# Reengagement Panel Report

# Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

## Part 1     Details of provider

### 1.1     Applicant Provider

| | |
|---|---|
| Registered Business/Trading Name: | Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Development Authority) |
| Address: | Oak Park, Carlow, R39 XE12. |
| Date of Application: | 26 September 2020 |
| Date of resubmission of application: | 22nd December 2020 |
| Date of evaluation: | 27th October 2020<br>30th October 2020 |
| Date of site visit (if applicable): | 30th October 2020 |
| Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee: | 25th February 2021 |

### 1.2     Profile of provider

**Teagasc Statutory Framework and Functions:**

Teagasc (the Agriculture and Food Development Authority) is a statutory national body providing research, advisory and education/ training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. It was established in 1988 under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988 (http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1988/act/18/section/3/enacted/en/html#sec3 ). Teagasc integrated the functions of its predecessor organisations, An Foras Talúntais (AFT), the state agricultural research body; and An Comhairle Oiliúna Talmhaíochta (ACOT), the state agricultural advisory and education/training body. The principal functions of Teagasc as outlined in the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act 1988, are threefold:

1) To provide, or procure the provision of educational, training and advisory services in agriculture,

including such educational, training or advisory services in agriculture as may be specified by the Minister for the purpose of giving effect to any directive, regulation or other act adopted by an institution of the European Communities.

2) To obtain and make available to the agricultural industry the scientific and practical information in relation to agriculture required by it.

3) To undertake, promote, encourage, assist, co-ordinate, facilitate and review agricultural research and development (including research and development in relation to food processing and the food processing industry).

It is important to note that Section 4 (2) and 4(3) and 4(4) of the aforementioned Act also provides the following:

(*2) Teagasc shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, also have and enjoy all those functions (other than those conferred by sections 34 , 36 and 59 of the National Agricultural Advisory, Education and Research Authority Act, 1977 ) that immediately before the establishment day, were vested in the Institute, the Council, An Comhairle and the Board and are not specified in subsection (1).*

*(3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsections (1) and (2), Teagasc shall, in performing its functions, have particular regard to the need for and the importance of agricultural training and education for young persons and research and development in relation to food processing and the food processing industry.*

It would seem clear from this that under Section 4(2) above, Teagasc also inherited the following statutory functions from An Comhairle Oiliúna Talmhaíochta (ACOT), the state agricultural advisory and education/training body, as set out in Section 7 of the Agriculture (An Comhairle Oiliúna Talmhaíochta ) Act, 1979:

*7.—(1) An Comhairle shall have the general functions, subject to the provisions of the Act of 1977, as amended by this Act, of providing, or causing to be provided, training and advisory services in agriculture (as defined in that Act) and making available the scientific and practical knowledge required by the agricultural industry.*

For the avoidance of doubt, 'agriculture' is defined under Section 2 of the National Agricultural Advisory, Education and Research Authority Act, 1977 as including:

*(a) horticulture, dairying, the breeding of horses, cattle, pigs and other livestock, poultry and bee-keeping,*
*(b) the cultivation, production and preservation of crops, including grass,*
*(c) the use and application of manures and fertilisers,*

*(d) the production and processing of meat and other livestock products, milk and other dairy products, eggs and other poultry products, honey and other bee products, fruit and other horticultural products, and*

*(e) animal nutrition, farm management, farm home management, agricultural economics, marketing and other activities and sciences which relate to or tend to improve or develop agriculture,*

In addition, Teagasc inherited under Section 4(2) the following statutory functions from An Foras Talúntais (AFT), (the state agricultural research body) as set out under Section 4 of the Agriculture (An Foras Talúntais) Act, 1958:

4.—(1) The functions of the Institute are to review, facilitate, encourage, assist, co-ordinate, promote and undertake agricultural research.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) of this section, the Institute may do all or any of the following:

(a) make grants, subject to such conditions as it may think fit to impose, to persons engaged in carrying out agricultural research for the extension and development of their facilities for carrying out agricultural research,

(b) provide such new facilities for carrying out agricultural research as it considers desirable and provide for their use, control and administration by or on behalf of the Institute or otherwise,

(c) provide for the use, control and administration by the Institute of such facilities for carrying out agricultural research as may be transferred to the Institute, with its consent,

(d) consult with and advise persons engaged in carrying out agricultural research in relation to their programmes of agricultural research,

(e) make grants, subject to such conditions as it may think fit to impose, to assist the carrying out of specific programmes of agricultural research or specific agricultural research,

(f) provide scholarships and other awards for the carrying out of post-graduate agricultural research,

(g) award fellowships, subject to such conditions as it may think fit to impose, to persons who have done outstanding work in relation to agricultural science or agricultural research,

(h) provide and organise courses of study for advanced students in agricultural research and related subjects,

(i) provide and organise seminars, conferences, lectures and demonstrations on agricultural research and related subjects and on specific problems and programmes in relation thereto,

(j) disseminate, or procure the dissemination of, the results of agricultural research to interested persons, including, in particular, persons engaged in providing advisory services in relation to agriculture,

(k) publish, or procure the publication of, the results of agricultural research.

(3) The Institute shall advise the Minister on any matter relating to agricultural research or agricultural science on which its advice is requested by him.

**Teagasc Colleges**

Teagasc colleges have been strategically located and deliver a wide range of NFQ Level 5 and Level 6 courses in agriculture, horticulture, equine and forestry. The colleges also collaborate with a number of third level institutions in the delivery of Higher Level courses in agriculture and horticulture under the quality assurance of those institutions.

Colleges are located in:

Teagasc, Ballyhaise College, Ballyhaise, Co Cavan. H12 E392

Teagasc, Clonakilty Agricultural College, Darrary, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, P85 AX52

Teagasc, Kildalton College, Piltown, Co Kilkenny

Teagasc, The National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Botanic Ave, Glasnevin, D09 VY63 and

Ashtown (Teagasc Food Research Centre, Scribblestown, Dublin 15

Teagasc education and training provision has been focusing primarily at further (vocational) education land based qualifications on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Programmes leading to major awards, special purpose awards and component awards are delivered at NFQ Level 5 Certificate and at NFQ Level 6 Advanced Certificate levels [equivalent to European Framework of Qualifications (EQF) Levels 4 and 5].

**Provider delivery models, QQI Validated Programmes  and QQI Certification Data:**

- Teagasc education delivery models include QQI accredited full time, part-time and blended delivery mode.
- programmes; and accredited/non accredited short duration courses. Learner profiles include school leavers, mature farming practitioners, graduates of non-agricultural awards, land sector personnel and rural professionals.
- QQI validated Teagasc Level 5 and 6 programmes include:


Agriculture:
Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture (QQI award 5M20454).
Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture - Pig Production (QQI award 5M20454).
Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture - Poultry Production) (QQI award 5M20454).
Level 6 Advanced Certificate programmes:
• Dairy Herd Management (QQI award 6M20486).
• Drystock Herd Management (QQI award 6M20486).

• Pig Management (QQI award 6M20486).
• Poultry Husbandry Management (QQI award 6M20486).
• Crops and Machinery (QQI award 6M20486).
• Agriculture Mechanisation (QQI award 6M20486).
• Teagasc Part-time Green Cert (QQI awards 5M20454, 6S20487).
• Teagasc Distance Education Green Cert (QQI awards 5M20454, 6S20487).
• Teagasc Distance Education Advanced Dairy Management (QQI award 5M20454, 6M20486).
• Planning for Dairy Expansion (QQI award 6S2745).

Horticulture:
Level 5 Certificate in Horticulture (QQI award 5M2586).
Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Horticulture:
• Nursery Stock Production (QQI award 6M4334).
• Food Production (QQI award 6M4334).
• Sports turf (QQI award 6M4334).
• Landscaping ((QQI award 6M4334).

Forestry:
Level 5 Certificate in Forestry (QQI award 5M3425).
Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Forestry (QQI award 6M4337).

Equine:
Level 5 Certificate in Horsemanship (Equitation) (QQI award 5M3371).
Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Horsemanship (Equitation) (QQI award 6M3505).
Level 5 Certificate in Horsemanship (Stud) (QQI award 5M3371).
Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Equine Breeding (Stud) (QQI award 6M3507).

Food:
Farmhouse Cheese Making (QQI award 6S0241).
Food Production HACCP Management QQI award 6S0212).
Laboratory Auditing (QQI award 6S2179).
Food Hygiene (QQI award 4S2087).


Certification Data:

The substantial majority (>85%) of QQI certifications for Teagasc further education programmes relate to agricultural awards. Teagasc is also a provider of further education major award programmes for the equine, forestry and horticulture sectors; and of component (minor) awards for the horticulture and food sectors.

Guideline number of learners participating per year:

QQI accredited Level 5 and 6 programmes:
Fulltime programmes: c. 1,100
Part-time/ Distance education programmes: c.3,000

HE programmes that Teagasc support the delivery of:
Undergraduate learners of HE institutions c. 1,000
Postgraduate learners of HE institutions c. 150 – 200

The numbers participating in accredited and non-accredited short-duration courses can vary considerably but are typically expected to be in the range 2,000 to 3,000 in a given year. Circa 900 participated in Teagasc ConnectEd courses and events.

Total annual QQI Level 5 and 6 certifications for Teagasc programmes averaged at c3,600 over the past 10 years [source: QQI certification data]. However there has been a substantial upward shift in certifications in recent years. For the period 2015 to 2019 annual certifications averaged at c4,800 relative to c2,500 for the 2010 to 2014 period.

**Higher Education Programmes in conjunction with other Providers:**
Teagasc, through formal agreements, also supports the provision of various Level 6 to 8 land sector higher education (HE) institutions programmes whereby HE learners attend at Teagasc colleges for some agricultural production, husbandry and farm management modules of their programmes. Teagasc also provides research opportunities for postgraduate learners enrolled with HE institutions. University College Dublin validates the Teagasc Level 7 Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management programme.

**Future Request for Extension of Scope noted in Application**
Teagasc is planning to extend its provision into Higher Education and Training apprenticeships at level 6 and 7 based on demand from industry. Five apprenticeship programmes are in development in the areas of agriculture (x2), horticulture (x2), and equine. These programmes together with the Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for providers of Statutory Apprenticeships programmes will be submitted to QQI in 2021 for validation and agreement in 2021.

**Learner Profile:**

QQI data indicates that circa 33% of Teagasc learners were in the 15 to 24 age bracket with c55% in the 25 to 39 bracket and the remainder in the 40+ bracket.

Primary target groups for QQI accredited Teagasc Level 5 and 6 programmes
- Full-time programmes: school leavers (Post Leaving Certificate) predominantly.
- Part-time programme: learners over 23 years without third level qualifications (adult education).
- Distance education programme: learners who already have achieved a major non-agricultural award at Level 6 or higher.

Higher education (HE) learners
Higher education undergraduate learners (HE institutions that have collaborative agreements with Teagasc) attend Teagasc colleges for elements of their HE programme. Postgraduate learners (Level 9 and 10) completing their academic research at Teagasc centres under the joint supervision of their academic institution and Teagasc through the Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme. Teagasc is planning to extend its provision into Higher Education and Training apprenticeships at level 6 and 7, and potentially develop some Minor or Special Purpose Awards at level 7 or 8 for Continuing Professional Development purposes.

Target groups for accredited and non –accredited short duration courses
Industry Practitioners (e.g. farmers, growers)
Industry support service staff (e.g. financial institutions, feed suppliers, animal transporters, agri-services and other.)

## Part 2    Panel Membership

| Name | Role of panel member | Organisation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Chair: Dr. Tara Ryan – Registrar, Irish Management Institute (IMI) | | |
| 2. Secretary- Treasa Brannick OCillin BL | | |
| 3. Dr. John Mulcahy – former Head Hospitality Fáilte Ireland (Food Tourism, Hospitality Education, & Standards) | | |
| 4. Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan - Principal Blanchardstown Campus, TU Dublin | | |
| 5. Dr. Dermot Douglas Higher education consultant - former Head of Academic Affairs/Secretary, Institutes of Technology Ireland | | |
| 6. International UK – Dr. Helen Corkill, Quality Assurance Agency and the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) | | |
| 7. International USA – Dr. Leah K. Matthews, Executive Director, Distance Education Accreditation Commission, US, Washington D.C | | |

## Part 3    Findings of the Panel

### 3.1    Summary Findings

The panel acknowledges the considerable track record, experience and good standing of Teagasc both within the education sector and equally within the agricultural sector. The panel acknowledges and commends the particularly positive, professional and open attitude of Teagasc personnel to the re-engagement process. Teagasc is very clearly a learning organisation with an ethos based on public service values, a strong focus on serving the land sector and its communities, and securing positive outcomes for their learners. It was clear that the attitude of Teagasc towards re-engagement was that it presented a valuable learning opportunity to improve systems and processes within the organisation in terms of quality assuring delivery to learners. The positive disposition of the provider significantly aided the examination of quality assurance processes conducted by the panel in conjunction with the provider, in particular as part of providing information in the lead up and on day of the virtual site visit.

