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Our UCD research coverage takes a new direction this month as we launch a series that focuses on different researchers in the UCD School of Veterinary Medicine to find out more about the paths that led them to their current roles in the school, their areas of interest and what drew them into these areas, what they enjoy most about their work, and what they find most challenging. We begin this new series with a profile of Eilidh Thomson.

FROM PRACTICE TO RESEARCH...

Eilidh Thomson BVMS MRCVS, is a European College of Animal Reproduction (ECAR) specialist with the UCD Herd Health team. She graduated from University of Glasgow in 2014 and went into mixed practice in the North East of Scotland, developing an interest in reproduction and herd health. Her main areas of interest are bull fertility and the environmental impact of beef farming. She is keen to develop this interest through further study and through teaching others with the ultimate objective of improving livestock efficiency and public understanding

Eilidh grew up in Falkirk, Scotland with a house full of dogs, cats, hamsters and guinea pigs: "We had horses all my life but I think I had always wished that I lived on a farm. I remember wanting to be a vet at the tender age of eight, and I achieved that dream when I went to the University of Glasgow in 2009. After the ups and downs of a tough course, I thought I would never go back to studying and doing exams!"

Weird and wonderful

After graduation, Eilidh worked as a mixed-animal vet in the north east of Scotland. "It was a true James Herriot-type practice, and I saw everything from bulldogs to bulls, as well as gaining exposure to the weird and wonderful, such as snakes and alpacas. I'm not sure exactly when my interest in fertility started but, in my second job, I started pushing to go on calls to scan cows and test bulls. I organised meetings with our farmers to discuss calving performance and herd health.

"It took me a long time to realise that practice life might not be for me and, not being fully aware of what options were available to me, I reached out to a former lecturer at Glasgow to see what opportunities existed in cattle reproduction." Driving over to Dublin in the middle of the pandemic to start a cattle-reproduction residency was the scariest thing she had ever done, she says. "But I've not regretted the decision once, despite the massive amount of studying and the thought of exams looming. I have just completed my thesis on pre-breeding examinations in dairy heifers and the effect on their future reproductive performance, as well as that of their offspring."

Farm visits

Eilidh noted: "This project involved several farm visits with a fabulous team, late nights spinning bloods, and a lot of drafts for the research papers. I thoroughly enjoyed the research,



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and I have loved the teaching aspect of the job as well. I would never have thought that I would have liked teaching as much as I do, but being able to inspire even one young vet student, and letting them know how much this degree opens up for them, is incredible."

Eilidh's future plans may involve a PhD and/or a move to New Zealand. Outside of work, she loves travelling: "Top of my bucket list at the moment is Canada and I have just found out my exams are in Vienna, so that will be another new place to tick off! When I'm stuck at home, I love baking and will often use people's birthdays as an excuse to make cake instead of studying. My two lurchers, Flo and Tiger, and my cat Spud, keep me company when I'm not off exploring Ireland with my office mates."