



Gurteen Gazette

November 2023

Principals Welcome

Autumn is such a wonderful time of year, as the evenings draw in we watch the colours of the countryside change, the change is mirrored in the atmosphere around the campus as we move from the buzz and excitement at the start of term and settle into the academic routine, building towards the necessary assessment work of projects, skills tests and exams.

We were thrilled to welcome a large cohort of new students to Gurteen in September, some were bold and confident others quiet and restrained but all with a common hope of making new friends learning new skills and of course eventually gaining a qualification. The range of courses offered at Gurteen continues to grow as do the total number of students. Our busy campus once again includes the sounds, sights and smell of horses; sincere thanks to Laois Offaly ETB who fund the course.

Over the summer we have conducted a number of bio diversity surveys across Gurteen, our knowledge and understanding of how we can manage the farm to further improve wildlife habitats continues to develop.

Of course, students are why Gurteen exists and it is the challenge and pleasure of working with the students that motivates every member of staff - we are privileged to witness first-hand the development of unique and amazing individuals as our students grow in confidence and start the next stage of their own journey.

I hope you enjoy reading the Gazette, please do share it with friends and neighbours - better still encourage them to share their contact details with us.

-Principal Jon Parry

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all our social media pages!**



Nothing breaks the ice during the student's first week quite like some friendly tug-o-war!



A beautiful Peacock butterfly seen on our farm by Kevin Helion, one of our TUS lecturers.



Jon Parry, Grainne McGrath LOETB, Jolene Hall LOETB, Stephanie Scully, Paul McGlone and Dolly, an Irish Sports Horse!





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Gurteen represents at the Agro Challenge 2023- Slovakia

This Summer Wayne Smith and Rosie O'Brien, two of our full-time Level 6 students, had the incredible opportunity to represent not only Gurteen but Ireland at the Agro Challenge 2023, in Slovakia! The Agro Challenge is a competition for full-time students of the green sector who attend a school or institution that is a member of the national EUROPEA organisation.

Wayne is from Ballymore in Co. Westmeath and is studying the Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Dairy Herd Management, and has shared with us some of his thoughts about the event!

"It was a great opportunity to get the chance to represent the college, Teagasc and Ireland, in these Agro events in Slovakia! We did really well too, coming 10th overall out of 18 teams taking part. Considering this was Ireland's first time to be in this event, we were super pleased with the result. Within the individual events, we came away with a Silver medal in Tractor driving with a water tank, and bronze medals in hand milking, changing blades on a mounted disc mower, and log splitting!

My favourite part of this whole experience was to represent Ireland, and have fun with all the different countries at the end of the events! I have learned so much with this experience of all the different ways other countries farm and work. I have made loads of new friends I will have for life.

I found that the hardest event was trying to drive a tractor with a dolly trailer we had lots of training before all the different events, this was the one we couldn't train for as the dolly trailer is not that common in Ireland.

The most fun I had was after all the events we had the chance to have chats with all the different countries! In terms of the event that was the most fun, I'd say it was the milking a cow by hand- you had a fake cow and you had to milk her out by hand in 3 minutes and see how much you can get out then they counted the litres you had.

I would like to thank Eva from Kildalton, Danielle from Gurteen, Anne-Maire Butler head of Teagasc education and FBD for sponsoring the whole trip."



Team Ireland was comprised of Conor Farrell and Ellen Doherty from Kildalton College (Left) and Rosie O'Brien and Wayne Smith of Gurteen. (right)



The event took place over 3 days, and featured teams from 16 different countries.



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Student Sports

As well as students getting into the swing of their academic studies we've been delighted to see some incredible sporting achievements for our students! With students from across all our courses, we managed to field some incredible talent for the inter-college competitions.

Both our boys' and girls' GAA teams achieved great results, with a super special congratulations to Level 6 Dairy Herd Management Student Wayne Smith for winning the player of the tournament trophy and the lads for winning the shield competition.

A huge congrats to our two Hurling teams- with team A, captained by James Cuddy, Level 6 Drystock Management student, winning the B final over the Gurteen B team.

Martin Lawlor, Level 6 Drystock Management, was also declared the free-taking winner of the competition.

History was also made this year, with the first-ever inter-colleges Camogie match taking place between Kildalton and Gurteen (featuring a few players from Pallaskenry and Mountbellew also!) An incredible achievement and great to see our students participate in making this history!