The reengagement process has involved a comprehensive review by the panel of Teagasc's Quality Assurance (QA) manual, policies, and related documentation. Teagasc made a very strong, detailed and comprehensive submission in this regard. There was also a lengthy and robust review meeting as part of a site visit. During the latter, the panel engaged directly with key members of staff working at both executive and operational and across different areas, achieving triangulation of information/documentation provided as part of the review. A learner centred approach was evident across the organisation as a whole, with a clear commitment to learner support and progression.

Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the site visit, despite a significant amount of work successfully completed in terms of new governance structures, the panel identified improvements required around these structures in terms of externality, connection to higher level governance units within Teagasc, and

learner representation on working groups and governance units that influence the quality of the learner experience. The mode of operation of the Quality Group with responsibility for oversight of quality assurance and enhancement was problematic as the membership was not static, which was reflected in its title of 'group'. It was considered that this unit required increased standing, a clearer structure ensuring full separation of responsibilities in terms of development and approval functions, and the academic decision-making function is separated and not unduly influenced by commercial considerations. The panel notes that due to the public nature, the relevant statutory framework and organisational ethos of Teagasc, commercial considerations are limited to financial and funding matters[1]. The panel makes no suggestion that academic decision making has not been robust, however, strengthening governance structures in this regard will benefit from the modifications, making the role of this governance unit more akin to an Academic Council and enhancing self-evaluation processes as part of governance. These were identified as proposed mandatory changes and are outlined in detail in Section 7.1 of this report. Additional items of specific advice are included in Section 7.2.

However, in light of the provider's robust and comprehensive submission, the capacity and capability demonstrated by the provider as part of the process, and that the vulnerabilities identified while fundamental, were discrete in nature and could be remedied within a short period for the provider to move forward, the panel availed of the option to defer its overall decision for a period of six weeks, and allowed Teagasc this time to submit evidence to the panel that the changes identified had been satisfactorily addressed.

The panel also notes that Teagasc has expressed an intention to apply for an extension of scope as part of programme validation applications to QQI to deliver at Level 6 (Higher Certificate) and Level 7 (Ordinary Degree) which in the main will be agricultural apprenticeships, and also possibly some short programmes leading to Minor or Special Purpose Awards in the context of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The provider has acted in full transparency in this regard, and while some additional information on the bespoke governance and quality assurance of these type of programmes was provided, this has not been evaluated by this panel. However, the panel subject to the mandatory changes being evidenced, is of the view that the provider should be well placed to seek QQI programme validation for these purposes at some point in the future on the basis that the appointed programme validation panel will evaluate the relevant additional quality assurance required for these programmes.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc. It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures[2].

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[1] It should be noted that *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*, section 2, paragraph 1.1 (c), specifies that decision-making should be "independent of commercial considerations". Where 'commercial considerations' are referenced in this report, they should be interpreted as referring solely to financial and funding matters which reflects Teagasc's context.

[2] Based on Teagasc's response to the findings of the Panel dated 8th February 2021.

## 3.2 Recommendation of the panel to Programmes and Awards Executive Committee of QQI

|  | Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate |
|---|---|
| **Approve** Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Development Authority) draft QA procedures | **X** |
| **Refuse approval** of [the provider's – insert name] draft QA procedures **with mandatory changes** set out in Section 7.1<br><br>(If this recommendation is accepted by QQI, the provider may make a revised application within six months of the decision) |  |
| **Refuse to approve** [the provider's – insert name] draft QA procedures |  |

# Part 4 Evaluation of provider capacity

## 4.1 Legal and compliance requirements:

|  | *Criteria* | *Yes/No/ Partially* | *Comments* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *4.1.1(a)* | **Criterion:** *Is the applicant an established Legal Entity who has Education and/or Training as a Principal Function?* | *Yes* | Teagasc is a statutory body established under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988, wherein its statutory functions are set out, which include an education and training function. |
| *4.1.2(a)* | **Criterion:** *Is the legal entity established in the European Union and does it have a substantial presence in Ireland?* | *Yes* | Yes. As well as being a statutory body, Teagasc is a registered Charity CHY9086 and is registered with the Charities Regulator. Please see https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-the-public/search-the-register-of-charities/charity-detail?srchstr=Teagasc&regid=20022754 Teagasc is also subject to inspection by the Comptroller and Auditor General. |
| *4.1.3(a)* | **Criterion:** *Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?* | **Yes** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider all collaborations were clearly specified and included collaborations with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), grant aided private colleges a strategic alliance with Farm Relief Services and contracted training providers. |
| *4.1.4(a)* | **Criterion:** *Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?* | *Yes* | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider third-party relationships are compatible with the scope of access sought by Teagasc. |
| *4.1.5(a)* | **Criterion:** *Are the applicable regulations* | **Yes** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider is |

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| | *and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?* | | compliant. Insurance, revenue and regulatory requirements within this jurisdiction would seem to be complied with. OCAG signed off on accounts in June 2020 after their audit.<br><br>Teagasc has also indicated in its Gap Analysis that Teagasc Education has the support of the Teagasc Corporate Service Dept., Finance Dept., HR Dept., ICT Dept., Customer Service Officer, Freedom of Information Officer and Data Protection Officer who have responsibility for ensuring Teagasc complies with relevant legislation. |
| **4.1.6(a)** | **Criterion:** *Is the applicant in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any countries where it operates (or where its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrols learners, or where it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators.* | **Yes** | The provider is in good standing and has a long and established history of education and training provision. |

**Findings**

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that Teagasc meets the legal and compliance requirements for re-engagement.

**4.2     Resource, governance and structural requirements:**

|  | *Criteria* | *Yes/No/ Partially* | *Comments* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4.2.1(a) | **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a sufficient resource base and is it stable and in good financial standing?* | **Yes** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider does have a sufficient resource base and is in stable and good financial standing.<br><br>The Teagasc Annual Report and Accounts (2018) are available at: https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/news/2019/teagasc-annual-report-and.php<br><br>Teagasc income and expenditure budget for 2020 is projected to be in the region of €191m. Of this, circa €133m will arise through publicly funded grant in aid and the remainder arises through generated income from Teagasc research, farm advisory and education activities. The Teagasc Knowledge Transfer Directorate (advisory and education) income and expenditure for 2020 is projected to be in the region of €50m; of which circa €20m will be devoted to direct Teagasc education delivery exclusive of supporting unit costs (e.g. HR, Corporate Services, ICT, Finance and other such costs).<br><br>Teagasc is subject to the Comptroller and Auditor General and its accounts were audited on |

| | | | the 29 June 2020 with no issues arising. See Annual Report 2019 pg. 67 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4.2.2(a) | **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?* | **Yes** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider has a reasonable business case for sustainable provision. Teagasc is a state sponsored body within the state bodies division of DAFM. It was established in 1988. The Teagasc Establishment Act specifically mandates Teagasc to provide and procure agricultural education and training. Similar functions were mandated to Teagasc predecessor organisations since the foundation of the state. Teagasc receives annual state grant in aid funding from the public exchequer through DAFM. The Teagasc Education Vision (2018) sets out Teagasc' s strategic goals for land sector education over the coming decade and demonstrates Teagasc' s long term commitment to education and training. The provider also indicated that to the best of its knowledge this criterion is met. |
| 4.2.3(a) | **Criterion:** *Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?* | **Yes** | At the conclusion of the site visit, the panel was not satisfied that the provider's governance and decision-making structures had appropriate levels of externality, |

| | | | learner representation. There was also a lack of clarity in relation to the reporting and membership structures of one of the more important governance units which caused insufficient clarity on full separation between academic and commercial decision making, and separation between parties/units which developed/modified programmes and governance units which approved modifications or programmes for submission to validation.<br><br>These vulnerabilities have been satisfactorily addressed by the provider through their formal response dated 8th February 2021. |
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| 4.2.4(a) | **Criterion:** *Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?* | **Yes** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider does have appropriate arrangements in place including Result Approval Panels prior to certification being sought. Double check how RAPs are operating under multi centre arrangements. |

**Findings**

Vulnerabilities in the new academic governance structure were identified with the provider. However, these vulnerabilities were addressed within the agreed period as evidenced by an updated submission from Teagasc dated 8th February 2021 as it relates to governance. The panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that Teagasc meets resource, governance and structural requirements after evaluating updated documentation.

## 4.3 Programme development and provision requirements:

| | Criteria | Yes/No/ Partially | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **4.3.1(a)** | **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have experience and a track record in providing education and training programmes?* | **Yes** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider does have an impressive level of experience and track record even preceding its establishment in 1988 as it inherited functions from previously existing statutory bodies. |
| **4.3.2(a)** | **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?* | **Yes** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider has a stable complement of staff with national coverage. Contracted training staff are used to supplement where demand arises outside of usual human resource planning cycles. |
| **4.3.3(a)** | **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have the capacity to comply with the standard conditions for validation specified in Section 45(3) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) (the Act)?* | **Yes** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider does have capacity. |
| **4.3.4(a)** | **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have the fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision proposed in place?* | **YES** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider does have the necessary resources and facilities for the |

| | | | provision of its programmes. Teagasc have an impressive resource base in this regard. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4.3.5(a) | **Criterion:** *Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?* | **YES** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider has appropriate ATP arrangements in place. Some enhancements worth considering are recommended further on in the report. In addition, it is noted that the Admissions Appeals Flow Chart submitted immediately prior to the virtual site visit may need amendment to avoid any misperception that the Head of Education is involved in the decision at a number of different levels, which is understood not to be the intent. |
| 4.3.6(a) | **Criterion:** *Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?* | **YES** | Based on the process undertaken, evidence provided in writing/orally the provider has appropriate structures and resources to ensure the fair and consistence assessment of learners. These included internal verification processes and authentication |

| | | | processes carried out by the central quality assurance unit, in conjunction with external experts.<br>There was concern about the authentication functions being labelled as "external" as 'independent of centre' is more accurate, as it is carried out by the CDSU. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **4.3.7(a)** | **Criterion:** *Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?* | **YES** | Teagasc provides the following protection:<br>*In keeping with its statutory responsibility Teagasc has and will continue to protect learners, in the event of a private college or Teagasc college/centre ceasing to provide training programmes, by arranging for an adjacent college or local centre to deliver*<br>*the outstanding education and training programme requirements*<br><br>The provider is a national multi-centre provider and has an internal arrangement in place, which is permissible in light of it being a statutory provider and publicly funded. |

**Findings**

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that all relevant programme development and provision requirements are in place.

**4.4 Overall findings in respect of provider capacity to provide sustainable education and training**

Appropriate evidence was submitted as part of the provider's application for reengagement, through the site visit/meeting and subsequent submission of modifications made to indicate that the provider clearly has the capacity to provide sustainable education and training within its current scope of provision.

## Part 5　　Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by Teagasc

*The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Teagasc's quality assurance procedures against QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016) and Topic Specific QA Guidelines - Blended Learning and Apprenticeship.  Sections 1-11 of the report follows the structure and referencing of the Core QA Guidelines.*

### 1　　　　　GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

*Panel Findings:*

Teagasc is a multi-centre, national provider of education and training with dispersed delivery but with a centralised programme development and quality assurance unit known as the Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU), which operates independently of centres.

The Panel examined the membership and Terms of Reference (TORs) of all governance units prior to the meeting with the provider. These were accompanied by organisational structural charts, reporting arrangements and process maps.  It was clear that the provider had given serious consideration to the governance aspect of the Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and had endeavoured to design a comprehensive system of governance to support quality programme delivery for their learners.

It is important to note that Teagasc is a three-pronged organisation with statutory functions in research, advisory services and education and training. It is for this reason, that Teagasc comes under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture versus the Department of Education. The panel was also advised by the Head of Education that Teagasc has very few direct comparators internationally in this respect. It therefore has an unusual structure within the educational sphere.

The organisational structure is a strength for Teagasc but also a challenge, as education and training division is part of a larger and more complex organisation. The strengths for a provider of education and training being part of a larger entity, include being scaffolded by strong corporate capabilities and access to wider expertise including in areas such as business and resource planning, human resources, branding, legal and regulatory compliance, data protection, risk and safety management, and links to a wider network of state agencies, public bodies, NGOs and international organisations. It was apparent, that challenge presented as one of organisational complexity which consequently added to the complexity of governance structures and achieving connectivity across and in particular vertically within the organisation at supra department level.

