available to CIT by the Department of Education and Skills. I was also chosen by the CIT Access Service as one of the potential recipients of the 1916 bursary which fortunately I was granted. This meant nothing stood in my way, giving me hope, encouragement and belief.

I am currently in my second year in CIT. It is a very challenging course but I am enjoying the process and I love what I am becoming. I have peace of mind and have no worry where my next rent or next month's bus pass will come from, thanks to CIT Access Service.

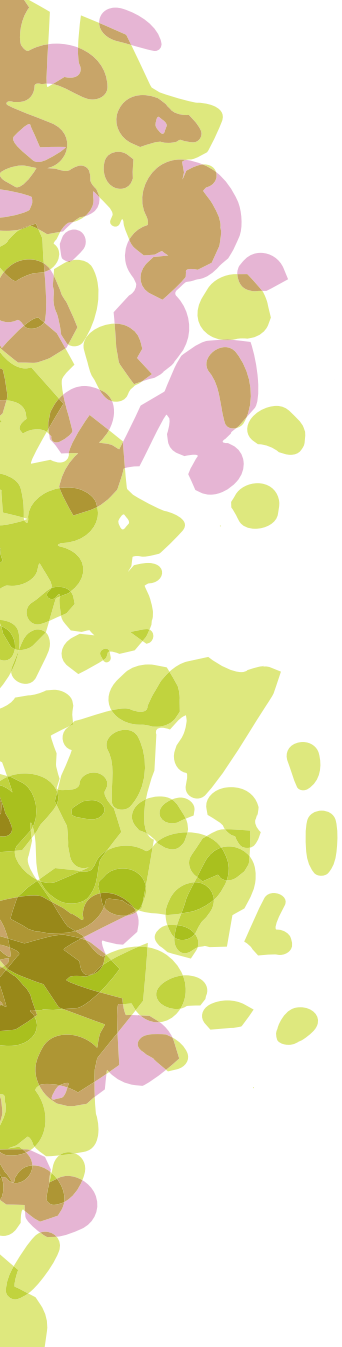
Now my goal is to get my degree and work in a pharmaceutical company like GSK or Pfizer and contribute to the Irish society. I will continue to work harder towards my dream and am forever appreciative of the opportunity I was given by CIT Access Service.

*“Register with the  
DSS on day 1”*

**Seán O'Shaughnessy**  
*Higher Certificate in  
Hospitality Studies*







I am currently studying the Higher Certificate in Hospitality Studies. I am challenged by DCD/ Dyspraxia and I have a vision impairment. I've had a long and interesting journey to CIT, a journey I am very proud of. I started off in secondary school, in my spare time, I did level 3 FETAC on Food and Cookery outside of school with a tutor.

After secondary school, I went for an interview for the cooking course in National Learning Network in Hollyhill, I was successful and I did a three week trial at the end of August. The course was two years in duration and I got a major award in level 2 City and Guilds which is same level as FETAC level 4. From there, I went into College of Commerce and completed Hospitality Studies FETAC Level 5 which was a one year course. I made a lovely new friend there, Elaine Fitzgerald, who helped me through some really tough times in there when I was struggling with things I didn't know. She helped me with topics and sat next to me until I understood it. I had great teachers like Joe, Anita and Catherine, and my great note taker.

After the College of Commerce, I received a place in Hospitality Studies (level 6) in CIT. It is a 2 year course. I've made new friends; Elaine has been helping me through the times when they got tough and still helps me when I am struggling. She sits down next to me until I understand the material. Elaine has helped me gain confidence in myself and she is a very inspiring person who has helped me get to where I am now. This course has been tough but I love every second of it because I get to spend it with Elaine which is a present in itself... thank you so much Elaine.

When I arrived in CIT, I registered with the DSS as I knew I needed support during my studies. The lecturers and the note takers have been very helpful. My one piece of advice is to register with the DSS on day 1. I found the early orientation extremely beneficial to me, as it gave me an opportunity to explore the campus before the rest of the students returned. I would recommend attending the early orientation to any incoming DSS student. Laura and Ruth (DSS officers) have been a great support. Exams have always been difficult for me, having supports such as extra time and a reader, keeps the pressure off me and allows me to focus on the exam itself.

