



Amy Martin did a year in Moate Business College before landing her dream course in Athlone IT
PHOTO: GER ROGERS PHOTOGRAPHY

'If it wasn't for the PLC, I would never have got a place on a nursing degree course'

Amy Martin, Moate Business College/Athlone IT

Amy Martin always wanted to be a nurse but she wasn't confident of achieving the CAO points necessary to gain entry to this highly competitive field of study.

The 19-year-old from Westmeath says she didn't like school: "It wasn't really my thing; I felt I wasn't doing anything I really enjoyed."

The former pupil of Moate Community School skipped Transition Year and sat her Leaving Cert at 17. Despite her young age, by then she had a clear plan of how she was going to realise her dream.

It worked perfectly and last September, one year after leaving school, Amy started her nursing degree programme.

During fifth year, Amy's guidance counsellor introduced her to the idea of post-Leaving Cert (PLC) courses, which may be for one or two years and a wide variety of which are on offer in the neighbouring Moate Business College. It is a large college of further education, with courses in business and IT, caring, and art and leisure.

Amy applied to the CAO, but she also applied for a place on the PLC in Nursing Studies in Moate Business College.

"I wanted to go there. I applied to the CAO, but I knew I

was going to go to the business college," she says.

Successful completion of the PLC allows students to compete for places in a large number of nursing degree programmes, both in Ireland and the UK, based on PLC results and not CAO points.

As well as doing modules in subjects such as anatomy and physiology, as in all PLCs, students also cover areas such as communications.

It was the right decision for Amy: "I was the type where it was an effort for me to go to school, but with the business college, if there was a day I couldn't go, I was really upset. If you like what you are doing, it makes it easier to put the work in."

While PLC students need a minimum of five distinctions to be considered for progression to higher education, Amy swept the boards with eight and clinched a reserved place on the general nursing degree programme in Athlone IT.

"If it wasn't for the PLC, I never would have got that place. I had a fantastic year and I would recommend it to anyone.

"It gave me the basics and it was a great introduction to college. I am very lucky to be where I am, studying what I want to study."

PLCs

Post-Leaving Cert courses are valuable

Aoife Walsh

There are more than 200 further education (FE) colleges around the country providing what are commonly known as post-Leaving Cert (PLC) courses. The courses are of one or two years' duration and offer excellent opportunities.

PLCs prepare school-leavers, or adults returning to education, for direct employment, or can be used as a basis for entry to higher education. All feature modules in essential skills, such as communications, which stand to everyone.

The wide breadth of courses is as diverse as hairdressing, pre-university science and engineering, media, art, accountancy, and many more. There are more than 700 courses listed on the CAO that will consider any PLC as a basis for entry, and most PLCs can lead to possible entry to multiple CAO courses.

Application to a PLC is made directly to the FE college, most of which are now taking applications for the autumn. In general, there are no closing dates and most colleges will continue to accept applications until all places are filled. However, popular courses fill quickly, so early application is advised.

At times, my students question why they should do a PLC when their goal is to progress to third level. They reason: 'This course is a

Level 5, same as Leaving Cert, and I want a Level 8!'

Yes, the majority of FE courses are Level 5. The Leaving Cert is a very broad qualification and many students struggle to be successful in all areas. A student may find Irish and geography difficult, but excel in maths and computer science. This student may not achieve the entry requirements or points for a chosen computer science course in university. If that student takes a PLC in computer science, they could easily make the grade for entry to third level the following year, because their study is focused in their area of interest and aptitude. They can use their PLC results, rather than points, to compete for a place. With a two-year PLC, a student may even progress directly to second year in higher education.

FE courses involve smaller classes than universities and institutes of technology, and the combination of continuous assessment and a final exam gives students opportunities to gain feedback from teachers and so improve their learning.

FE courses also allow students to immerse themselves in their preferred area of study in their own locality before committing to a four-year degree, or moving away from home with the financial burden this can entail – perfect for the student who may be unable or unwilling to commit, just yet!






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