There was a discussion with the provider in terms of how governance ensures that decisions on academic matters are made free from commercial consideration (as interpreted in this document), and in this respect how was the Authority and sub-committees of the Authority connected to decisions in relation to academic affairs. It was emphasised that the primary purpose of Teagasc is to meet the needs of the land sector and this is true of all the education and training aspect also. A business plan is presented by the Head of Education to the Authority and a budget is assigned for the education and training function. The same process applies to the other functions. It was noted by the panel that when Teagasc experienced a significant increase in demand for its services between 2014-2019, just over one third of new posts were secured by the education and training function clearly demonstrating parity of esteem for the education function.

The budget will cover the majority of the cost of delivery as course fees only cover a relatively small part of the costs. The budget is determined based on meeting the needs of the sector, and this informs the

ethos of the organisation and the education and training function and not commercial gain. A number of examples were given to further evidence this assertion, including:

1. the requirement to seek Teagasc Authority approval to increase course fees which would require a case to be made.
2. the education and training function is not encouraged to convert to more cost-effective delivery models in order to purely reduce delivery costs.
3. The development of new programmes is not driven by commercial considerations (as interpreted in this document) but based on the needs of the sector.

It was evident through discussion that there is a performance-based element to the funding of the education and training function, as part of business planning and resource allocation processes, which creates significant accountability. However, this process would seem to be predominately based on meeting the needs of the land sector, including as learners. The education and training function is given a wide remit in terms of decision-making authority in respect of programme governance e.g. content of programmes, level of work-based learning and approval of programmes. It also has a wide remit in terms of decision-making authority in respect of quality assurance and enhancement. How programmes are delivered and managed on the ground, predominately falls to the Head of Education, the Head of the CDSU and centre management teams.

To ensure pragmatic, fit for purpose practices across education programmes in Teagasc, staff within CDSU have defined roles, meet on a regular basis, have direct access to the Head of Education, consult both internally and externally in development and review processes, with a primary focus on continuous improvement. Teagasc quality assurance policies and procedures are developed with regard to QQI statutory quality assurance guidelines, are learner centred, and focused on achieving the Teagasc mission to support science-based innovation to underpin competitiveness, profitability, and sustainability in agri-food sector. Extensive interviews with Teagasc leadership, administration and staff provided evidence that the quality assurance policies and principles are implemented and communicated clearly to teaching staff. Detailed procedures are in place for implementing these policies that entail the establishment of working groups consisting of stakeholders formed for consultation on policy development work. Teagasc assures that such policies and procedures are cognisant of, and consistent with, Teagasc's mission and goals as well as with QQI guidelines. There is evidence of a holistic approach toward quality assurance with accountability serving as a central element and continuous improvement as an ongoing effort. Teagasc research programmes have extensive quality assurance mechanisms in place that maintain effective internal control of resources and key performance indicators.


The governance within the education and training function was explored in more detail with the provider. It was noted by the panel that the following groups were operating:

**Teagasc Education Quality Group** – with responsibility for direction and leadership in the development, monitoring and review of Teagasc education programmes and can accept or reject programme development, monitoring and review initiatives, subject to final approval by the Head of Education. The Chair is Head of the CDSU.

**Teagasc Programme Development Group** – with responsibility to consult with appropriate stakeholders, and develop Teagasc training programmes, support materials, and policies for submission to the Teagasc Education Quality Group. The Chair is the Teagasc National Education Resource Specialist

**Teagasc Programme Review Group** – with responsibility to consult with appropriate stakeholders, review Teagasc training programmes and support materials and recommend programme changes/updates to the Teagasc Education Quality Group. The Chair is the Teagasc National Education Resource Specialist.

**Teagasc Programme Monitoring Group** – with responsibility to monitor Teagasc training programmes in respect of their delivery and quality assurance procedures. This can be done individually or as a group. The group reports directly to the Head of the CDSU. The Chair is the Teagasc National Verification and Standards Specialist.

**Education Resources Leadership Teams** - ERLTs are expert teams responsible for developing new Teagasc Education Resource material. In the past when module workbooks were initially developed cross functional groups from across Teagasc would have contributed. A CDSU Member will be the project manager.

While the panel acknowledged the comprehensive nature of the governance system and the important work being carried out and co-ordinated as part of the different groupings, some aspects were less clear. Within the QA Manual the reporting lines were somewhat different to those outlined in the Terms of Reference set out above, in that all groups as part of the Quality Group seemed to be reporting directly to the Head of the CDSU. The Quality Group seemed to be connected only to the Head of the CDSU in what seemed like a consultative capacity, and with the direct reporting line being between the Head of the CDSU and the Head of Education. The membership of the groups was not clearly defined in the either the diagrams or the Terms of Reference.

These observations were explored with the provider as part of the site visit (virtual) and it emerged through discussion that the membership was inclined to change depending on what the particular group was looking at, and the groups were formed and brought together on an ad hoc basis. This included the Quality Group, which according to the Terms of Reference the other groups were supposed to be feeding their work into for consideration and recommendation, or not as the case may be, to the Head of Education. It was queried whether 'group' was appropriate for the Quality Group which had a very important function within the organisation.

The provider did elucidate the thinking behind this: depending on the area or programme being looked at different expertise may be needed, and different centre managers and teachers would often be selected to participate on the groups. It also emerged that members of the CDSU could be on both a working group reporting to the Quality Group and on the Quality Group itself, however, subject to the restriction that if a member had been on the working group, they would not form part of the membership of the Quality Group when the work of that working group was being considered. It was also noted by the panel that the Head of the CDSU was also the Chair of the Quality Group as the

organisation considering the work coming out of the working groups, which were all Chaired by members of the CDSU. One of the working groups also only reported into the Head of the CDSU.

While it was clear that a lot of consideration had been given to the structures, from an academic governance perspective the view was formed by the panel that there was a lack of clarity in terms of how full separation of responsibilities could be ensured from those that developed to those that approved, and equally despite the clear ethos of the organisation, full separation could not be clearly demonstrated in terms of academic decision making and commercial considerations (as interpreted in this document) due to ambiguity in the structures. The panel also pointed out that it was hard to see where within the governance structure the function of protecting, maintaining, and developing academic standards, akin to that of an Academic Council, was clearly provided for, and in a way which was tangibly and by design protected from commercial considerations. There was not clear and tangible separation within the structures from those that develop and those that approve programmes of education and training.

There was an overreliance on populating the governance units from internal pools and increased externality in governance units was also deemed necessary, in particular in relation to the Quality Group as it was the highest unit in the education function. Externality increases objectivity and robustness in self-evaluation processes.

Finally, it was also noted that based on the structures it would seem that the consideration of outcomes/recommendations of the Quality Group, would remain with the Head of Education in conjunction with the Head of the CDSU, as there was no evident connection to other governance structures higher up within the organisation. It was the view of the panel that governance would be improved with greater levels of connectivity between the governance units in the education and training function and those higher up as the Authority or sub-committee of the Authority with a remit for education and training. It was also the view of the panel that clear criteria should exist on selection of members for governance units with mechanisms in place to ensure members fully understand their roles; and for role combination restrictions to be expressed and adhered to, to ensure sufficient separation is achieved.

The absence of learner representation in the governance system was examined. On a positive note, Teagasc had also identified this as a vulnerability in their own gap analysis. Leading on from this there was further discussion on the role of learners in the governance system, to give voice to how the end users feel about the quality of the experience. Currently the only area where learners are represented is on the Teagasc Educational Forum, which is a consultative body not a decision making body. The Teagasc Authority and relevant subcommittees could also benefit from having representatives that are graduates of Teagasc programmes of education and training. Currently this may be implicitly provided through the representative of Macra na Feirme.  Teagasc are actively exploring ways to involve learners in more governance groups.

The role of data in governance as part of quality assurance and enhancement was also explored, in particular the use of metrics against which to measure effectiveness, and the role of data in informing determinations of effectiveness e.g. critical data sets that send signals such as pass rates/referral rates. There was particular emphasis on how quality assurance systems are improved based on the use of data. Teagasc identified learner feedback from surveys as a key data set, and it was used to inform discussions with centres to discuss the findings, in particular where they fell below average in responses. In addition, this data informed discussions between the Head of Education and the Authority as this data

would also be presented to them.  It was clear that the data was being used to address quality issues which might arise in centres and this was considered a positive methodology. However, the panel was of the view that this needed to be part of a quality improvement cycle within the governance system so that there was oversight to ensure the necessary adjustments were being carried out, thereby closing the loop. This is how a system improves itself.

Finally, the issue of risk and risk management was discussed. Teagasc advised the panel that risk registers were completed as part of level 3 business planning (centre level) and are unique to the educational context. The level 3 centre business plans are then furnished to the Head of Education who then prepares a Level 2 business plan for the education function. These are then incorporated to the level 1 business plan for Teagasc at Authority level. Risk registers have to be reviewed every 2 months and reported on nationally. Auditing occurs at centre and corporate level. This was considered a robust process in terms of managing and monitoring risk. The panel also emphasised the importance of the overall organisation risk register including an explicit focus on educational risks.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines will be sufficiently addressed subject to the implementation of the proposed mandatory changes.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc. It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures[3].

## 2          DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Teagasc embeds a culture of quality and compliance within its overarching strategy. Given that Teagasc is a semi state organisation it must comply with a number of acts, state directives and codes of practice. Teagasc's evaluation unit is central in embedding a culture of quality as an underpinning principle, and an integral component of all Teagasc activities. Emanating from these, Teagasc education develops and adopts appropriate and effective policies and procedures in consultation with its stakeholders. It uses similar practices when developing and implementing quality, quality assurance, improvement and enhancement. Education staff, learners and external stakeholders are involved in the quality assurance system. Through the Learner Handbook, learners are made aware of their role and responsibilities and are asked to give feedback formally, through learner surveys, across all of the Colleges and areas of provision. Staff have access to and fully engage with the CDSU, are consulted in the development of policies, procedures and course materials, and provide feedback on an on-going basis to ensure programme improvement and implementation.

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[3] Based on Teagasc's response to the findings of the Panel dated 8th February 2021

To ensure effective academic domain over quality assurance, Teagasc education level policies and procedures are ratified by the Teagasc Education Quality Group and are authorised and implemented by the head of CDSU. Performance and effects are monitored by the Teagasc Education Programme Monitoring Group, with findings reported to the Head of CDSU. Amendments and updates follow if required. New or updated policies and procedures are communicated by Head of CDSU in usable formats via the public website, staff meetings and email.

The documentation supplied by Teagasc in relation to their quality assurance was considered both extensive and fit-for-purpose by the panel. In addition, where requests for further information were made for additional documentation and examples of forms, this was acceded to comprehensively and in an extremely prompt fashion, which also indicated that the documented approach to quality assurance was a deeply embedded aspect of Teagasc's quality assurance system. Many of the policies and documents were also available to the general public.

The quality assurance manual submitted was well laid out and easily navigated, and this also applied to Teacher and Student Handbooks. The different documentation was strongly connected and appropriate to the relevant target audiences. It was evident that the new manual had been developed in line with the new Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and it was clear a considerable degree of thought and planning had gone into documenting the providers approach to QA. Some aspects could be improved through a greater emphasis on procedural specificity, however, for a multi-centre provider with nationally dispersed delivery the degree of consistency in terms of a documented approach was substantial. This can be developed and honed more as part of monitoring and self-evaluation procedures.

The panel was brought through T-Net site (Teagasc's intranet), which contained all the relevant policies and procedures and documentation for all Teagasc staff. It was impressive as a medium for staff communication and for providing resources and guidance for staff in the area of quality assurance.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines will be sufficiently addressed subject to the implementation of the proposed mandatory changes.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc. It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures[4].

## 3       PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Teagasc have a significant range of programmes, and from a vocational education perspective offer a learner a variety of learning styles, from theory-based instruction to practical instruction and work-

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[4] Based on Teagasc's response to the findings of the Panel dated 8th February 2021

based learning elements. There is an extensive range of learning environments offered to learners including classroom based, Teagasc working farms, Teagasc research facilities and work-placements.

