

My name is Andrei Kohut, and I've just graduated with a BSc. in Nautical Science from NMCI where I studied for 4 years as a mature student.

Originally from Transylvania, Romania, I moved to Ireland in 2013 and joined the workforce right away. I started in sales but eventually worked my way up to the position of Training and Development Manager. Unfortunately, in 2016 I was made redundant and as a result I started looking up course options for mature students.

The Munster Technological University (MTU), known as Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) at the time, had a great informative website with clear guidance for mature students. A constituent of MTU, the National Maritime College of Ireland had a leaflet that caught my eye. It stated that 100 percent of graduates had jobs upon graduating. As a mature student it is massively important to secure employment after completing a course.

Having worked as a seafarer before moving to Ireland the programmes offered at the NMCI seemed like a good match, so I drove down for the NMCI Open Day and did not regret it.

The staff and students had organised tours of the facility. I was impressed to find a 360° simulator that has the Command Centre of a ship built within a sphere. There were numerous fully equipped laboratories including a fully functional marine engine room. The environmental swimming pool was also very impressive. It simulates real waves, thunder and lighting, as well as wind. Here students are taught sea survival techniques. Outside the building there is the fire yard where students practice extinguishing live fires while wearing full fire fighting suits complete with masks and compressed air cylinders.

I was truly impressed by the high-tech facilities provided and with the supportive nature of all the staff. The moment I identified myself as a prospective mature student, I was introduced to several mature students that answered all my questions. I even met the Head of the Department of Maritime Studies at the time, Captain Vivion Gough, who offered advice on

applying through the CAO and encouraged me to apply both through the 'mature student' route but also through the 'points system'.

I left the open day with a clear understanding of all the mature student supports available and the degree programmes offered at the NMCI: Nautical Science, Marine Engineering and Marine Electrotechnology. After such a positive and welcoming experience, I was not going to delay in applying.

The CAO application process was straight forward even with a Romanian Bacalaureate which is the Leaving Cert equivalent. It is graded differently than in Ireland but once I supplied all the paperwork, MTU determined my points. I can't tell you how relieved I was to learn that I had more than enough to secure a place.

Within a few weeks of starting college, sponsorship applications were organised with shipping companies that would offer employment upon the successful completion of the course.

The support from MTU Careers Service was outstanding when it came to drafting a CV, mock interviews, psychometric tests, etc. I felt prepared when interviewed by prospective sponsoring companies and as a result received an offer. Although sponsorship offers may vary from company to company, in my case all tuition costs were fulfilled by the company, and I was paid a wage during the work experience phase that lasts 12 to 15 months and is part of the second year of the programme.

The most daunting experience was getting stuck into maths, but we had great support including the Preparatory Maths Programme upon starting in MTU. The Mature Student Officer organised a range of various workshops and tutorials throughout the academic year, and for maths in particular a lecturer travelled down to NMCI from the MTU Cork main campus for additional workshops.

In the second semester I availed of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process for one of the modules. Phil O'Leary, the RPL Officer, was extremely helpful and made the process hassle free.

For those interested in extracurricular activities, the college offered club memberships for the sailing club and sub-aqua club where you could become a certified scuba-diver. My free time was spent in the college library, gym, outdoor running and the once a week 'trad' session in the 'FBI'.

I've made friends with the five mature students in my class and the mature students from the other classes but also glued in well with the younger students. Our year one coordinator organised a team building day filled with outdoor activities like kayaking, obstacle courses and orienteering in Crosshaven; this was massive fun and we all got to know each other so much better.

To keep us busy MTU runs innovation competitions such as the 'App-rentice' amongst others. This is great for teamwork, and I encourage any MTU student to give it a go. As part of a team of three, we have won first prize in the 2018 NMCI Innovation competition where you had to pitch your invention in front of the judges and the audience. Being a mature student didn't hold me back even though the other teammates were much younger, we got along great and we're still friends to this day.

The second year of my programme is known as the 'sea phase' where you get to experience life onboard vessels of different types and get on the job training. You will be assisting and shadowing an Officer that is assigned as your 'mentor'. They will introduce you to life onboard and help you find your bearings. Your job will be to learn their responsibilities. As you gain experience you will be given more and more responsibility to the point where in your last few months onboard you are an acting Officer on your own right. It isn't all work though... during this year I got to experience an Ice Breaker and saw the Northern Lights twice a week for a whole month. I've ridden an ATV through the sand dunes of Namibia, experienced

Malaysia, Mauritius and seen the world from the highest tower in Shanghai. I even had a few hours to explore European places such as Amsterdam, Las Palmas and Monitor, France. And the best part? I got to meet people and make friends from almost every culture imaginable.

The third and final year came along, and it was time to return to college. We've spent a good chunk of the final year online due to the Covid 19 pandemic, but we still had practical classes held in the college. I was impressed how well the online classes were delivered with no disruption to the academic year.

Looking back from the shoes of a graduate, I am left with many memories, friends, and life experiences that I wouldn't have expected. As a mature student it was tough at times, but it was worth it. Time management is key!

Today, I am in full time employment with the same shipping company that has sponsored me through college. I couldn't recommend MTU highly enough to any mature student looking for that 'second chance'.

Wishing you every success!