

Variety and opportunity

In this, our second article (see also Today's Farm March/April) on Teagasc courses, horticulture and equine students outline the extraordinary range of experiences they have encountered during the courses and after graduation

The Bachelor of Science in Horticulture level 7 at Waterford Institute of Technology/Teagasc Kildalton is very diverse and opens many doors. Some of my class mates look after the gardens in a castle, another is working on Donald Trump's course near Doonbeg, another is working on the stunning new Adare Manor Golf Course and another is working in a well-known garden centre.

So says Shane Burke, who is currently senior maintenance groundsman with SIS Pitches in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Shane is in charge of 80% of football clubs' stadium and training pitches in the Arabian Gulf League, and school pitches also.

"My typical week consists of driving around the UAE (Abu Dhabi, Hatta, Al Ain, Sharjah and Ajman) liaising with staff making sure the football pitches are up the highest possible standard and that the maintenance plan is being followed closely. I also meet with clients and customers all around the Middle East, including Qa-

tar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Israel and Egypt. Every day has been different since I started 17 months ago. I have been lucky to be involved in major football tournaments including the FIFA Club World Cup, which was held in the UAE in 2017 and 2018."

BSc in horticulture

"I really liked the diversity of the course, as it was not all about study. I enjoyed the practical side of things in Teagasc Kildalton College; you got hands-on experience of machinery and also planting, etc. There was a lot of variety.

"I was fortunate to get my work experience in Croke Park stadium. My day-to-day duties included the preparation of the pitch for league and championship games and maintaining machinery.

"On match day, I was liaising with divoters, coaching staff of teams, instructing them where to do their warm-ups and also liaising with stewards and officials.

"Also, I was learning about fertiliser and chemicals and application rates. I

Shane Burke of SIS Pitches.

was very lucky to gain experience in a world class stadium and pitch."

Benefits of the course

"There are so many subjects included that help in everyday life, computer skills, communications even accounting. In the position I am working in now, communication is key, especially when I'm dealing with different nationalities every day.

"Subjects like plant biology, which give you a vital insight into how plant systems work, are also fundamental. You have to understand the soil, the grass and need to know what the problems with the plant are. You also need to know when to apply chemicals, fertilisers and what is best for the plant given the conditions currently and in the future weeks.

"Our next major project is the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. We have just finished building 30 training pitches there now and hope to get some of the stadiums for the tournament also, so that will certainly be interesting and a challenge I'm looking forward to.

"There's opportunity all over the



Zack Meehan and Bartek Wojcik pictured at the student garden building project which is under construction at the Teagasc campus in Ashtown Dublin 15.

world for horticulture students, not just in turfgrass, but landscaping and other areas too. Highly qualified skilled people are hard to find now in the industry and there is a big demand for them."

Current students

Zack Meehan is studying for a degree in horticulture at the Teagasc College at the National Botanic Gardens. He is part of a first-year class of 18 students taking their degree, which, again, is run in conjunction with Waterford Institute of Technology.

The students complete three years in their degree, six semesters in total, one of which is a full work experience semester which can be conducted in Ireland or abroad.

The degree is based entirely in the Teagasc College, which is bi-located between National Botanic Gardens and Teagasc Ashtown in Dublin.

"My course is going well and I have learnt a lot already," says Zack. "We attend for work experience on one day per week in Teagasc Ashtown as part of our practical work experience on

the course. We fill out a diary to help gain the most from this experience.

"I am doing six subjects this semester. These include plant knowledge, plant propagation, horticultural mechanisation, horticultural building construction, horticultural skills training and chemistry for land scientists.

"Exams are completed at the end of each semester and you move on to new subjects in the following semester. Each semester is 12 weeks of teaching, so the time is very short. Horticultural building construction is my favourite subject.

"My great-great-grandfather had a nursery in Kimmage called Irish Nurseries. My grandfather worked with the queen on her gardens and, at present, I work alongside my father in his tree surgery business when not at college.

"I find that the course is giving me the tools to help build up my skills which will help me be part of the family business. The level 7 course is full on, but you learn so much from it."

Equine opportunities

Andrew Moore, student on the Level 5 stud management course at Teagasc Kildalton, says: "My family own a small but growing stud farm mainly breeding thoroughbred flat horses. We started off with one foundation mare called City of Cities, we now have 20 breeding mares.

"I always knew I would end up doing horses," says Andrew. "I was young finishing school and was advised by my guidance councillor that the course at Teagasc Kildalton was really practical, with opportunities to grow, learn and mature. It also gave me the opportunity to complete the Green Cert.

"I am enjoying the course and have made friends with other young people who have similar interests. It has introduced me to a new side of the equine industry as I had had very little contact with sport horses before I came here.

"I also enjoy the work experience – this has given me an insight into how high-profile studs do things. At present I am in Ballylinch Stud and I really like the variety that a big yard has to offer and the learning opportunities. From Adrian Sherry, who manages Ballylinch, to the general yard staff, everyone is there to help and educate you.

"I would recommend Kildalton to any young person, either the horsemanship course or the stud management course. They offer great training in the basic husbandry of horses and my course has taught me a lot. The practical skill training is second to none and the environment helps students to learn.

"I would like to travel and there are so many opportunities for young people once they are qualified in stud work. I think it is important to see as much of the world as possible and to see how things are done in other countries.

"I also feel that to get to the top, you have to make contacts and prove yourself outside your comfort zone. I hope to go to spend a breeding season in Australia and see where it takes me from there. Ultimately, when I've seen a bit of the world, I hope to come home and apply what I've learned on our own farm."



Interested in a Teagasc full-time course?

Agriculture courses

Six colleges provide full-time Level 5 and 6 agricultural courses: Teagasc Ballyhaise, Co Cavan; Teagasc Clo-nakilty, Co Cork; Teagasc Kildalton, Co Kilkenny; Gurteen, Co Tipperary; Mountbellew Co, Galway; and Salesian Pallaskenry, Co Limerick.

Horticulture courses

Level 5 and 6 full-time horticultural courses are provided at the Teagasc College of Amenity Horticulture, National Botanic Gardens, Dublin, and Teagasc Kildalton, Co Kilkenny. Both colleges have substantial horticultural facilities and extensive industry links with a hands-on teaching and learning experience delivered by specialised horticultural staff. Accredited and non-accredited short courses and industry continuous professional development events are also offered. Waterford Institute of Technology degree programmes are also delivered at both colleges providing progression opportunities for learners.

Application details for Teagasc full-time Level 5 courses

Equine: Sunday 2nd June 2019

Agriculture: Sunday 30th June 2019

Forestry: Sunday 30th June 2019

Horticulture: Sunday 11th August 2019

How to apply: Apply online at: <https://www.teagasc.ie/education/going-to-college/apply-online/>

For course information go to: <https://www.teagasc.ie/education/>

Equine

Full-time Level 5 and 6 equine programmes are offered at Teagasc Kildalton, Co Kilkenny. Kildalton is a nationally recognised equine training centre offering courses in stud management and horsemanship.

Kildalton's facilities include an equine yard and stables, two outdoor riding arenas and a substantial indoor arena. The college has extensive links with industry and its specialised equine staff provide a very hands-on teaching and learning experience.

Forestry

Full-time Level 5 and 6 forestry programmes are offered at Teagasc Ballyhaise, Co Cavan, which is a recognised forestry education and training centre for the sector. Ballyhaise College has its own woodland and wide range of forestry equipment, including a state-of-the-art forestry training simulator for practical forestry instruction. The course incorporates practical learning periods with host forestry sector companies and contractors. The courses are delivered by specialised forestry staff.