I also use the Assistive Technology Lab - Mark has been a great support and introduced me to Zoom Text. Having a note taker is vital for me, as the speed the lecturers talk at can be very fast, so if I miss something I can read back over the notes when I am studying. The lecturers in CIT are fantastic, they are always on hand to help or to answer any questions you may have. One special lecturer has been very good to me, Joe O'Donovan. He has given me extra help and has helped me all the way through.

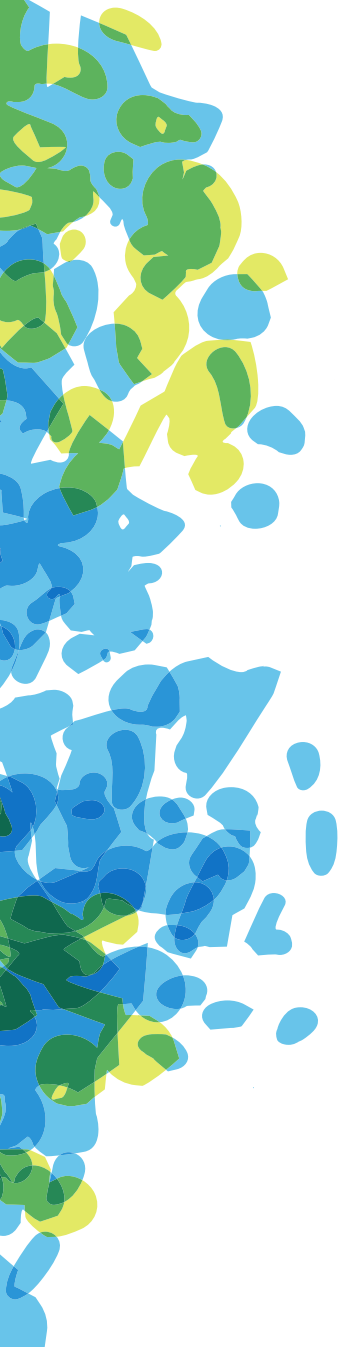
If you are struggling with a class don't miss it, keep coming to class and you will slowly understand it, ask for help if you are struggling with a module. There is always help!

*"Your ability  
doesn't limit you"*

**Nisha O'Mahony**

*Bachelor of Science (Honours) in  
Nutrition and Health Science*





I am currently in my 4th year of Nutrition and Health Sciences. I was diagnosed in 6th class with dyslexia. This means that I don't have great coordination skills, spelling, maths and structure of sentences. My social awareness isn't very good either.

My Mum is the one who encouraged me throughout my education to keep thriving and proving I was intelligent enough for college. She got me all the help I needed to improve my spelling and processing skills - this had an enormous impact on my life. I wouldn't be studying in college if it wasn't for my Mum.

As with any teenager I had ups and downs. I enjoyed learning in two schools - I went to Coláiste Daibhead and Coláiste Choilm though at times that was difficult. It didn't stop me. During my teenage years I mainly had movie evenings with my friends. I was a quiet, nerdy girl in class but outside the classroom environment, I was full of life. I enjoyed many hobbies, such as drama, dance, and cooking. At times it did frustrate me since it would take a bit longer to undertake a task. Spelling was the worst. I always forget how to spell words and pronounce words. Since I went to an all Irish school, this made it even harder to get structure correct. I was awful at languages as well. I studied French but found it difficult to learn.

I knew I wanted to study biology. The first class I had in biology was in 5th class and I remember finding it interesting. I was worried I wouldn't get into CIT so I also applied to Coláiste Stiofáin Naofa. My plan was to do a year there and then get a place in CIT to study Applied Biosciences. I wanted to succeed more than anything! On the day the CAO points came out, the points to the course I wanted went up hugely. My parents came into my room anxiously, thinking I wouldn't get in. But I did, thanks to the DARE scheme. DARE stands for the Disability Access Route to Education and is a third level alternative admissions scheme for school leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second level education.

I registered with the DSS in 1st year of Applied Biosciences, Laura and Ruth were fantastic. I use the Assistive Technology lab, you can get a range of programmes installed onto your laptop such as Dragon Naturally Speaking, Read and Write Gold, and Ginger. I rely on Dragon Naturally Speaking and Ginger on my laptop.

