

## University Profile

Queen's University Belfast (QUB) is one of the leading universities in the UK and Ireland. Founded in 1845, Queen's University Belfast is now in the top 140 universities in the world for graduate prospects. QUB have achieved this ranking by combining excellence in research and education with a student-centred ethos.

The School of Biological Sciences is one of the largest Schools within the University and teaches students on some of the most fundamental global challenges facing humankind. The School is concerned with human, animal, plant and environmental health, sustainable use of resources, food, and rural development.

As part of their learning ethos, QUB recognises the importance that gaining relevant experience has for students to develop key skills and a bright career. All students have the option to integrate a work placement into their studies for this reason.

## Structured Learning Placement: from University to Work Life

Education and raising awareness of biodiversity is fundamental to the Wild Work movement. A key element of this action is to support employment activation by providing opportunities for people to take part in a structured learning placement.

Wild Work is creating connections with universities to increase student involvement with the initiative. Wild Work learning placements will enable students to work with a variety of sectors to enhance biodiversity.



*Rachel Hayden and Finbarr Wallace completing outdoor work around Cork.*

Throughout summer 2020, Rachel Hayden – an 'Ecological Management' student at QUB – joined Wild Work as one of the first official student placements. During her learning placement, Rachel was asked to complete multiple tasks including a specific project report – looking at how landscape management affects climate change and biodiversity.

Wild Work also incorporated practical field work when possible so Rachel could understand how her project fit into Wild Work's wider objective.

## About Wild Work

Wild Work is a unique initiative with biodiversity at its heart. We support everyone committed to helping nature and our particular focus is to connect business, biodiversity and local communities.

We also support the work of both local and national organisations involved in the conservation and protection of our natural environment. With our practical expertise, we create and care for meadows, woodlands, beaches, rivers and other natural habitats, both in urban and rural settings.

Furthermore, we support employment activation by providing quality work experience opportunities for people and aim to contribute to the creation of fulfilling jobs, particularly in the biodiversity sector.

We launched the first official structured learning placement opportunity in early 2020.

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Other roles involved creating social media posts and coordinating a student podcast series, meaning Rachel was able to work on her communication skills and build confidence around discussing her own and Wild Work's projects with people of various biodiversity knowledge, as well as with people interested in learning more about Wild Work.

Work placement is not just about the work though, placement also provides a real sense of what working life is about, from taking part in meetings and group discussions, to working in a team and working within deadlines.

Although her placement occurred during the Covid-19 crisis, an unprecedented time for everyone, including Wild Work, Rachel embraced every aspect of her placement, from hosting team meetings and taking minutes to reviewing the Wild Work website to suggest ways in which the site could be improved for visitors.

Work placement is mutually beneficial for both parties, it is not just about Wild Work helping students learn about nature and key skills for the workplace, but it is also an opportunity for Wild Work to engage with students and learn about new and interesting information coming from academia.

“I wanted to work with Wild Work as they are passionate about working with people for nature and for people, something I hope to pursue in my own career. Throughout my placement I felt that Wild Work supported, guided, and encouraged me to work on improving my practical plant and bird I.D skills, as well as my communication and writing skills. Being given the autonomy to plan and carry out my own research, reviews, and social media content was a huge confidence boost. Completing work placement gave me a fantastic opportunity to meet new people with similar interests and learn valuable skills that I will use in the future.”