The decision-making process for securing resources was explored to examine how Teagasc ensures the necessary resources are in place and to ensure academic decision making in this regard is not unduly impacted by commercial considerations (as interpreted in this document). The Head of Education brought the panel through the resource and business planning process within Teagasc. Level 3 plans are developed by each Heads of Centre and include resource implications. These plans are then taken by the Director and converted into a Level 2 plan for the education function. This Level 2 plan is then taken to the main Directorate to agree and secure the necessary budget to deliver the programmes of education and training, and connected services. Resource allocation requests as part of this process are assessed against the main criterion for Teagasc which is meeting the needs of the land based sector. Once agreed Level 2 plans are then incorporated into a singular Level 1 plan and overall Budget which is approved by the Authority. Capital investment for new programmes such as the Apprenticeships is captured within this process and where programmes require updates and access to new resources (taking account of investment in new technology to reflect improvements in agricultural practices).

The spread and reach of Teagasc across the country is significant.  One of the challenges for a nationally dispersed, multi-centre provider is ensuring quality standards across the delivery of programmes. The same Teagasc programme can be delivered in a number of locations across the country. How Teagasc ensures output standards are consistent was explored with the provider. It was made clear that under Teagasc policies not all centres can deliver all programmes and there is an approval process for where programmes are delivered. Centres have to apply every year for the programmes they are seeking to deliver. This decision-making process is criterion based to include access to expertise, resources and the needs of learners in that region.


In setting the requirements on how Teagasc programmes are delivered, all Teagasc programmes have a course memorandum which sets out how the programme is to be delivered.  This assists in ensuring a consistent model of provision across all centres.  In addition, there are programme module descriptors which specify the learning outcomes to be covered and the assessment instruments to be used. Teachers will devise assessment instruments in line with these specifications. The Internal Verification process examines how assessment has been carried out with reference to the programme and module specifications, and in addition to any mistakes or omissions being picked up areas for improvement are also identified.  All new Teagasc teachers are provided with a 10 day induction programme on the system of quality assurance, which includes guidance on programme delivery and assessment.  This also assists in maintaining consistent standards.


The query was put to Teagasc on whether it could identify red flags for one of its centres in terms of possible grade inflation e.g. one centre keeps registering higher grades than all other centres, and can Teagasc's QA system respond appropriately and prescribe remedial action in this regard. Teagasc advised that there is a member of CDSU staff responsible for national standards and overseeing the external verification (EV) process ('external' as defined by Teagasc), which follows the Internal Verification process at the end of the programme cycle. Practice is that sign off will not occur as part of the external verification process unless national standards for the programmes have been met with regard to the relevant awards specifications. Where necessary teachers will be requested to remark or

arrange additional learner evidence to be provided in order for approval to be forthcoming that all learning outcomes have been demonstrated and evidenced appropriately by learners. As the EA function is carried out on a national basis by the CDSU, Teagasc is in a position to compare across centres. Where one of the centres was deviating from national grading norms, this would be highlighted and followed up and examined as part of the EA process. There would be a conversation with relevant staff members were grades were not reflective of learner evidence produced, or where assessment instruments were not being designed to the correct level of the programme and associated grading criteria. The CDSU member with responsibility for national standards, was of the view that the CDSU carrying out the role of external verification worked really well and contributes significantly to improving standards because the person has a good overview of all courses in all colleges and EA would not be able to see the whole picture instead of it being very local and limited. However, there was concern among the panel members that, while useful internally, this system lacked true externality, and has the potential for vulnerabilities in terms of objective judgement being exercised and cognisance of comparable standards.  As restated later in the report under point 6 – assessment, it is suggested that the model be more accurately described in documentation avoiding the word external – and perhaps using independent.  Independence and competence are the key requirements in undertaking the reviews referred to here.  Notwithstanding the efficacy of the current model, Teagasc may wish to establish an additional light touch periodic sampling process which does engage fully external expertise.

The concept of capturing the learner voice as part of quality assuring programmes was explored with Teagasc. It was identified that this fell into two broad categories: student feedback and student representation. The query was put to Teagasc as to what learner surveys were in operation, in particular if there was one just after admission e.g. an induction survey. Teagasc advised that there was an induction process for learners, but no induction survey and that data is collected from learners at the application stage and used to identify learning supports that may be needed. Data was not collected from learners as to how they may have found, the recruitment, selection, admission and inductions processes. While this was not done formally, the ethos of centres would be to continually check with learners if they needed additional information or clarification on anything. It was evident that there was an 'open door' approach taken in terms of communicating with learners.

How feedback is collected during programme delivery was also explored with Teagasc. Centre management representatives advised that a mentoring programme was in operation which involved a mentor being assigned to a group of learners as a result of the move to remote delivery. The mentor would meet with members of that group individually and discuss matters such attendance, assessment results, work-placements. Centre management advised that feedback from these sessions would then be used to adjust programme delivery locally.

Teagasc are currently formally capturing learner feedback by way of online survey, which does drill down to module level, however, it does not occur until the end of the programme cycle which means data collected can only be used for the next cohort. The weakness of this was highlighted by the panel, as there was no formal capture of feedback during the programme which could be used to make adjustments for that learner group in real time. It was emphasised by Teagasc that where learners were dissatisfied this would be brought to centre management and acted upon, and in addition many colleges operated a learner representative system on their programmes. However, this was not universal or effective as a whole.

The panel was of the view that the culture and initiatives outlined were very positive, however, a more formalised approach to capturing of learner feedback data was necessary. A more formalised approach which has a closed quality improvement loop by addressing:

- how learner feedback is to be considered as part of governance structures
- the formulation of clear actions in response,
- implementation of prescribed actions,
- monitoring and review mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of those actions.

It was also pointed out by the panel that there needed to be a formal process for reporting back to learners on how their feedback was used by Teagasc.

The lack of learner representation was recognised by Teagasc as a key action item arising from re-engagement. Teagasc had committed to putting a Teagasc Learner Council in place to amplify the learner voice as part of the quality assurance system. The centres should also be reporting in the themes arising from learner feedback centrally including to the relevant governance unit, as part of a formal process so themes can be identified nationally, Teagasc level policies, procedures, programmes and resources can take account of this and corporate resources can be targeted more effectively. This should also be part of the quality improvement loop.

Access, Transfer and Progression policies and procedures were explored with Teagasc. The lowest level offered by Teagasc is level 5. It was recognised that this can often be problematic as applicants may present with needs that cannot be easily met on a level 5 programmes. Teagasc does operate a model of assessing learners needs as part of their recruitment and selection processes. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is used as part of determining an applicant's suitability. In general, this operates in the main at level 5, as for entry into Level 6 programmes the application will need to demonstrate that they have achieved level 5 certification in a related area. This will invariably be a level 5 Teagasc programme, however, there is provision for the assessment of equivalency of other related national and international awards by providing a non-standard application form. Relevant state agencies such as NARIC are utilised as part of the assessment of international awards. RPL is carried out centrally in the CDSU for consistency purposes. It was recommended that the RPL policy be updated to reflect procedures on RPL for access and programme contact exemptions as well as Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL), which has the highest degree of specificity in the policy and procedure document.

The model of monitoring and reviewing the quality of programmes was explored with Teagasc. There are working groups managed by the CDSU which have monitoring and review functions and which feed into the overarching Quality Group. However, what was less clear was how programme performance was being measured and how data was being collected to measure effectiveness against agreed performance indicators. It was clear that the management team including the Head of Education had a very strong knowledge base and were operating with strong oversight using data from learner surveys to follow up with centres that received a below average rating.  In addition, the graduate survey conducted every 5 years garnered very useful insights. Teagasc are also already considering the data on pass rates data from pre- and post the Covid-19 response to inform quality assurance policies and procedures going forward. However, it was evident that while the provider has a very strong record in

using data for oversight and planning purposes, Teagasc would benefit from a more formalised, systematic quality improvement cycle being embedded in their governance system, using key data sources for consideration by the relevant governance unit and using clearer metrics by which to measure their performance e.g. learner enrolments, learner retention, leaner satisfaction, learner completion and progression. This quality improvement cycle should operate in closed loop fashion, and allow for programmes to be improved in both real time, and for next the cohort of learners.

Identified programmes for development are written into CDSU and Education Programme business plans and progress reported bi-annually to Teagasc senior management. Teagasc offers both further and higher education programmes with a separate programme development approach to each. Common to both is a systematic process in place for programme design, development and approval which complies with QQI policies and procedures. Key programme development stages, timelines, dependencies, risks, resources, actions and responsibilities are identified and mapped. These practices were verified through extensive interviews with Teagasc's administration and staff. Teagasc implements detailed and well-documented procedures for reviewing proposals for programmes based upon feedback from industry, staff, regulatory bodies and other stake holders. This is particularly effective for its apprenticeship programmes. The Teagasc Quality Assurance Manual described its approach to apprenticeship programme development at a very high level with exceptional attention to detail that references the Teagasc Education Strategic Vision, stakeholder consultation and involvement of the Apprenticeship Council of Ireland.

Teagasc reviews its programme delivery on a regular basis to confirm that the programmes remain appropriate and are delivered in a supportive and effective learning environment. This review identifies corrections required as well as possible improvements. The process includes learner satisfaction surveys, staff comments during external verification, and external verifier's observations, comments and recommendations.

The current structure provides for consideration of programme submissions prior to validation applications to QQI, coming under the remit of the Teagasc Quality Group. A recommendation is then made by the Group to the Head of Education on whether to approve the programme for submission or not. The issues identified earlier with the lack of externality on this group, and permanency in terms of a core membership are highlighted again here. By having a core membership learning can be retained and built on as part of new programme development, which is critical given new QQI programme validation policies being implemented in the sector and the move by Teagasc to develop Apprenticeship programmes, which are subject to very bespoke quality assurance structures and processes.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines will be sufficiently addressed subject to the implementation of the proposed mandatory changes.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc. It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures[5].

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[5] Based on Teagasc's response to the findings of the Panel dated 8th February 2021

| 4 | STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT |
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*Panel Findings:*

Across all staffing grades, Teagasc has a robust recruitment policy and procedure which is led by Teagasc Senior Management and the Teagasc Human Resources Department. The ethos is that appointments are made on merit and through fair and transparent recruitment processes. Recruitment processes in Teagasc comply with employment legislation, and follow best practice for public service recruitment. Teagasc has dedicated webpages on its public website (www.teagasc.ie) which provide information about working with Teagasc. Key documents are available on these webpages which provide interested parties, including Teagasc staff and other stakeholders, with information on Teagasc staffing strategy, recruitment policy, candidate information, job opportunities, and current publications relating to working with Teagasc.

The recruitment process for education staff is managed by the Teagasc Human Resources (HR) Department and follows Teagasc recruitment policies and procedures. As part of Teagasc's on-going staffing plan determination, each Teagasc head of programme is required from time to time to identify new priority staffing posts within their programme area and the rationale behind the prioritisation. Teagasc senior management makes the final decision as to what new priority posts are created and how they are to be filled (e.g. through additional recruitment or by suppression of existing posts). The filling of vacancies for existing approved posts requires initial approval of the relevant head of programme. On foot of initial approval, Teagasc HR seeks formal sanction from Teagasc senior management to proceed to fill the post. Teagasc senior management may or may not at this point seek a more detailed business case outlining the rationale and options involved. Where the filling of a posts is approved HR proceeds with the recruitment process. The hiring manager with HR develops the role specification documentation and the job application form. Both documents require the final approval of the head of programme before the post is advertised. Teagasc education managers monitor and the Head of Education staff resourcing needs to deliver programmes on an on-going basis. Requirements for additional staff posts are included in the Head of Education submission to the Teagasc Staffing Plan process. Where staffing deficits arise that are not or cannot be addressed through the Teagasc Staffing Plan, the Head of Education prepares a business case for Teagasc Senior management outlining options to address the deficit arising.

The focus of the panel for the site visit, in respect of this area was for Teagasc to go through the processes for recruiting, managing, developing and mentoring their staff, and how this was connected to their quality assurance system and processes.

The approach taken by Teagasc in terms of recruitment and selection when sourcing new teaching staff involves established criteria for the role including specific qualifications, an ability to deliver utilising their qualifications and experience. While there was a strong emphasis on qualifications in terms of the subject area and industry experience, a teaching/training qualification is not currently a requirement prior to recruitment. However, Teagasc operate an induction programme for new staff and mandate that training staff must complete the Level 6 Teagasc programme on teaching practice and pedagogy, which has a strong emphasis on practical teaching methods using a workshop style and is delivered in conjunction with a Higher Education Institution.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) requires persons teaching in DES funded providers to be registered with the Teaching Council. The Teaching Council states Further Education "embraces education and training which usually occurs outside of post-primary schooling but which is not part of the third-level system" and establishes national requirements for the registration of persons teaching in further education settings. In this context, the absence of a teaching qualification requirement for new teaching staff as part of the recruitment and selection processes is a vulnerability for any provider of education and training. It is noted that the absence of the requirement in the aforementioned process is significantly ameliorated by mandated induction programmes and teaching and learning qualifications post appointment. While there are different practices in place in respect of higher education, the panel urges Teagasc to consider review their practices here to ensure they meet national FE teacher requirements. In light of Teagasc's upcoming programme validation applications for Level 6 and 7 Higher Certificate courses in the future, it would be important to have a clear and consistent approach to this issue and ensuring high standards of teaching across all programmes.

