

2021 KT Walsh Scholarship (MAIS) Project Summary

1. Project Title and Associated Programme

KT Programme	Education - Horticulture
Project title	The perception of horticulture as a career among school leavers

2. Project background

Horticulture graduate numbers are insufficient to drive innovation and future growth within the industry. Several reports have highlighted the issue of attracting new entrants: a Bord Bia report stated *“the need to market the horticulture industry in a positive light to encourage students to consider horticulture as a career”* (Bord Bia, 2016). The Horticulture Industry Forum (HIF) members created a “Vision,” document which stated, that Teagasc be provided with the resources to deliver *“targeted pertinent education and training to potential new entrant growers”* (HIF, 2017). FoodWise 2025 report identified *“the attraction, retention, and development of talent right along the supply chain, supported by training, will foster the necessary technical and entrepreneurial skill sets”* as a key strategic challenge for the agri-food sector to reach full growth potential. A *‘Horticultural Skills Evaluation by employers in Leinster’*, (Yvonne Grace, MSc thesis 2018), also highlighted a lack of succession as one of the predominant limiting factors among commercial growers for the future of their business. The need for competent, skilled graduates to service this industry at middle and higher management levels was emphasised. This is a worldwide trend but there is a lack of consensus as to why this is the case.

3. Project aims and objectives

To establish second level senior cycle student’s perception of horticultural and its industry. To clarify cause(s) for the decreased interest in horticulture as a viable career over the last 15 years. It would examine the motivation of current students in horticulture at further and third level courses and former recent graduates.

It would explore actions taken in other countries such as the UK, USA and New Zealand where a similar decline has been experienced and assess the engagement strategies used by organisations such as the ISHS, CIH and ASHS for their suitability in an Irish context.

Create a brief multifaceted communications strategy to awaken second level students’ interest in studying horticulture to address global sustainable goals (food security and safety), climate change mitigation (environmental protection) and address malnutrition due to under nutrition (low fruit and vegetable intake) or over nutrition (excess food intake).