

My name is Ioana Cretu, originally from Romania, now based in Bandon and have been living in Ireland in the last 15 years. I graduated in June 2021 as mature student of MTU in Visual Communication.

Four years ago, I decided to apply to MTU to allow me to learn new skills and develop my passion for design. I was unhappy in my previous job, and I knew I could **CHOOSE** where I wanted to go. We all have that option of choosing. MTU offered me more than I expected, and I am grateful for that. Returning to college as a mature student was not easy, but not impossible either. I totally understand the experience mature students go through when deciding to return to higher education. Most mature students have family commitments, full-time jobs and various other commitments to juggle but whatever we decide to do, it must be coming from ourselves that we can do better for us.

I had previously undertaken a PLC in Coláiste Stiofáin Naofa and had built up a portfolio of work. Once I made my mind up about going to MTU, all I had to do is to fill out my CAO application. The CAO application was straight forward, by listing the course I wanted to join, followed by other course choices I was also interested in. You can't go wrong writing down as many course choices in the order you feel it's best for you. Within a couple of months, I remember receiving my CAO offer with my first choice of course in Visual Communications.

During my four years of college, I got involved in Mature Student Society trying to bring people together creating a small community, where people can share and talk about experiences they have in common or even go out to the cinema. As a new mature student with more life experience than the majority of my younger classmates, I also took the opportunity to be a class representative for two years consecutively. I also worked alongside the Good Start Team as a Student Ambassador for another two years. The Good Start Programme is very helpful to find your feet in college, especially during the first few weeks of the semester. The Mature Student Officer is there to help you find your feet and support you all the way to graduation- from offering support with a particular issue or just dropping in for a hello. There are lots of other services and supports available as well for mature students; SUSI and Student Assistance Fund for those who are struggling financially, the Academic Learning Centre for those who need extra support with certain modules, or even the Counselling Service when you need to talk to someone.

Life in general is not easy, but when you try to achieve your goal, it can be more challenging, and that's what makes the journey even more worthwhile. I became pregnant in my third year of college, and I was doing well, until I had my son Cillian in the first lockdown (April 2020). I faced a real challenge at that time - dealing with a new born baby and finding a way to finish my third year of college. I managed to get through it and I started my fourth year in September 2020. I had no choice other than try to find a balance between college as a full-time mature student and a first-time mum studying and doing Zoom calls from home. That was some challenge! With some help provided from a childminder and a loving partner, I

managed to get through successfully graduating this year with a wonderful result. Even my final year project was related to how I managed balancing between college and the baby!

I strongly recommend getting yourself organised and asking for support if you think you need it, because the support is available. All you have to do is '*Just Ask*'.

If I look back now to four years ago, I never thought I could get this far. I made a choice and it changed my life and I can guarantee you that MTU can help you to achieve your goal. I got mine because I decided to **CHOOSE**.

I did it. You can do it too!