The DSS also informed me that I was also entitled to exam supports. I find using a laptop a lot easier than writing in exams and having the extra time also helps a lot. It releases a lot of pressure on me during exams.

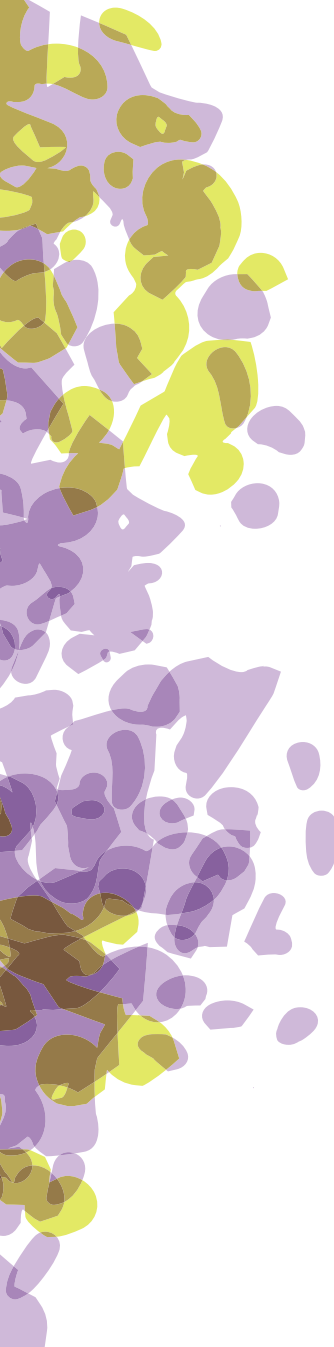
My lecturers have been extremely helpful, I receive notes from my lecturers either before or after class. They have always been fantastic and very supportive. Since 1st year, I've gotten involved in many societies such as drama, anime, and manga as well as sports, which is a fun part of student life in CIT. I was chairperson of Barrier Free CIT last year - this is a society about bringing awareness to all kinds of disabilities. We also organised a fundraiser. I got to know many amazing people and made lovely friends here. The students here are all very easy and open-minded to chat to.

My ambition is to finish my level 8 degree in Nutrition and Health Science. After that, I wouldn't mind working in the research and development lab in a food company. I really want to create and sell my own food product. I am hoping to do a programme in the CIT Rubicon Centre during the summer to learn marketing skills. The one key message I would like to give is: 'your ability doesn't limit you'.

*"You're the only one who  
can choose your path, take  
a chance to make a change,  
never ever let your limitations  
get you or don't allow anyone  
to say that you can't do  
something"*

**Marian O'Mahony**  
*Bachelor of Arts in  
Community Development*





I am in 1st year of Community Development and I have a disability called Ataxia Cerebral Palsy. I use a walker all the time on campus to allow me to walk independently and the walker is known as Dorothy.

The way that I learn is slightly on a lower standard and everything with me is at a slower pace than others which causes me to struggle alongside frustration. If I didn't have any disability, I don't think that I would be the person I am today because of all the obstacles that any person with a disability has to face; it makes you stronger and more resilient to things in general. Since I started in CIT, I would be lost without the support and encouragement of the college.

I avail of a number of services here in CIT through the DSS. They include exam supports, I have a scribe who transcribes what I want to say on paper in relation to questions. I also have a PA to take down notes, and carries things for me if needs be etc.

I also have access to the Assistive Technology Lab where I can do extra study as well as doing up assignments. I was given Read and Write Gold, Mind Mapping, and Grammarly software; without these supports that were put in place for me from the moment I started, I would have been truly lost.

I think because of the different route I had to take into CIT, it benefitted me in a way that I was still very much in the zone of timetables, deadlines, and the entire mind frame of being an academic student. I'm not saying for one second that my struggles/fears disappeared from me once I got in through the gates of CIT. Because they didn't, doing a degree is hard for anyone but if you have any disability it's ten times harder. I have gained so much already and the first year's not over yet, I can only imagine how I will feel after 4th year. I'm so grateful for my determination to allow me to believe in myself and to keep me motivated when times get hard. I know that with my own determination and the support I receive in CIT, will lead me to a greater potential in the future. I'm looking forward to gaining more knowledge within the area that I'm interested in to see what kind of a

professional I'll turn out to be. Hopefully, with more encouragement that I can pass onto others. No matter how long it may take you, you'll achieve your goals and always be proud of yourself.