One of our two Hurling teams which competed.



Our Shield competition winning Football team!



Our female GAA team, comprised of students from across our courses! (left)



The girls competing in the first ever inter-college Camogie match- history in the making!



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Meet Naomi- Equine Course Coordinator

Hi, my name is Naomi Ruane, I am from Roscommon, and I am the Equine Course Co-Ordinator and Lecturer here at Gurteen College!

In 2013 I began my educational journey here in Gurteen where I began studying Business and Equine Studies. After completing my degree, I progressed on to complete my Masters' in Business Studies with Athlone Institute of Technology (now known as TUS) with my Thesis focusing on The Motivation of Equine Employees in the Midlands and South of Ireland.

Teaching in Gurteen is a delight and I have loved every minute of it. It is so nice to be able to come to work and spend the day doing what you love and being able to talk about horses all day and nobody finds it strange that all you talk about is horses. Everyone is so helpful and nice, and this means a lot- even just to have someone to talk to. It doesn't feel like I'm coming to work, I love my job!

My favourite module to teach is the Stable and Yard routine, as this provides the basic knowledge of caring for the welfare of the horse, and how we can do our best to protect them. For the future of Equine at Gurteen, I hope to see all the stables full (possibly even more stables!), loads of happy Equine Students, and possibly more course options available to our future students that they can avail of.

Equine is my passion as well as my job and I can't wait to see how we progress in the future as this is only the beginning!

What makes the Equine course so special is that we don't have big numbers in each group. This allows everyone to get that one-to-one help if it is required, it allows the group to become bonded more and it is easier to work as part of a team.

The reason that Equine is so special here is that we are a tight-knit group and the best thing about that is we can work together, and mutually see the benefits of the hard work that is being put into everything that is done here. We share a lot of stories whilst we are learning and at the end of the day every day is a school day, you will never go home not learning something new!



Naomi competed at Tullamore show this year, and was awarded 2nd out of 21 for the AIRE Riding Club Class, and 6th out of 13 for the Lightweight Hunter Class.



This horse of Naomi's is called Whitecastle Lad- or Oscar for short!



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Some of the students who make up the first wave of equine students after a 7-year hiatus!



Equine students have been busy practicing their riding skills with some gymnastic jumping exercises with Paul McGlone.



Equine Course Update

The horses are back and so are our Equine students. For the first time in 7 years, we can hear the sound of hooves and neighing around the yard along with the chit-chat about horses in the halls and around the tables in the canteen.

We kicked off the Level 5 in Horsemanship/Equitation course on September 11th, 2023 and we have been so lucky to have this course funded by the LOETB (Laois Offaly Educational Training Board) and we are grateful for their help and support with the running of the course.

Currently, we have 10 horses on site that range from 14.2HH to 16.2HH with varying personalities and experience along with 9 wonderful students that are our first group of equines in 7 years.

We are making strides with the Equine course and applications have just opened for the Level 5 Certificate in Horsemanship/Equitation and the Level 5 Certificate in Stud Management with applications already rolling in.

If you know anyone who would be interested in our Equine courses, please let them know that applications are now open and to apply as places will fill up quickly (Fingers crossed).

We hope to have 2 new courses on offer for the upcoming academic year (*subject to verification*) that will open up the courses to many more possible students within the industry and we will keep you posted as this progresses.

It may only be November, but so far, our academic year has been very busy, from organising timetables, to work placement locations, to trips away.

The destinations for our trips away are anything from the Army Equitation School to RACE, to sales, and the National Stud in Kildare.

-Naomi Ruane, Equine Course Coordinator



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Agriculture Course Updates

Level 5 Agriculture

The first-year agriculture students have settled into Gurteen life, their individual characters are starting to emerge. During the first part of the term we spend time talking with the students about academic expectations and the assessment schedule – but the first exam always seems to catch a few by surprise! As part of the health and safety training every student will spend time practising some of their driving skills using the tractor simulators – it's a good way of introducing them to the nuances of modern equipment before they are let loose on the fleet of John Deeres. We are very grateful for all the work Teagasc did in securing the funding and the sourcing of the tractor simulators.