In terms of developing staff further once they are in their role, Teagasc use the Performance management and Development System (PMDS) which involves every staff member having a session with their manager to identify training needs. Staff are encouraged to pursue further qualifications that will have a direct benefit to their area of work. Funding of such initiatives are subject to a business case being made by the staff member.

In terms of offering other opportunities for Continuous Professional Development, Teagasc has an education conference for their staff every year. In addition, assessment standardisation events are delivered every year to promote consistency across Teagasc delivery. Practitioners from other jurisdictions are also brought in to target specific areas with staff, the example of bringing in an equine expert from Northern Ireland with experience in blended delivery was given in this regard. Study trips are also arranged to other institutions where best practice has been identified so that staff can witness first-hand how it is working and to bring the learning back to improve practice within their institution.

The Walsh Scholarship operated by Teagasc, is also used as a continuous professional development opportunity as students carry out research in the colleges and deliver their findings back to Teagasc teachers. CPD is also supported by centre management and teachers are accommodated in their timetables to avail of CPD. Representatives from centre management also gave the example of a CPD initiative where teachers are required to observe other teachers as part of Level 9 teacher training and development programmes. The teachers on the Level 9 programme also report back on what they are learning to the rest of the staff to optimise the benefit for the centre.


In terms of increasing capability in the area of blended learning, Teagasc outlined a number of initiatives including linking in with DCU as they have with extensive experience in blended learning with a dedicated research centre. As part of this initiative two staff members from every college are completing the post graduate course on distance learning through DCU. In response to feedback received from teaching about the wealth of material available on blended learning, and the varying levels of quality and appropriateness of the material for use in Teagasc, the CDSU took the lead in terms of sourcing and evaluating the appropriate of guidance material for teachers in this area. The selected and vetted resource material is made available via T-Net, thereby providing relevant support to Teagasc teachers and ensuring the quality of the material available. Following on from this, there is also a newly established digital working group within Teagasc, which is informing business planning for next year with

a focus on organising and aligning CPD on blending learning with the needs of Teagasc staff and learners rather than leaving it up to individuals alone.

The panel found the range of examples provided in terms of CPD opportunities and the input from centre management very positive.  Possible improvements include formalising processes to enable Teagasc to track staff members completing CPD; and formulating goals for CPD on a yearly basis which are linked into their quality assurance planning. This will allow Teagasc to be able to measure the performance of their CPD programmes more effectively and measure how it is improving practice in line with their quality goals. Teagasc advised that it was already under consideration to mandate certain aspects of CPD programmes for completion by staff and the CPD in the blended learning area was a strong example of this.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed.

| 5 | TEACHING AND LEARNING |
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Teaching and learning is at the core of the Teagasc enterprise. In terms of teaching and learning, Teagasc strives to maintain and improve the quality of the learner experience. This is achieved through targeted initiatives to develop teacher capacity, the learning environment, learner engagement and learning-centred course design. Teagasc demonstrates that it facilitates an open, engaged, stimulating, visual, action oriented and experiential teaching and learning environment; that enables each learner to develop his/her knowledge, skills and competency to the individual's fullest potential; and develops in a holistic way the overall capability of learners to pursue a farming or land sector career.

Monitoring of teaching and learning experience at the level of the learner is central to ensuring a quality learner centred approach. This monitoring is supported by local management and conducted in a number of ways:

• Mentor level: Co-ordinated by the course coordinator, learners are assigned to nominated staff mentors. Mentor meetings with learners provides a one to one mechanism for monitoring learner progress, the learner's experience and expectations, and dealing with issues should they arise.

• Teacher/ Technician Level: The direct daily experience and interactions between learners and staff engaged in the teaching and learning experience is the singular activity that has the greatest impact on the teaching and learning experience for all involved (both learner and tutor). Teagasc's ethos of mutual respect is key to enhancing this experience. The direct daily experience of both staff and learner is monitored through many mechanisms including attendance, punctuality and performance of both staff and learner.

• Peer to Peer Level: This monitoring is informal but plays a crucial role informing both mentoring meetings and the direct daily teaching and learning experience. It includes staff to staff and learner to learner interaction. A staff member on an informal basis will monitor the quality of their teaching through reflection, PMDS, in-service training sessions, standardisation days, at staff meetings and in conversation with other staff. Interactions between learners and staff, both formal and informal, provides the individual learner with a benchmark of their own and others' learning and forms the basis of necessary feedback to staff on the quality of the learning experience.


Different modes and flexibility of delivery are primarily the responsibility of teaching staff. Across programmes a combination of theory, applied practice and discussion group format in combination with distance, part time and full time course delivery offers a range of learning methods.
All courses are subject to surveys and learner responses inform management and teaching
staff reflection on content and delivery. Education Resource Leadership Teams comprise subject matter experts, researchers and experienced tutors and are part of the process of continuous development. Where improvements are identified, or where the syllabus needs to be updated, staff can input into or provide feedback through the programme review group.

Teagasc supports the area of teaching and learning by conducting staff surveys and offering a wide variety of CPD opportunities to teachers. The absence of a teaching qualifications requirement as part of recruitment and selection opportunities will have an impact on teaching and learning practice, however, the supports for teachers post appointment are significant as discussed previously. In addition, to CPD opportunities T-Net holds a substantial amount of resources and guidance to teachers in conjunction

with course memorandums/programme and programme module descriptors. In terms of the monitoring of teaching and learning, the performance management of teachers was discussed to establish how learners are protected and staff are supported. This seemed to be mainly within the remit of centres management, however, it is suggested that this could be part of the monitoring function of the CDSU in the external verification process where issues around the standards of assessment briefs and learner evidence would come to light. This occurs at the end of a cycle which means learnings captured and actioned benefit the next cohort in the main. Improvements in the area of teaching and learning are strongly connected to improvements in getting learning feedback in a formalised manner, to be actioned in real time and subject to further monitoring and review thereafter as part of a closed loop quality improvement cycle embedded into governance. This has been discussed in more detail already in the report and is referred to here as a means of supporting quality practice in teaching and learning.

The main focus of the discourse on teaching and learning during the site visit was in relation to blended delivery as it presents as one of the most pressing and key challenges currently faced by providers of education and training. Teagasc's use of the VLE in structuring its programmes was commended. Typical challenges include ensuring appropriate levels of interactivity and communities of learning. This will be discussed in more detail within the blended learning section. However, of note was the observation by members of the CDSU and centre management staff that one of the most positive aspects of the extreme challenges in the current environment was the significant increase in engagement between teachers and centres to share practice and learning, and support one another. This has aided greatly in terms of developing and strengthening communities of practice to promote quality in teaching and learning within Teagasc.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed.

## 6  ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

*Panel Findings:*

Teagasc operates a fair, consistent and professional approach to learner assessment. Teagasc maintains exceptionally well-documented policies and procedures for its assessment of learners and makes the assessment policy available to the public on its website at www.teagasc.ie.

Teagasc's philosophy on, and approach to assessment is "assessment to a standard, applied consistently and fairly". Fairness is contingent on being consistent in a robust, fit for purpose assessment framework. Teagasc in its assessment philosophy endeavours to be consistent in terms of:

• Developing and implementing policies and procedures with respect to QQI core guidelines and benchmarked against other providers

• Implementing fit for purpose assessment methodologies that assess to a standard recognised by industry, are practicable for candidate and college, and that are designed to accurately determine achievement of learning outcomes

• Practising professionally as an education provider

In consultation with stakeholders, assessment policies and procedures are developed with regard to QQI publication Assessment and Standards, (revised 2013). The Teagasc Education Quality Group examine and determine whether the developed policies and procedures align with QQI guidance and internal structure ensuring that they are fit for purpose and implementable. Once approved by the Head of Education, the Head of CDSU implements the new or revised policy or procedure. CDSU through consultation with stakeholders determine the assessment strategies for each programme and module, ensuring that assessment:

• Is standardised, benchmarked, reviewed and maintained in relation to best industry practice and

• Supports the learning outcomes of the award standard against which they are set. Any newly developed or amended education materials, be it a policy, a procedure or changes in curriculum are reviewed by Teagasc's Education Quality Group who issue a recommendation for approval to the Head of Education before they are implemented.

It was acknowledged that achieving consistency in assessment is a particular challenge for a nationally dispersed and multi-centre provider such as Teagasc. This was the focus of the discussion in relation to assessment of learners in additional to quality assuring alternative assessment instruments.

The process for ensuring fair and consistent assessment of learners was explored with Teagasc. The learning outcomes/type of instruments/grading criteria to be used are prescribed in the programme module specification. This promotes consistency.

Assessment instruments and learner evidence are also subject to internal verification (IV) which is carried out within each centre as part of peer review. The IV process is uniform across all centres. This is followed by External Verification which is carried out by the CDSU as being independent of centres and using expertise within the CDSU. External verifiers are not used in this regard. The CDSU carrying out the external verification function for all centres nationally. It was queried by the panel, as to whether this was in fact external. Teagasc were confident that it could be deemed "external", as the CDSU is independent of centres and reports directly to the Director Education. This model has been subject to discussion with QQI, and Teagasc experience is that it works very well as "external" verifiers within the CDSU know what to look for and can drill down in a manner that a verifier external to Teagasc may not be able to do as effectively, as they will lack knowledge of the centres, and certain systems and process knowledge unique to Teagasc. Teagasc are not convinced that a verifier external to Teagasc could drill down to the same degree to which they can internally and enables the CDSU to compare across centres nationally to promote consistency. As indicated in point 3- Programmes of Education and Training, it is suggested that the model be more accurately described in documentation avoiding the word external – and perhaps using independent. Independence and competence are the key requirements in undertaking the reviews referred to here. Notwithstanding the efficacy of the current model, Teagasc may wish to establish an additional light touch periodic sampling process which does engage fully external expertise.

The appeals process is operated centrally, and only applies to the learner's overall grades at the end of the programme cycle. During the programme results are uploaded to the Quercus system to which learners have access. This ensures learners can also track their own progress and discuss provisional grades with their teachers in a timely fashion.

RPL portfolios are put forward for IV and EV also. Recognition of formal learning and prior certified learning is available. Members of the panel found there were two documents on the RPL process, with one being more detail than the other. It is recommended that the more detailed version become part of the Quality Assurance Manual.

The role of the Results Approval Panel (RAP) l in Teagasc could be clearer as it lacks detail in the relevant documentation it lacks detail. In this vein, the following is a useful synopsis of the function carried out by the Results Approval Panel:

*The results approval process is a key stage in the provider's assessment process and "ensures that appropriate decisions are taken regarding the outcome of the assessment and authentication processes." (QQI Quality Assuring Assessment, Guidelines for Providers, Revised 2013, p. 28)*

*The results approval process takes place following completion of the authentication process which includes the internal verification process and the external authentication[6] process. The process must include consideration of the internal verification and external authentication reports. Results must be approved before being submitted to QQI, i.e. it is the responsibility of the results approval panel to agree that the results can be forwarded to QQI. The results approval panel has a responsibility to recommend/take corrective action where appropriate.[7]*

It is important to note that a RAP panel has an evaluative function and includes prescribing corrective action where appropriate and does not have a bare sign off function. This could be made more explicit in the relevant documentation.


In the last academic cycle, two types of alternative assessment types were used by Teagasc in lieu of in-centre examinations. These included an assignment or an online Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs). Groups were appointed to develop assignment briefs as an alternative to exams, which were submitted to the CDSU for approval before being issued to learners. The CDSU developed rules around the development of MCQ assessments which were uploaded to T-Net so all staff could access. The final versions of MCQ examinations were uploaded to a dedicated platform for monitoring by the CDSU. As MCQs were new to learners, commendably practice sessions were provided prior to the summative online exam. All alternative assessment briefs were also subject to external verification processes at the end of the programme cycle. It is important to note that alternative assessments would have had to be developed in very short time frames across the education and training sector due to imposition of restrictions to protect public health at very short notice. In a very challenging environment, Teagasc made a very robust effort to quality assure alternative assessments and the panel commends them in this respect.


From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed.