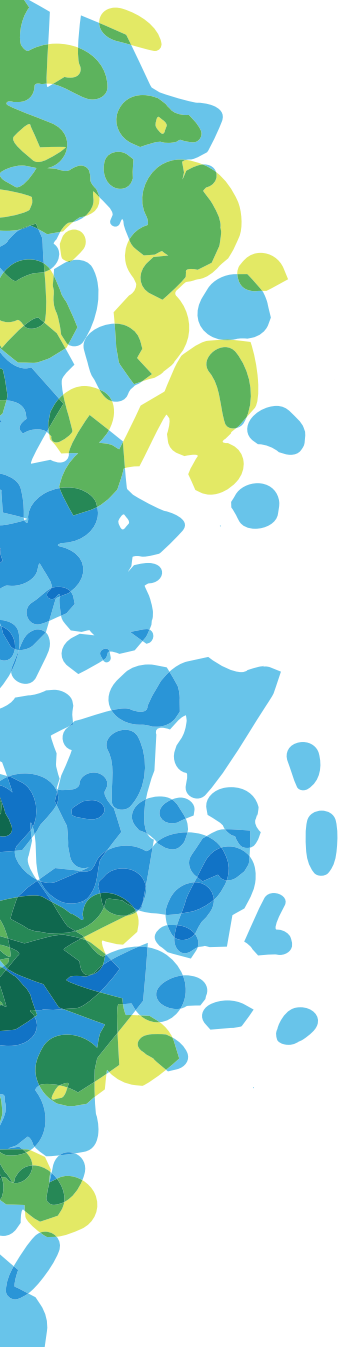
Once I have my degree in Community Development finished, I would love to go down the line of being an advocate for people with disabilities, perhaps in PR, organising events to promote our differences.



*"I am very proud to  
be a deaf person"*

**Emma Barrow**  
Bachelor of Arts in  
Social Care





I am a first year Social Care student. I was born deaf. I was four years old when I had my cochlear implant inserted. This helps me to have some level of sound, but I still identify as a deaf person. I am the only deaf person in my family. Since my family are hearing, they have always encouraged me to use my voice, I have a strong voice for a deaf person. Though I can speak, my family have always been encouraging me to use the Irish Sign language (ISL) as my first language. My family have basic ISL which is easier for me to communicate with them.

When I first came to CIT I registered with the DSS because I knew that I needed extra help, having the support releases a lot of pressure from me. In college, I have note takers and interpreters for all my classes. These supports are vital for me in college. Both supports work together, for example, I would struggle to take notes whilst watching my interpreter. For me having an interpreter is vital because I get the information from the lecturer through ISL rather than English. I use visual language the majority of time. I find it can be hard to focus on my interpreter on a long day of lectures because it can be tiring for me to watch everything been signed and to try and take in the information. I have to ask a lot of questions to make sure I understand things clearly. Overall, I am finding it easier as the time goes on.

When I first started my course, I was very nervous because I knew it was going to be a lot harder with big number of students in the classroom which can be distracting as I am very strong visually, I'm constantly alert in case I miss a piece of information. I really like the college social life and getting to know people in CIT. In my course there are 80 students, which is huge compared to the small number that I used to be with in secondary school. The only different thing about me from the other 80 hearing students is that I have a different ability to hear.

