

My name is Gerard Daly and I live in Garrettstown, Co. Cork. I've just completed an BA (Hons) programme in Crawford College of Art and Design (CCAD) in Contemporary Applied Art as a 65-year-old mature student!

When I was made redundant in 2010, after 31 years in same job, I was 54 years old. After being in the same job for so long I was completely lost when it came to finding new work. In 2015 I started a QQI course in Kinsale Further Education College. While there we went to an open day in CCAD and it was there I decided I wanted to further my education with the BA course. Following on from the QQI level 5 and level 6, I then applied for and was accepted to CCAD, which is a part of MTU.

Going back to education after being in the work force for so long was a very daunting thing to do. I completed my Leaving Cert in 1973 but I felt I had to return to education for my sanity if nothing else. The first day in Kinsale was hard but I found the first day in CCAD much harder. I came from a background of where people going to college were 'elite'. However, this changed the instant I walked in the door of CCAD. With such a great level of engagement, I was made feel welcome from day one by my fellow students and all staff members!

As I was unemployed prior to starting the course, I was eligible to receive the back to education allowance instead of the unemployment benefit. Thankfully I was also granted SUSI to pay the fees element on my behalf. Parking near the college was a struggle at first but the college had an agreement with Q park nearby which gave us students subsidised parking. This did help immensely. Still financially it was challenging at times. Family help did come into play. Both my sons and my wife worked part time to help out when they could. Finance has to be a consideration before taking up your offer of study.

Preparing the CAO application was the most stressful part of my whole 6 years. Kinsale College had people available to give us help with the application which was great. Nobody should be afraid to ask for help, whether it's someone in your FE college or through the MTU Mature Student Officer. After applying, we had to prepare our portfolios and take them to CCAD to be assessed. The long wait then began to see if we were accepted to the college. Thankfully three of us from Kinsale were offered places. It really does help to know even one person going to college with you.

While at MTU all mature students are offered help with IT, academic writing skills, communications and other various workshops to brush up on our skills having not been in education for a while.

One thing I will say is, as a mature student, that college work can and does take over your life. You begin to dream, talk, study, read and do whatever you are studying in every aspect of your life. I would not change what I've just completed for anything! Give it a go, take your fear and put it aside. It'll be forgotten the minute you start at MTU!