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[6] External Authentication is the common term used for the external verification process within the FET Sector.
[7] Further Education and Training Support Service (FESS), 2014, *The Results Approval Process (Including the Results Approval Panel)* available at www.fess.ie

| 7 | SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS |
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*Panel Findings:*

Teagasc aims to be inclusive for learners with differing levels of ability and disability. This is underpinned by the learner support policy. Demand for, and the format of, flexible learning programmes is evolving. Teagasc is committed to the provision of blended learning solutions that are fit for purpose in terms of the effectiveness of the learner environment; that are delivered, assessed and assured to a comparable standard as other modes of delivery. Programme and assessment schedules and pedagogic style is learner centred allowing the learner time to understand, assimilate, practice and apply their learning. Practical skills demonstration and practice are an integral part of pedagogical practice and the learning experience. Teagasc programmes reinforce the underlying theoretical concepts and principles. Assessment schedules are coordinated by the course coordinator ensuring that learners' assessment load is manageable. CDSU investigates pedagogy best practice for the delivery of Teagasc programmes through:

 • Dedicated research projects investigating aspects of teaching and learning in Teagasc under the Walsh Scholarship Programme

• Attending external training and pedagogy workshops for education providers

• Taking note of teaching and training approaches with other providers on a national and international level

• Enabling staff at Teagasc education conference to showcase innovation and initiatives that have been trialled to their peers. In promoting a positive learning environment Teagasc has policies underpinning key areas outlined below:

• Dignity and Respect - Teagasc is committed to the promotion of an environment for work and study which upholds the dignity and respect of the individual and which supports every individual's right to study and/or work in an environment, which is free of any form of harassment, intimidation or bullying.

Teagasc recognises the right of every individual to such an environment and requires all staff and learners to recognise their responsibilities in this regard. Harassment of others by staff or learners is not acceptable or tolerated. This policy applies to the behaviour of learners and staff of the college/centre and others on business or engaged in activities relating to the college/centre or providing services to the college/centre.

• Learner support - Teagasc is committed to making reasonable accommodation for learners with specific learning requirements. A dedicated specialist within the CDSU is responsible for overall learner support co-ordination and draws on the knowledge and experience of Access Officers at college and at regional level. Information about learner support needs is collected during the applications process and provision of reasonable accommodation is made to suit the learner profile, whenever possible. For learners unable to complete a mainstream training programme in agriculture, Teagasc provides an alternative applied programme. Teagasc also provide free access to professional counselling and support for full time learners though its Student Assistance Programme.

• Diversity and Inclusion - Diversity refers to individual and cultural differences prevailing in a workplace, often deriving from differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, ability, and sexual orientation.

Inclusiveness describes an attitude whereby the worth and dignity of all individuals are recognised and promoted.

Under its People Strategy document, Teagasc is cognisant of diversity, and is actively developing and rolling out a strategy to maintain a diverse and inclusive corporate environment, to ensure a best practice workplace for staff and to ensure that Teagasc is equipped to meet the increasingly diverse and inclusive culture of modern Ireland. This extends to all Teagasc activity. Teagasc recognises that there is also diversity in learning and how people learn. To this end Teagasc:

• Provides different routes in its provision (e.g. full time, part time and distance blended learning) directing different learner types to appropriate routes.

 • Relates theoretical concepts to applied practice in so far as is practicable

• Adopts and uses technology to enhance learning such as Teagasc's VLE Moodle

• Encourages and enables staff to use at their discretion, pedagogical methods to suit the learner cohort
• Facilitates staff to share their experience of innovative pedagogies

• Encourages learners to be independent and responsible, for their learning and course work, fostering autonomy and competence by integrating tasks into the programme

• Expects as a norm, a mutual respect between learner and staff which is the basis of a fruitful learning environment

• Incorporates field trips and site visits into its programmes

• Includes practical learning periods as a mandatory module in its programmes in line with QQI award requirements.

The focus of discussion during the site visit was on whether supports for learners are subject to monitoring and review processes under quality assurance system in review processes within the quality assurance system, to ensure improvements.

Information is collected from learners as part of the application stage to assess any additional supports required. Assessment of the literacy and numeracy of all incoming learners is undertaken to determine supports needed. The query was put to Teagasc as to how they respond when the learning needs of the application do not meet the requirements of Level 5 programme. Teagasc acknowledged that this does happen, and every effort is made to accommodate the learner needs on the Level 5 programme by developing a personal learning programme. This will involve the learner, depending on their needs, taking some but not all of the modules offered on the Level 5 programme and will receive additional learning support. Work experience will also be provided in a more sheltered learning environment. It was queried as to whether a learner would be referred to another provider who could offer a suitable level 4 programme under transfer arrangement. Teagasc undertook to consider review this, however, it was emphasised that under their ethos of meeting the needs of the land-based sector certain government grants were connected to attaining qualifications in particular areas at level 5. When a learner presents with learning needs not completely compatible with level 5, there is a strategic focus in supporting them attain the necessary qualifications connected to their livelihood. Another provider would not be able to offer qualifications in those key areas and would therefore be undesirable from the applicant's perspective. Teagasc were encouraged by the panel to explore the possibility of developing strategic alliances with other providers in terms of securing support to the optimal benefit of the

learner. Teagasc agreed with this approach and had emphasised that efforts had already been made to link in more with other providers in the further education and training sector.

The issue of supporting learners to move to more online learning platforms was also discussed. The panel had made the observation that moving programmes with very practical elements online posed a challenge. Teagasc advised the panel that practical hands-on elements of programme delivery are still being operated in accordance with public health guidelines and this is working well for their learners, who are invariably learners that enjoy that learning style.

In terms of providing additional supports online, if a student is entitled to have a reader or scribe, they still receive that support in the online environment. Learners are now encouraged to use technologies which provide transcripts and read aloud functions and have been introduced to those technologies and supported in using them. This provides an alternative to personal scribes and readers. There have been positive findings in this respect, that many learners are doing better in the online environment especially those of a more introverted natures and are more empowered through the use of the new technologies as they can use them themselves whenever they need them.

It was the view of the panel, that while the learning outcomes are essential parts of programmes the learning experience and its quality is about more than just addressing the learning outcomes of a programme, it also involves the scaffolding around ensuring the quality of the experience for the learner. In this respect, Teagasc were asked to go through with the panel the types of scaffolding used, in terms of support, how consistency is being achieved across centres and is this aspect picked up as part of the quality assurance monitoring and review processes of Teagasc.

Teagasc emphasised that there are consistent policies and guidance in the area of learner support and there are certain minimum requirements imposed on centres in terms of the provision of learner support and this included the appointment of Access Officers in all colleges. Processes utilised by such Access Officers would be similar across the colleges including the need for simplicity and ease of access for learners availing of support. Teagasc would consider the colleges to have developed a good level capacity and capability in this area. For smaller centres, due to lower numbers of learners they would not have the same capacity. For those centres they are supported by the CDSU to provide learning supports where necessary. It is noted that the Quality Assurance Manual states that "Teagasc quality customer procedures allow complaints or appeals to be made should applicants unhappy be perceive unfair, inequitable or inconsistent treatment in the application process". Further on it states Learner complaints can arise about the general operation of Teagasc education programmes or specifically about assessments." It is important that there is clear guidance on what is matter for a complaint and what is matter for an academic appeal (whether relating to entry or assessment). There should be distinct processes identified for each and assessment appeals should be addressed in a dedicated assessment appeals process. The flow charts presented for appeals processes are very useful, and the principles and steps identified are important. The flow charts would benefit from being accompanied more precise procedures. It is noteworthy that diagram 5.2 describes a useful review process which occurs prior to the issue of a result after a formal Results Approval meeting. These two distinct contexts for a learner "querying" a result should be clearly described in a detailed procedure. Similarly, the Customer Complaints Procedure would be significantly enhanced through the provision of greater detail than that provided in the quality manual or in the customer charter.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed.

## 8    INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

*Panel Findings:*

As part of the evaluation in relation to this aspect of quality assurance, there was an emphasis on how quality assurance is communicated, and also how learner records and relevant information is managed, communicated and learner data is appropriately protected. T-Net as already discussed, is a key tool which is utilised to communicate with staff and provide access to quality assurance policies, procedures and resources. All the relevant documentation in terms of QA policies, the QA manual, Course Memorandums, Programme/Programme modules descriptors and resources are all made available here. There is widespread utilisation of T-NET and as it was demonstrated to the panel, it is clear that it is user friendly for staff. Version control is also operated by ensuring the most up to date policy, procedures, programme and resource documents are uploaded to the central location of T-NET.

The student management system used by Teagasc is Quercus.  It provides a mechanism to monitor *inter alia* attendance and record support needs.  The system is also used to upload the results from assessments within 10 days of the assessment event. Learners have access to this system and can bring queries in relation to results to their teachers after the provisional results become available.  This system can also generate useful reports in relation to learner performance. In terms of work-based learning, the learner, the workplace host and the supervisor write reports, and these are examined. Where issues arise around the quality, hosts would not be used again.

It was again noted by the panel, that the education function of Teagasc is scaffolded by the larger organisation in terms of corporate level policies and procedures in areas such as HR, data protection, health and safety and risk management. These policies, procedures and supporting documentation are operated throughout the organisation and also contained on T-Net.

The area of learner records and information was also explored with Teagasc, including the collection, processing and storing of data within the organisation.  Learner marks and results are managed during internal and external verification, appeals, results approval procedures. QQI's system is used to upload learners results for certification. Teagasc confirmed that any data that is no longer required is destroyed according to the organisation's retention schedule for different types of data.  There are also data protection and management agreements with the private colleges, which are evidenced in the Service Level Agreements.

The issue of identifying data sources, and the use of metrics was again identified here, however, it has been dealt with in more detail in other aspects of the report, including self-evaluation and monitoring.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed subject to the implementation of the proposed mandatory changes.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc. It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory

changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures[8].

## 9          PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

*Panel Findings:*

A wealth of information is provided to the public by Teagasc, the area which was subject to evaluation by the panel was in relation to how information is communicated to the public by Teagasc as a provider of education and training, including prospective learners. Members of the panel had examined Teagasc's website prior to the site meeting and it was also examined with Teagasc as part of the site visit. There were entry requirements up on the website, however, it was queried whether this was supported by a more detailed policy. Teagasc advised that there wasn't a central policy, and that more detailed information would have to be sought via one of the colleges. The panel also emphasised that it was important for a learner to be able to discern from the information made available about each course the workload, time commitment, including the level, credit value and what was required to pass. This was recommended to ensure that a learner is fully informed in terms of what they are signing up for when they apply for the courses. While it is acknowledged that Teagasc operates a monitoring and audit function on information being provided to learners via their college websites, it was the view of the panel that this should be operated in conjunction with a policy on the provision of information to learners, to act as a good practice guide to colleges with criteria to inform decision-making.

A number of panel members had used the online application process to assess the information being provided to the learner, and the website and process were user friendly. There was a more detailed prospectus also provided. This was discussed in more detail, as in some instances level 5 and level 6 programmes were presented as year 1 and 2 of a programme. Teagasc informed the panel that this approach had been taken after extensive stakeholder consultation, whereby it was agreed to present clear career paths to learners in the land-based sector. This was acknowledged as being important, however, there was a balance to be struck with regard to ensure the presentation met QQI criteria also, and it was the view of the panel that both could be met with the addition of an explanation that learners would qualify for a distinct award upon completing the one year level 5 programme. It was also the view of the panel that while the prospectus was very informative, 'progression' only referred to the prospect to progressing to higher education programmes, whereas the graduates from the programmes had achieved progression within industry upon completion and were in a position to hold high level roles with greater levels of responsibility and recognition. It was the view of the panel, that this was very positive and significant and should be given added prominence by Teagasc. The addition of a section on 'employment opportunities' for each programme might highlight the effectiveness of Teagasc programmes in this regard.

The panel acknowledges, the wealth of information available to the public about Teagasc. It is also a requirement that a provider publishes quality assurance policies and procedures upon the completion of re-engagement with QQI. However, in line with best practice, the panel is of the view that Teagasc should also include a clear statement in its Quality Assurance manual to include a commitment to

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[8] Based on Teagasc's response to the findings of the Panel dated 8th February 2021

publish policies and procedures of relevance to the learner and outcomes of quality reviews, upon completion of the re-engagement process and thereafter.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed subject to the implementation of the proposed mandatory changes.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc. It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures[9].

