

Take it from the top

Laois native Michael McCrohan was last year's top Junior Cert student with a grand total of 13 As in the exam. A student at the Cistercian College Roscrea, he is involved in rugby, debating and, as if that weren't enough, he also plays the piano, the violin and the banjo. Currently in Transition year, he speaks to GRÁINNE FALLER

I planned to start studying in September, but I was mainly doing homework and keeping up with schoolwork until Christmas. It wasn't until after Easter that I really got into gear, but from January onwards, I was doing about an hour a night on top of my homework. After Easter I started studying at weekends and I was doing maybe two hours of study a night. Obviously, it's a complete waste of time if you don't focus on what you're doing while you study. You can do five hours a night and not be any better off.

I read the text books when I was studying. Business was one subject where I took notes, but with most of the others I just followed the books. Past papers were really useful so I used those to test myself on what I'd learned.



The mocks were a good experience. The fact that you had to do the whole exam was great for things like time management. They're pretty good for showing you what you need to work at. I got a C in the Irish mock so I knew that I had to work hard at it if I wanted to do better. When you get the mock papers back, make sure you look at where you went wrong. Teachers go through them in class, so they're handy for revision.

It's really important to have some extracurricular activities throughout the year. You should never refuse to do something because of the Junior Cert. My own main extra-curricular activity was sport. I played rugby with the school and that helped a lot. You need to relax and try not get too stressed throughout the year.

The biggest thing to remember at this stage is not to get disheartened if you did badly in the mocks. The mocks are a practice run and a lot of people do badly but then go on to do well. Don't ignore the results though. Your bad marks are a sign that some of your subjects are weaker than others so take the opportunity to improve and study them harder.

There is definitely still loads of time left from February, even if you haven't done much until now. You don't have time to spare though. The most important thing is to start now. Don't leave it until tomorrow.

ENGLISH

English was definitely one of my weaker points. I found it hard. I'm from Laois and I'd have a lot of the slang and not so much of the vocabulary.

I suppose the big thing to remember about English is that there is no right or wrong. If you can back up your points, you'll do well. The most important thing in English is to do the past papers. Just keep writing.

When you're faced with an essay, it's easy enough to blabber on and get off the point. I started using spidograms to plan my essays. It only takes three or four minutes and it helps to keep you focused. I ended up doing the short story in the exam. I never actually thought to learn a couple of essays off by heart, but, as it happened, I ended up writing an essay that I had actually written before. Obviously, I changed it a bit but it definitely helped to have written it previously.

The day before the English exam I learned off loads of quotes for the drama and the poetry. That's the main thing when it comes to paper two. They were fresh in my mind and I could use them to back up any points I made in the exam.

IRISH

I really worked on this after the mocks. One of the main things I

Michael McCrohan who received 13 As in his Junior Cert pictured with Dom Kevin Daly, abbot of Mount Saint Joseph Abbey at the Cistercian College, Roscrea.

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did was to put the past-paper aural onto my mp3 player and I'd normally listen to them for five minutes before listening to my music. It really helped.

I found the comprehensions terribly difficult. I did all of the comprehensions on the past papers. There was no trick really, other than using a dictionary to look up the words that I didn't understand.

Practise is definitely the key to this, though. A lot of the questions begin to repeat themselves a bit, so once you've written out lots of answers they begin to get easier. I actually got one of my classmates (he's good at Irish) to correct my answers, which helped a lot.

MATHS

Maths is a stronger point of mine. After the mocks I actually spent less time on it because I was in fairly good shape. You have to keep doing questions. Again, it's really the only way. I'd say I often did the same exam questions five times over. Make sure you learn all your formulae and theorems.

If you don't understand something, ask your teacher. You need to understand maths. If you don't have a grip on the basics, you

