



Time to think

Wondering what to do next with your CAO choices? Now, more than ever, is a good time reflect on and re-evaluate your life goals, writes *Clodagh Dooley*

When I was in my final year of secondary school in 2010, getting ready to progress to third-level, I honestly had no idea what I wanted to do after the Leaving Cert. I felt anxious and uncertain about my future. I had listed a variety of courses on my CAO form, not many of which I can recall today – a sign that I definitely was not passionate about what I had chosen!

A sense of uncertainty is almost always guaranteed as the time comes to finalise CAO choices. But without a doubt, the pandemic has brought about even more uncertainty.

There is a quote in JRR Tolkien's 'The Fellowship of the Ring', the first of three volumes of The Lord of the Ring novel, which I think can resonate with a lot of Leaving Certificate students right now:

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. And the wizard Gandalf's response is, "so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

I'm sure a lot of Leaving Cert students may be feeling disheartened right now – wishing the pandemic had not happened and played havoc with their plans. However, despite all its challenges, the pandemic may actually be the perfect opportunity to take some time out and really put things into perspective...

Finding my passion

When I eventually received my Leaving Cert results, I remember getting an offer for a course related to website design. But there was a voice deep down inside, telling me it wasn't right for me.

So after careful consideration weighing up my options, I listened to that voice and decided to defer my course until the following year. To fill the gap year, I applied for a Post-Leaving Cert (PLC) business/secretarial type course and continued my part-time job in a local supermarket. I didn't love the PLC course, but it did help me come to the realisation that I had a more creative flair. And while I enjoyed working on computers, I definitely did not like the technical side of things!

Although at the time I didn't think it, that gap year was probably one of the best things I have done. I had the chance to rekindle my passion for reading books and magazines, and personal writing, after spending so much time studying hard for the Leaving Cert beforehand. I also figured out what I wanted to do next.

I realised I had a huge interest in the media, and magazines in particular. And so began my journey to becoming an editor of features and supplements in a well-known newspaper today! The following year, I began an Arts degree in Media and Communications and English at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, where I spent four years, one of

which was spent abroad studying Journalism in Cardiff.

Write your own future

My message to Leaving Certificate students is that life is always going to throw hurdles in the way. I've experienced so many, I could write a book about it! Until the CAO Change of Mind deadline, you have the opportunity to revise your course choices. But when August comes around, and if you don't get a good feeling about the course you're offered, or there's some other hurdle standing in your way of the course you want, then take the time to really think about what's important to you.

One positive that I feel has come from the pandemic, is the realisation that we need to slow down from our busy lives. To enrich our lives by doing the things we love and spending it with the people we love (if these people are not living with you, then when all restrictions lift, of course!)

I have been trying to get back into things I loved doing before, but hadn't been doing for months, even years – like journaling and personal writing. I've even been doing a free online writing class, led by my colleague and best-selling author Kevin Flanagan, called 'Write Your Life'. Kevin has been teaching us about the importance of expressive writing – putting your thoughts and feelings into words on paper. Keeping a journal or gratitude diary can be a powerful way to enhance overall wellbeing.

I also recently purchased a book to keep me motivated called 'My Life Goals Journal'

by writer and certified clinical hypnotherapist Andrea Hayes (andreaahayes.ie). After years struggling to manage the pain of a chronic invisible illness, Andrea finally took some time out to stop and take charge of her healing. She finds journaling every day vitally important to her wellness routine. She tells me, "When embracing change, a journal can be a great place to start."

Andrea Hayes "Think of the pages of your journal as your sacred space to write your innermost feelings, record quotes, or sayings that inspire you. The act of writing can be a wonderful tool to help you analyse where you are at this present moment and where you want to go. And most importantly, what your life purpose truly is."

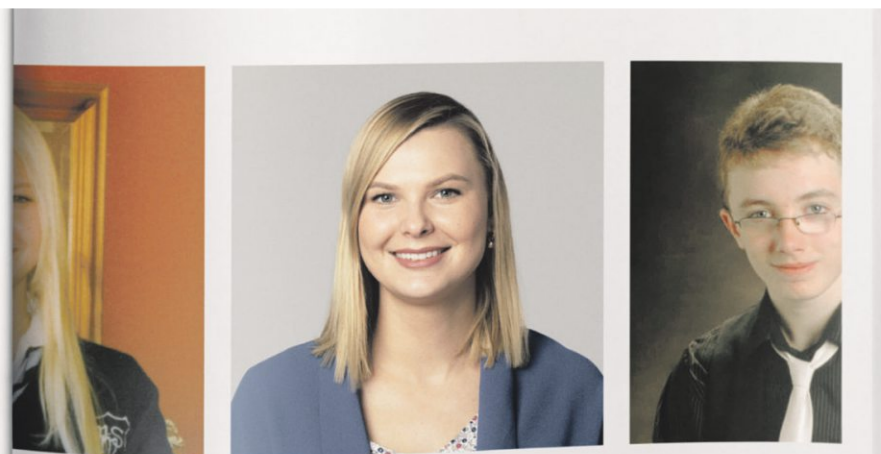
She adds, "A journal is a great place to start to help you unlock your potential, and create and live the life that is right for you, not the life everyone else thinks is right."

Whether you discover your goal by the time the CAO Change of Mind facility closes or decide in the next year or two years what you want to do with your life, that choice is yours and yours only. But the best thing you can do is take your time to figure it out.

As a quote I came across on social media said, 'Life teaches us to make good use of time, while time teaches us the value of life.'



Andrea Hayes



"As a teacher, I get to see students grow in confidence and be more creative; that's a great feeling to have."

Gintare Gontyte – English teacher

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