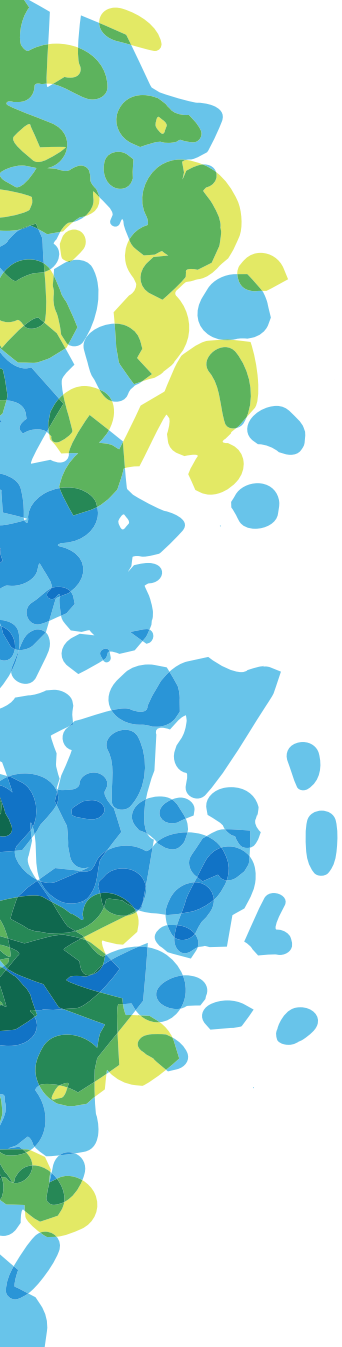
With registering with the DSS, I found out that I was entitled to exam supports. This is very important to me because in exams I find it hard as I have to think about the English written language but I am lucky enough to get the support of having an interpreter to translate English into ISL. Also, having a separate centre for exams, with extra time and rest breaks, is a great support for me. I need these supports so that I can give my exams 100%. I wouldn't be where I am today without these supports. I prefer doing assignments than doing exams because I have more time to think and do research on assignments.

For me, I have a hidden disability as my cochlear implant is behind my ear, covered by my hair but I am very proud being a deaf person. I have the best of both worlds - which are the deaf and hearing communities because I am open minded and both of these worlds are beautiful communities. My future is no different from every other student in CIT because I have dreams - I want to be successful, I have the motivation and I am determined to achieve my degree.

*“Explore your  
passion and help  
create a world you  
want to live in”*

**Richard Cross**  
*Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in  
Creative Digital Media*





I am a fourth year Creative Digital Media student. I have diagnosis of Asperger's and Dyspraxia. Having Asperger's and Dyspraxia means I talk a lot, and I mean a lot.

I came into CIT via the DARE route. I had missed my course by 5-15 points. DARE stands for the Disability Access Route to Education and is a third level alternative admissions scheme for school leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second level education. I got in - my recommendation to everyone with a disability is sign up for DARE. I wouldn't have gotten into my course otherwise.

I picked Creative Digital Media because I wanted to meet and work with passionate people. It is the reason why I am not in a science area of study even though I love science. I decided to come to college because, well for one thing, family made me do it! I also wanted to actively broaden my horizons by meeting new people.

At first, college was nerve wracking! I can still remember the induction day when my classmates and I were all waiting for our student ID cards and someone in my class broke the silence. We ended up having lots of fun but more importantly it helped break the ice with my year and that has made us grow closer over the past 4 years.

As part of getting into CIT via the DARE scheme, you have to register with the DSS, there are a lot of supports on offer for students registered with the DSS. The support I use the most would be the exam supports.


The DSS team have been fantastic, they helped me prepare for my Erasmus year in Austria and helped me whenever I reached out to them. Erasmus is a very interesting experience to take part in, I would highly recommend it to any CIT student.

After my graduation, I am hoping to get an apprenticeship in a TV production company or be a runner in a post-production house to build up my technical and practical skills with the goal to set up my own company but keep that a secret! My advice to new students would be explore your passion and help create a world you want to live in. Work to the best of your ability every day and try to make our world a better place.



# *About the CIT Access Service*





CIT Access Service is committed to widening participation, increasing access, and supporting positive educational outcomes for underrepresented groups.

The Access Service aims to ensure widened enrolment in CIT from under-represented groups. The service aims to lead the way in high quality, professional and responsive access provision. This is achieved through a strong commitment to education and social inclusion principles and by working in partnership with all key stakeholders. The service organises and delivers a range of pre-entry, entry and post-entry support programmes for the various groups we work with.

The Access Service engages with the following groups who are under-represented at third level. We support:

- mature students
- Further Education award holders
- students who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- 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.

The Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities are under Third Level Access which is co-funded by the Department of Education and Skills and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

## *Science for Life Programme*

CIT's Science for Life Programme has increased the number of workshops in CIT Access Linked Schools in the past number of years. We continue to lead students towards third level education by making learning as much fun as possible. We aim to achieve this by helping students to focus on science throughout Junior Cycle with lots of fun workshops, allowing students to gain hands on experience in Transition Year with field trips and helping students achieve their goals through academic support throughout Senior Cycle. CIT's Science for Life programme is also involved with various other projects and competitions such as VEX (SFI funded), MegaDojo, Johnson & Johnson Access to Education, Bridge to Employment Programme, and Royal Society of Chemistry Spec in a Suitcase Initiative. Our Science for Life Programme is facilitated by Dr Sharon Lawton, David Hodge, and Róisín Ormond.