Level 6 Agriculture

The full-time level 6 Agriculture students are working hard in the build up to placement – which commences in late January and will last 16 weeks. The students focus at the moment is to ensure they keep on top of the assignment work – with projects such as animal breeding, grazing platform design, and farm business plans are challenging their thinking, to balance this the student also enjoy regular industry trips.



Level 6 Dairy Herd Management students learning about Lely Robots on a farm in Offaly



First year degree students out visiting the farm of James, Mary and Jack Healy from Freshford, Killkenny.

Degree Course Updates



Autumn 2023 was the first intake to the degree via the CAO points system – and we were overjoyed to welcome 44 undergraduates into the class. During semester one of the first year, the students are based full-time at the TUS Thurles campus – the timetable includes a number of lab-based modules combined with modules on sustainability and Family Farming in Ireland.

The group that successfully completed the first year were bolstered by an additional 6 students who had previously completed a Level 6 Agriculture course and therefore gained 'advanced entry' in the second year of the degree. Recently the second-year group completed a Problem Based Learning week when all timetable classes were cancelled and the students worked in teams for 5 days to consider options and develop an alternative business plan for Gurteen farm if we lost access to 150 acres of 'con acre' rented land. There were some very intriguing suggestions!



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Some of our pedigree Holstein-Friesian herd being dried off ready for winter.



Students ploughing fields ready for Winter barley, before all that rain hit!



Great results in our clover content in our paddocks!

Farm Update

In the previous Gazette, we talked about rain giving us some reprieve from the dry conditions. I should be careful what I wish for, it feels like it hasn't stopped raining since! Prices across all enterprises have been poor, and it just feels like one of those tough years. It hasn't been all bad though, our breeding results were very good and we're preparing to face a very busy calving season in February. Although we've started drying off cows our thoughts are firmly focused around springtime and calving season, as with all farms it's a busy, busy time of year. We're paying close attention to our calf house and we're starting work on changing pens around to create some more space. We're delighted with our tight expected calving pattern but the downside of having 196 cows calve in the first 4 weeks means the calf houses will fill up quickly and the team looking after calves will be busy straight away.

Our students got some great hands-on experience sowing the winter barley, with the wet weather the winter wheat still isn't sown but we're hopeful of a chance before Christmas to get it done. The students also got involved with pulling the fodder beet, we have about 10% pulled and conditions were challenging. When we return to finish it the student's skills will be put to the test with the difficult conditions.

Our signpost advisor scored our paddocks for clover content and we were pleasantly surprised with how high we scored; and now hopeful that this information will help us cut back further on our chemical nitrogen usage. The scoring has also helped us identify the poorest paddocks for work either stitching in clover seed or doing a full reseed.

We are almost one year into the deal with TFM and the John Deere's are going well, in January the current fleet will be swapped out and a fleet of new John Deere's will be put in and our students will straight into getting Deere's broken in.

The farm team are looking forward to a break at Christmas and the new year and remain hopeful that 2024 will be kinder to us than this year.

-Ken Flynn, Farm Manager



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Words from Steven, our College Chaplain

It's been a great start to the new academic year. There has been hard work by college staff and management to get ready for this new phase. There has been much planning of courses and the practical implications. The vision and energy involved speaks so positively of Gurteen.

I've been struck this autumn by the beautiful variety of everyone in the Gurteen community. Everyone comes with a wide spectrum of gifts and insights and all are important. That applies whether each one is student or staff; academically challenged or not; settled home life or unsettled. Whatever background or lens through which we see the world, all are important to Gurteen and all have something to bring as we learn and work together. We celebrate the beauty of our varied humanity and in doing so we pause to notice others - to both support and learn from them. In doing so, we are all enriched.

-Steven Foster, College Chaplain.



Gurteen College teaching team- 2023/2024!



College Chaplain Steven Foster chatting to a group of students in our Diamond Grove

Apply now for September 2024!

Applications for all our full-time level 5 courses are open now! You can apply via the Teagasc website directly, or through our own website. You can also apply to join our Level 7/8 Agricultural Science and Sustainability degree via the CAO website today!

However, if you haven't yet decided if we're the college for you then why not come along to our next open day on **Friday 8th March**, where we'll be giving guided tours of our campus, onsite accommodation, and our farm and equine facilities! Get in contact and book your place today- we can't wait to meet you!

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