

Úna Craven – Report on use of PG Trust Award

Seven years ago I took a year out while studying for a BSc in Landscape and Amenity Management at Writtle College, Essex. I always intended to return to complete my studies but work commitments and other factors prevented me from doing so until September 2011. At that time I was working as an Instructor Gardener at Threave Garden, Dumfries and Galloway, and it was agreed that I could study part-time and still continue with my post. Due to my previous studies I was entitled to enter directly into the 3rd year of the BSc in Horticulture with Plantsmanship taught jointly between the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC formerly SAC). I was fortunate enough to receive funding from the PGTrust to enable me to do this as it involved travelling to Edinburgh one day a week for classes. As I was studying part-time it would take me two years to complete my studies. I successfully completed my first year of study and reapplied to the PGG for funding to complete my studies.

In September 2012 I began the second half of my study for the BSc. However, in November I took up a new position as Head Gardener at Haddo House in Aberdeenshire and I felt that moving, starting a new job and studying part-time was too much to take on. I therefore deferred my study for a further year. Finally, in September 2013, once I was well settled in my new job, I resumed my studies. I was extremely grateful to again receive funding from the PGTrust especially considering I was now travelling further (from Aberdeen) and more often (twice a week). Both of these awards were funded by an anonymous donor, VB. I had four modules to complete to achieve the BSc, three of which were compulsory modules; Research Skills and Data Analysis, Advanced Case Studies, and Horticultural Plant Physiology. The final module, which I chose, was Plant Biotic Interactions.

Research Skills and Data Analysis is really a module designed for students who intend to continue for a fourth year and study for an honours degree, as this lays the groundwork for producing a dissertation which is part of the fourth year coursework. However, it was extremely informative and contained elements which have already proven useful to me. It involved all aspects of collecting information, interpreting data and providing results and conclusions. This included differentiating between qualitative and quantitative data and how to collect each type, performing statistical analysis on data and arriving at robust unbiased conclusions. Advanced Case Studies built on the investigation, data collection and conclusion producing skills developed in Research Skills and Data Analysis. We visited a private garden, an orchard and a sustainable community group and we had to produce a case study on each which detailed what was there now, what could be done with each of the sites, how much it would cost, what impact it would have and whether they could become economically viable. These modules were both useful for developing my investigative and problem solving abilities.

Horticultural Plant Physiology provided an understanding of the physiological basis for horticultural practices. Investigations were made in laboratory

situations to determine the effect of changes to these practices and monitor physiological changes in plants. For example we undertook experiments to monitor the effect of environmental conditions such as drought, flooding and light levels on plants. Evaluation of such experiments and the resulting plant stress identified during them can allow us to predict and maximise horticultural plant production and landscape plant establishment and growth. As gardeners we all strive to get the best out of our plants and this can be achieved by ensuring our plants are grown in the best possible conditions.

Finally, I chose to study Plant Biotic Interactions as I am interested in how plants respond to other organisms and how these may be manipulated to obtain a beneficial effect. We investigated how plants respond to insects and mammals, to environmental conditions, to fungi and to each other. Of particular interest was the revelation that in fact plants do “talk” to each other and have sophisticated attack warning systems which can stimulate defences in themselves and in neighbouring plants. There really is a lot more to plants than meets the eye!

So finally after seven years I have completed my studies and in July I graduated in the historic Bute Hall in the University of Glasgow. I was also honoured on the day to be awarded a special prize for the best 3rd year Horticulture with Plantsmanship student. I thoroughly enjoyed my time studying although at times it was tiring and stressful especially when deadlines were looming both at work and at college. But I made it through thanks to the support of my line managers, the people development team and my fellow co-workers at the National Trust for Scotland, the PG Trust, and my family and friends.



Graduation Day