

STEM Entrepreneurship Camp

Report by Orla Banville



Waterford Institute of Technology

INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE

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From the 6th to the 10th of December, I participated in Waterford institute of Technology's TY STEM Entrepreneurship Camp. The STEM Entrepreneurship Camp is designed to give students a chance to explore the world of innovation and enterprise linked with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). This camp was free of charge and run online, so I was able to do it from home for the first three days as school was closed and the computer room in school for the last two.

We received an email from our TY coordinator Ms. Zimmermann, that informed us about this camp. I thought that it would be a great opportunity for me, as I have a strong interest in science and hope to pursue a career in it. I filled out the application form which included answering three essay-type questions:

1. Which STEM subjects do you plan on studying for your Leaving Cert?
2. Why would you like to do this camp?
3. What do you hope to gain from this camp?

A week later I was informed that I had been accepted to do the camp.

The camp consisted of talks from guest speakers and team work with the other camp participants. At the beginning of the week, we were split into our teams of five and introduced to our Team leader.

Each team was set the challenge of using their creative and innovative skills to re-imagine the 'Bus Experience'. To help us with this challenge, we were taught a lot about entrepreneurship and the innovative process. WIT Lecturer, Margaret Tynan, spoke to us about how empathy plays a key role in entrepreneurship, as an entrepreneur must understand the feelings of their customers, in order to create a product that will appeal to them.

Throughout the week, we worked together to develop an idea and create a presentation that would be presented on the final day of the camp. Working on a project online with people I had never met before was definitely a challenge, but it presented a good opportunity to improve our communication skills.

At the end of the week, we pitched our idea to a panel of entrepreneurs in a ‘Dragon’s Den’ format and then they gave us feedback. The constructive criticism that the professionals gave us was really valuable and overall, it was a really beneficial experience.

Each day an Irish Entrepreneur shared their experience with us. Each entrepreneur had a background in STEM and it was really inspiring to hear how they had used their knowledge and creativity to innovate and solve problems. They spoke to us about their journey.

One of the entrepreneurs that fascinated me was Dr. Laurence Fitzhenry. Dr. Fitzhenry has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Applied Chemistry and a PhD in Polymer and Analytical Chemistry. After completing his PhD, he began research into the development of contact lenses for the controlled release of pharmaceuticals. In 2019 he set up his company OcuDel which delivers solutions for chronic eye diseases in both the human and animal health sector.

As well as the entrepreneurs who spoke to us, we received STEM related talks from a number of interesting people. MEP Grace O’Sullivan spoke to us about climate change and the importance of sustainability. Meteorologist, Gerald Fleming, spoke about the relationship between climate change and extreme weather events.

This camp was a totally new experience for me and I think I have gained a lot from it. The talks that we received throughout the week were really interesting. I found the entrepreneurs to be really inspiring, each of them had a unique story and their advice was great. I think that working on the project with my team was a rewarding experience as it challenged us to be imaginative and collaborate with each other.

The team at WIT who ran the camp were really friendly and interactive. I am very grateful for this experience and would recommend the camp to any of next year’s TYs who are similarly interested in STEM.