# Mature Students

Returning to education after a break or entering it for the first time as a mature student can be very exciting but also quite daunting. Juggling life as a student as well as work and family commitments is a big undertaking.

My role as Mature Student Officer is to provide support and guidance to full time undergraduate mature students in order for them to achieve their educational goals. There are a wide range of supports available from pre-entry initiatives for prospective mature students such as the CIT Open Day, Maths for Matures Programme, the Further Education Maths Programme to Further Education and Training College visits and campus tours; Entry supports for newly enrolled mature students in CIT such as the Mature Student Orientation, IT Skills workshops and Preparatory Maths Programme to post-entry supports to all registered CIT mature students such as personal, academic and financial assistance as well as a weekly drop in service. I also liaise with the CIT Societies Officer and Mature Student Society to run social events for

mature students such as coffee mornings, mature student breakfasts and cinema trips.

No two mature students are the same and each student's educational journey will be different. CIT's 'student focused' approach helps students on the path to achieving their qualifications. CIT sees the value in having a diverse student population and Mature Students as non-traditional learners are an important cohort of students here in CIT.

A special word of thanks to Anne for sharing her educational journeys as part of this publication. She is a great role model to those who are considering returning to education. Thank you to all the students who have shared their inspirational stories in The Student Voice; I wish them every success with their studies and future careers.

**Christine Nolan**  
*Mature Student Officer*







# *Disability Support Service (DSS)*

The aim of CIT Disability Support Service (DSS) is to encourage the participation and access of students with learning differences, disabilities, and health conditions to third level education. When students share their educational journey with such honesty as they have in this publication, this encourages prospective students to think about accessing third level education also. By sharing their stories and the challenges that they have faced along the way, these students demonstrate that third level education is an option, especially when students engage with the supports that services such as the DSS can offer them.

The students who have shared their stories in this publication must be commended for the sincerity with which they have done so. There are almost 900 students in CIT who are registered with the DSS and the DSS welcomes any student to register with us if they need some support due to their learning difference, disability or health condition. Each student who chooses to engage with the DSS can have access to support to enable them to achieve their academic goals, to access their chosen course, and to become a more independent learner. The DSS works hard to try to ensure that students can come to us in confidence for support and help.

The DSS will determine and identify each student's individual learning needs when a student registers with the service. The DSS is committed to empowering students with disabilities, learning differences and/or health conditions to achieve their academic goals as well as supporting them with college life. The difference that this support can make to a student is evident in the stories in this publication.

The DSS is supported by the ESF Fund for Students with Disabilities which is an objective of the Third Level Access which is co-funded by the Department of Education and Skills and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.



## *Linked Schools Programme*

The CIT Linked Schools Programme works with selected schools in Cork City and County to increase access to higher education among students who may not traditionally attend. The programme works in partnership with school staff, local communities, CIT staff, and students from primary and secondary schools to support greater participation in higher education among students from CIT Linked Schools.

Students who transfer from CIT Linked Schools into a course in CIT are supported in their third level studies through one to one mentoring in addition to post entry supports which may include academic, personal, financial or social supports. Our Linked Schools Programme is facilitated by Louise O'Callaghan, Elaine Dennehy, and Bernie Lehane.



## *Traveller Education coordinator*

I am the newly appointed Traveller Education coordinator a position which has been financially supported by the HEA PATH 3 initiative within the CIT Access Service. As a Traveller myself, I want to be able to use my experiences both positive and negative for the benefit of present or prospective students. My job is to provide one to one support for second and third level students while helping them realise their potential and to encourage them to fulfill it to the best of their ability.

***Leanne McDonagh***



# *Acknowledgements*

We would like to thank all the students who willingly contributed to this publication. Their personal stories gives the reader a unique insight, not only to the struggles and the challenges that can face students, but also the supports available that can help students achieve their goal.

We would like to thank Brian Lougheed for the photography for this publication.

CIT Access Service Team





# Access



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