## 10        OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING (incl. Apprenticeships)

*Panel Findings:*

*This area of evaluation focused in the main on collaborations where Teagasc was entering into* arrangements with third parties to deliver Teagasc programmes, as these types of collaborations present a very significant and distinct challenge in terms of quality assurance. Teagasc had declared all third party collaborations including those with Higher Education Institutions, and myriad of state agencies and NGOs with whom Teagasc has collaborative relationships with. This diversity is recognised as a key organisational strength. The panel concentrated in the main on the following types of collaborative relationships; grant aid relationship with private colleges and the contractual relationship with private contractors pursuant to a public procurement framework.

Private Colleges

Teagasc grant aids a number of private colleges under long-standing funding relationships. The private colleges are deeply embedded into the organisation, which is reflected by arrangements which provide for the Principals of the private colleges attending the same meetings as those responsible for Teagasc owned colleges.  The panel discussed how programme delivery was quality assured in the private colleges, and how it was ensured that there was no conflict between the structures of the private colleges and those of Teagasc in terms of academic decision making. Teagasc advised the panel that the private colleges are subject to the same quality assurance processes as Teagasc colleges and the relationship is governed by a documented Service Level Agreement (SLA). The recruitment of staff is subject Teagasc processes and member of Teagasc will sit on the interview panel, and teachers have the same access to T-Net. The private colleges are also subject to financial auditing, and the Head of Education was accountable to the Teagasc Authority on the performance of the private colleges. Teagasc also advised that if any issues arose out of the external verification process or otherwise a working group would be put together to action anything that needed improvement or updating. Outcomes of the working group would be communicated directly to all relevant centres. The private colleges are also subject to the whole school evaluations which are carried out by the Department of

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[9] Based on Teagasc's response to the findings of the Panel dated 8th February 2021

Education and are reported to the education sub-committee of the Authority, and the relevant college has to take account of the finding as part of their next business plan which is submitted to the Head of Education.

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) had been provided in advance by Teagasc and had been reviewed by the panel. It was a detailed SLA; however, it was found to concentrate in the main on financial accountability for the grant aid. It was emphasised by the panel that ensuring the grant monies were used appropriately is only part of the grantor's responsibilities; there was also a responsibility to ensure the defined programme objectives and outcomes were subject to grant aid were also achieved. In this regard, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) needed to be built into the SLA, as well as clear programme management structures.  Expectations must be clear, and that actions and/or sanctions for non-conformance are detailed. This also related to having clear metrics in terms of performance indicators for all programmes/centres and how the outputs of the centres are monitored and considered from a governance perspective.  This will result in clear actions and follow up and then for the process to begin again, thus ensuring a closed loop quality improvement cycle is operating. While it is clear that there are strong management processes, there needs to be a move towards a more systematic processes as part of the governance of quality assurance as addressed above in the section on governance.


Contracted Training

*St*aff resourcing priorities are identified through the Teagasc annual staffing plan. Contracted education delivery services may be utilised in specific circumstances within the scope of the relevant Public Procurement Framework. For exceptional circumstances in recent years Teagasc obtained sanction from the Department of Agriculture to recruit temporary staff.

Authority approval had to be secured to use private contracted training providers in the first instance, due to an unprecedented increase in demand which could not be accommodated using the existing human resources of the education and training function. This involved a case being brought to the Authority as to why this was necessary, and demands could not be addressed through usual human resource planning. The contracting out of education and training delivery to third parties, will always have an inherent level of risk, and the quality assurance implications were also considered as part of this. The procurement framework was established in line with quantitative and qualitative assessment criteria. It is now effectively operated by the education and training function, subject to monitoring by the Teagasc Risk and Audit Unit monitoring in terms of the operation of the contract.

Teagasc colleges were divided into lots and a defined panel of contractors were appointment upon being successful in the procurement process. Colleges can use the contractors to meet staffing shortages as part of programme delivery. A contracted training manual was provided to the panel which is used to support management at centre level manage contractors. Teagasc were very clear in that risk associated with contracting to third parties was significantly mitigated through the agreed policy that contractors are not assigned whole programmes to deliver, instead contracted training staff are given modules within programmes where there is not an available internal staff member to do so. All programmes are delivered in Teagasc centres and are subject to the same quality assurance processes as all Teagasc programmes and programme modules. Contractors are subject to evaluation by centre management at the end of each programme cycle and sanctions have been imposed by Teagasc including removal of tutors assigned by contractors where performance was an issue. It was also noted by the panel that a training workshop was completed recently with centre management on managing

contracted training. Notwithstanding the extensive good practice being evidenced Teagasc in the areas of contracted training, it was observed that the contracted training manual could be more detailed, especially in terms of the managing non-conformance and the progression of progressive sanctions for contractors in the interests of clarity for both parties. Some education and training providers have used a green, amber and red-light system with contractors, with amber being used to put the contractor on notice of dissatisfaction and that they will be subject to more intensive monitoring and further non-conformance would result in losing that particular contract. One of the difficulties encountered by Teagasc is this area is in relation to requiring teaching qualifications, currently Teagasc staff are not required to have them, and contractors are not given access to the Teaching and Learning programme delivered internally by Teagasc. However, it is reasonable to require contractors to have robust CPD systems in place which ensures parity of delivery with that of Teagasc staff members. This could be considered as part review mechanisms for contracted training delivery.

While some areas could be strengthened, Teagasc has evidenced the application of considerable rigour to entering and managing third party programme delivery arrangements with due consideration for quality assurance implications. This is commended by the panel.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed.

| 11 | SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW |
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*Panel Findings:*

Teagasc engaged in an extensive self-evaluation process by conducting a gap analysis for the reengagement process. As part of this Teagasc had clearly identified its strengths in terms of people, expertise, brand recognition, extensive resource base, strong progression routes for learners and a diversity of working relationship and capabilities in offering hands on relevant training and work-based learning with 15,000 host work placements and a long standing commitment to quality assurance and standards. Teagasc had also very clearly identified areas for improvement as part of a robust gap analysis conducted as part of the re-engagement process which included developing a more systematic approach to self-evaluation, utilising and publish data, new policy and procedure development, the learner voice and ensuring full separation between those that develop programmes and those that approve. Increasing capabilities in the blended learning arena was also clearly identified and reflects the sectoral challenge in this regard. The strengths came through very clearly in the process, and the panel's findings echoed many of vulnerabilities identified by the provider themselves which evidences the effectiveness of Teagasc's self-review.

Teagasc identified the following as key monitoring activities which take place as part of quality assurance:

•        Course validation process – approves where programmes are delivered

•        IV and EV process – ensures national standards are achieved

•        Completion and progression rates

•        Uptake of learner supports

•        Results Approval Process

•        Staff, host and learner feedback

•        Teagasc Education forum

•        QQI feedback

•        External Reviews- Whole College Evaluations conducted by the Department of Education.

In addition, the following metrics for measuring their effectiveness were identified by Teagasc as part of re-engagement.

Qualitative indicators include:

•        Student satisfaction levels

•        Teacher satisfaction levels

•        Completion rates

•        Progression rates

•        % of learners achieving merit /

•        Distinction

Quantitative indicators include:

- Enrolments & FTEs
- Student: staff ratio
- Net cost per student

From 5 year graduate survey

- % in full time/part-time farming
- % involved in management of farm business
- % having increased farm activity
- % recommendation of Teagasc course (target of 80% +)
- % uptake of technologies adoption

Teagasc have clearly identified metrics and key data sources, and have strong management systems for ensuring colleges and programmes perform to expected standards, however, this needs to be strengthened by moving to a more formalised process for using data and information within the quality assurance system as part of effective governance structures. It is necessary for data to be collected from the identified data sets (some need to be increased in relation to learner voice), and inputted into the quality assurance system so that it is considered against agreed metrics within the governance structure to measure performance. Appropriate actions then need to be devised as result of these evaluation process. The agreed actions must then be implemented. The effectiveness of these actions must then be again evaluated using the relevant data and information sources to review how the actions have improved quality or not as the case may be thereby closing the loop and allowing the quality assurance system to continually improve. Quality assurance documentation will need to reflect how relevant data and information is being considered within the relevant governance units. This could be included as part of the TORs for the governance units, specifying what data/information will be provided to the governance unit to inform its work. Relevant data and information and performance metrics should be prescribed for collection in the self-evaluation and monitoring section of the Quality Assurance Manual.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed subject to the implementation of the proposed mandatory changes.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc. It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory

changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures[10].

## 12 TOPIC-SPECIFIC QA PROCEDURES: BLENDED LEARNING

*Panel Findings:*

The panel reviewed the blended and distance education being implemented by Teagasc and reviewed programme content in the online format. Teagasc is implementing distance education in an appropriate and effective manner. Teagasc's Blended Learning Policy appropriately addresses innovation for flexible teaching and learning.  Courses are organized and delivered by teaching staff using the Moodle platform.  Teagasc implements training for its teaching staff to ensure their capacity and effectiveness in delivering quality blended learning and online learning opportunities for students.  Specifically, Teagasc assures it maintains its academic standards by:

1. providing a framework for all staff to engage with blended and online learning delivery

2. assuring compliance with Teagasc Quality Assurance Procedures

3. maintaining a technological infrastructure that is both reliable and available to teaching staff

4. delivering training and support needed for teaching staff to provide effective online/blended course delivery.

Teagasc developed its Blended Learning Policy in response to rapid changes brought about by the impact of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.  Teagasc could strengthen its overall compliance by ensuring a system-wide approach to the instructional design process and delivery of blended and online learning.  earning community and supports learners not just instructionally but with co-curricular engagement and other social supports.  It is important to ensure that the same infrastructure exists around face-to-face education that supports student success (e.g., library resources, career services, health and wellness services) are available to students who study via distance education.  Effective online learning needs to be specifically designed to support learners with formal, informal, and social resources. Ultimately, effective online education requires an investment in an ecosystem of learner supports, which take time to identify and build.

Teagasc has identified blended learning as an area where they are currently building capacity and capability and moved from using Moodle as a depository for resources to using it for online teaching and learning is a very short space of time.

During the site visit, Teagasc reported that both staff and learners have improved their engagement with Moodle through using it and feeding continually feeding back on their experience. As part of learning captured the format of Moodle was changed so teachers and students could only see their own courses and teachers now have to develop blended learning lesson plans. Interactivity is monitored using the data analytics of the VLE and levels of interactivity have significantly improved since the initial

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[10] Based on Teagasc's response to the findings of the Panel dated 8th February 2021

move to the online platform. One of the centre managers reported 60-80% of students are attending at the classes and 100% of participants are interacting during the session.

In addition, programmes are inclined to be 50% theory and 50% skills based, with the latter still occurring face to face, this provides good opportunities for feedback and interaction between teachers and learners and their peers. More mature student cohorts can struggle more and Teagasc has responded to this by providing more links to practice sessions such as submitting assignments online. Where assessments take place online, assigned Mentors are there at the beginning as additional moderators, and check in with their assigned learners to ensure they can log in successfully. Learner identity is verified at the beginning of the assessment and the assessment is remotely proctored.

The panel was given access to the VLE prior to the site visit and were able to peruse resources and workbooks online. Some providers of education and training have contracted out the development of online content and resources. It was evident that this is not the case with Teagasc has all content and resources were programme and learner cohort specific and had been developed by Teagasc teachers.

In light of the importance of capacity building in the area of blended learning, the panel recommends that Teagasc conducts a system wide review of blended programme delivery to include staff development, resources for teachers and learners, learner retention and learner outcomes to support the quality improvement cycle in this key area of teaching and learning.

From the information the provider has furnished, the panel recommends that QQI can be satisfied that this area under QQI's Quality Assurance Guidelines is sufficiently addressed and the provider is approved to apply for validation for programmes to be delivered using a blended mode of delivery.

## 14          TOPIC-SPECIFIC QA PROCEDURES: APPRENTICESHIP

*Panel Findings:*

While there was material provided in the interests of transparency on the quality assurance processes that will apply to the new Apprenticeships being developed by Teagasc, it was noted the with this aspect of Teagasc's quality assurance is outside the scope of the review. Nevertheless, the panel is of the view that Teagasc will be well-placed to apply for the extension of scope required to deliver the new Apprenticeships as part of their programme validation applications.

## Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The panel acknowledges the considerable track record, experience and good standing of Teagasc both within the education sector and equally within the agricultural sector. The panel acknowledges and commends the particularly positive, professional and open attitude of Teagasc personnel to the re-

engagement process. Teagasc is very clearly a learning organisation with an ethos based on public service values and a strong focus on serving the land sector and its communities, and securing positive outcomes for their learners. It was clear that the attitude of Teagasc towards re-engagement was that it presented a valuable learning opportunity to improve systems and processes within the organisation in terms of quality assuring delivery to learners. The positive disposition of the provider significantly aided the examination of quality assurance processes conducted by the panel in conjunction with the provider, in particular as part of providing information in the lead up and on day of the virtual site visit.

The reengagement process has involved a comprehensive review by the panel of Teagasc's Quality Assurance (QA) manual, policies, and related documentation. Teagasc made a very strong, detailed and comprehensive submission in this regard. There was also a lengthy and robust review meeting as part of a site visit. During the latter, the panel engaged directly with key members of staff working at both executive and operational and across different areas, achieving triangulation of information/documentation provided as part of the review. A learner centred approach was evident across the organisation as a whole, with a clear commitment to learner support and progression.

Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the site visit, despite a significant amount of work successfully completed in terms of new governance structures, the panel identified improvements required around these structures in terms of externality, connection to higher level governance units within Teagasc, an absence of learner representation on working groups and governance units that influence the quality of the learner experience. The mode of operation of the Quality Group with responsibility for oversight of quality assurance and enhancement was problematic as the membership was not static, which was reflected in its title of 'group'. It was considered that this unit required increased standing, a clearer structure ensuring full separation of responsibilities in terms of development and approval functions, and the academic decision-making function is separated and not unduly influenced by commercial considerations. The panel notes that due to the public nature, the relevant statutory framework and organisational ethos of Teagasc commercial considerations is limited to financial and funding considerations. Thepanel makes no suggestion that academic decision making has not been robust, however, strengthening governance structures in this regard will benefit from the modifications, making the role of this governance unit more akin to an Academic Council and enhancing self-evaluation processes as part of governance. These were identified as proposed mandatory changes and are outlined in detail in Section 7.1 of this report. Additional items of specific advice are included in Section 7.2.

However, in light of the provider's robust and comprehensive submission, the capacity and capability demonstrated by the provider as part of the process, and that the vulnerabilities identified while fundamental, were discrete in nature and could be remedied within a short period for the provider to move forward, the panel availed of the option to defer its overall decision for a period of six weeks, and allowed Teagasc this time to submit evidence to the panel that the changes identified had been satisfactorily addressed.

The panel also notes that Teagasc has expressed an intention to apply for an extension of scope as part of programme validation applications to QQI to deliver at Level 6 (Higher Certificate) and Level 7 (Ordinary Degree) which in the main will be agricultural apprenticeships, and also possibly some short programmes leading to Minor or Special Purpose Awards in the context of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The provider has acted in full transparency in this regard, and while some

additional information on the bespoke governance and quality assurance of these type of programmes was provided, this has not been evaluated by this panel. However, the panel subject to the mandatory changes being evidenced, is of the view that the provider should be well placed to seek QQI programme validation for these purposes at some point in the future on the basis that the appointed programme validation panel will evaluate the relevant additional quality assurance required for these programmes.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc. It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures[11].

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[11] Based on Teagasc's response to the findings of the Panel dated 8th February 2021

# Part 6    Conditions of QA Approval

## 6.1    Conditions of QA Approval

# Part 7    Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures and Specific Advice

## 7.1    Mandatory Changes

The following proposed mandatory changes were identified at the conclusion of the site visit on 30th October 2020 by the panel. The panel availed of the option to defer its decision to allow Teagasc an opportunity to address these issues within a six-week period:

1.    To update QA documentation in relation to education and training governance structures, composition, permanency, and reporting lines to strengthen:

    a.    Externality, use of external expertise in governance units
    b.    the composition and status of governance units at a higher level by putting more permanent structures in place with at least a core and consistent membership
    c.    academic governance, by maintaining higher levels of separation between functions to increase transparency in decision making processes ensuring that there is clear separation of commercial and educational decision-making and ensuring those who make or influence decisions at one level are not the same people approving them at a higher level
    d.    oversight including the connection between the governance units within Teagasc's education and training sphere and appropriate governance units at Teagasc Authority/Board level, providing clarity on precise reporting lines and responsibility between units, and ensuring various units or committees are established with appropriate authority either to make recommendations or to make decisions based on clear criteria
    e.    learner representation and participation in governance bodies
    f.    KPIs and quality improvement cycles and their connection to governance and decision making

2.    To include a commitment to publish of policies and procedures of relevance to the learner and outcomes of quality reviews, upon completion of the re-engagement process and thereafter in the relevant section of their Quality Assurance Manual.

The panel reconvened on 25th February 2021 to undertake a desk review of the evidence subsequently submitted by Teagasc on the 8th of February. This formal response included a summary of how the quality assurance procedures of the provider have been amended to address the mandatory changes recommended by the panel. The panel also met with the provider again on the 25th of February to examine their response in more detail with them, and all queries arising were thoroughly addressed by

the provider, including the clarification that decisions of Teagasc's Academic Council, which is chaired by the Head of Education, are then subject to oversight from the Senior Management Team and the subcommittee of the Board of Teagasc with a responsibility for education.

It is the panel's view that Teagasc has addressed the proposed mandatory changes and has responded appropriately to the panel's initial specific advice. The panel consequently recommends that QQI approve Teagasc's QA procedures.

## 7.2    Specific Advice

1.  To conduct a system wide review which focuses on Teagasc effectiveness in blended learning to include staff development, resources for teachers and learners, learner retention and learner outcomes to support the quality improvement cycle in this area of teaching and learning.

## Part 8    Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

| NFQ Level(s) – min and max | Award Class(es) | Discipline areas |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1-6 | Major, Minor, Supplemental and Special Purpose | Agriculture |
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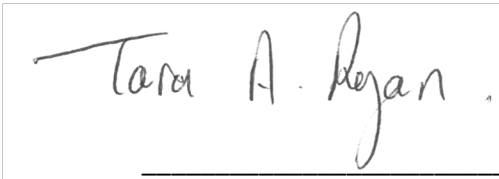
**Part 8        Approval by Chair of the Panel**

This report of the panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the approval of the draft Quality Assurance Procedures of Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Development Authority)

Name:        Tara A. Regan

Date: 11 March 2021

## Annexe 1:   Documentation provided to the Panel in the course of the Evaluation

Supporting Documentation by Chapter

| Chapter 1 | Title | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Chapter 1 | Governance and Management of Quality | |
| 1.1 | Terms of Reference | Terms of Reference for:<br>• Teagasc Education Quality Group<br>• Teagasc Programme Development Group<br>• Teagasc Programme Monitoring Group<br>• Teagasc Programme Review Group<br>• Teagasc Education Resources Leadership Teams<br>• Teagasc Education and Training Forum |
| | | |
| Chapter 2 | Documented Approach to Quality Assurance | |
| 2.1 | L5_CIA_Course_Memorandum_202021 | Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture Course Memorandum |
| 2.2 | Learner handbook Master | Teagasc Learner Handbook Master Copy |
| 2.3 | Tutor Handbook_D3_30092020 | Resources for tutors on QA and assessment |
| 2.4 | Teagasc Dignity and Respect for Learners Policy_v0.4 | Teagasc Dignity and Respect for Learners Policy |
| 2.5 | Access, Transfer and Progression Policy_07102020 | Access, Transfer and Progression Policy |
| | | |
| Chapter 3 | Programmes of Education and Training | |
| 3.1 | Blank_2020_Kildalton College Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture_NP | Blank Level 5 Agriculture Student Survey |
| 3.2 | Past Graduate Survey | Past Graduate Survey (a Survey of graduates from 5 years ago) |
| 3.3 | Blank_2020_Kildalton College Level 5 Certificate … | Blank Education Staff Survey (carried out in July 2020) |
| | | |
| Chapter 4 | Staff Recruitment, Management and Development | |
| 4.1 | 2020_L2_ Education Business Plan | Blank business plan template for Teagasc Education |
| 4.2 | 2020_L3_ Education Business Plan | Blank business plan template for a Teagasc College |
| 4.3 | 2019_Ed_Staff_IST ….. | Sample yearly staff IST schedule |
| | | |
| Chapter 5 | Teaching and Learning | |

| Chapter 1 | Title | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 5.1 | Blended Learning Policy 0.3… | Blended Learning Policy |
| 5.2 | Blended Learning Guidelines until August 2021………. | Guidance for staff on Blended Learning Delivery and assessment for Teagasc Education |
| | | |
| Chapter 6  Assessment of Learners | | |
| 6.1 | QA toolkit | • Ten point plan for preparing for the IV and EV processes<br>• Assessor Checklist in preparation for Internal and External Verification<br>• Booking Form for External Verification<br>• Internal Verification report<br>• AP form<br>• CS form<br>• Internal Verifier's folder<br>• Course Coordinator's  folder<br>• Module folder checklist |
| 6.2 | Management of Remote External Verification during Covid19 | Covid 19 External Verification Arrangements |
| 6.3 | Teagasc Assessment Policy | Teagasc Assessment Policy |
| 6.4 | Teagasc Security and Integrity of Assessment Policy | Teagasc Security and Integrity of Assessment Policy |
| 6.5 | Teagasc Assessment Appeals Policy | Teagasc Assessment and Award Appeals Policy |
| | | |
| Chapter 7   Supports for Learners | | |
| 7.1 | Teagasc Education Resources | List of Teagasc Education Workbooks and some web links |
| | | |
| Chapter 8  Information and Data Management | | |
| 8.1 | September 2020 Education Staff Newsletter | Education Staff Newsletters |
| 8.2 | June 2020 Education Staff Newsletter | Education Staff Newsletters |
| | | |
| Chapter 9  Public Information and Communication | | |
| | No supporting documents | |
| | | |
| Chapter 10 Other Parties Involved in Education and Training | | |
| 10.1 | SLA_Gurteen Agricultural College_September2018 | Sample of Teagasc / Private College Service Level Agreement |

| Chapter 1 | Title | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 10.2 | DKIT_Ballyhaise_Agreement_2018 | Sample Teagasc / IOT Memorandum of Understanding agreement |
| 10.3 | Teagasc_FRS_QA_ agreement | Teagasc /FRS QA agreement for the delivery of the Milking Process Techniques module |
| | | |
| Chapter 11  Self Evaluation, Monitoring and Review | | |
| | No supporting documents | |
| | | |
| Chapter 12  QA Provision for Proposed Higher Education Apprenticeships | | |
| | No supporting documents | |
| | | |
| Teagasc Webpage on QA policies https://www.teagasc.ie/education/quality-assurance-and-policies/ | | |

## Annexe 2:    Provider staff met in the course of the Evaluation

Name                                                              Role/Position

| |  |
|---|---|
| Tony Pettit (Head of Education, Teagasc) <br> Frank Murphy (Head of Curriculum Development and Standards (CDSU), Teagasc) <br> Tara Fitzsimons (Teagasc Verifications and Standards Specialist, CDSU, Teagasc) <br> Joe Hanlon (Teagasc QQI Coordinator/ Quality Assurance Specialist, CDSU, Teagasc) <br> Marcella Phelan (Teagasc Apprenticeship Programme Coordinator, CDSU, Teagasc) <br> James Maher (Teagasc Education Resource Specialist, CDSU, Teagasc) <br> Tim Ashmore (Principal, Kildalton Agriculture and Horticulture College), <br> Deirdre Walsh (Assistant Principal, College of Amenity Horticulture, Botanic Gardens) <br> Karen O' Connell (Assistant Principal, Clonakilty Agricultural College) <br> Joe Day (Lecturer and Course Coordinator, Kildalton College) <br> Katie Frazier (Lecturer, Distance Education Course, Kildalton College) | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Brian Morrissey  (Teagasc Education IT Resource Specialist, CDSU, Teagasc) Carmel Finlay  (Teagasc Recognition of Prior Learning and Inservice Training Specialist, CDSU, Teagasc) Donna Deegan (Teagasc Learning Support Specialist, CDSU, Teagasc) | |

*Appendix:* Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report

**Re: QQI Reengagement Panel Report (25/2/2021)**
    **Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedure – Teagasc Response**

Dear Alex,

Teagasc welcomes the outcome of the Teagasc - QQI Reengagement Panel Report.   Teagasc notes the many positive findings relating to Teagasc education highlighted in the Report and that the Panel commended the particularly positive, professional and open attitude of Teagasc personnel to the reengagement process.

The reengagement process has been a very valuable learning and self- evaluation process for Teagasc.   Teagasc takes on board the recommendations of the Panel.   Teagasc academic governance structures and QA processes will be further strengthened on foot of the process.

Teagasc would like to thank the Panel for its very thorough, objective and professional approach. The constructive insights of    and feedback from the Panel were very relevant and useful to the Teagasc context.

Teagasc also thanks QQI for its guidance and support around the reengagement process.


Yours sincerely

Tony Pettit
Head of Education
Teagasc