

Teagasc Policy for Security and Integrity of Assessments

Author	Tony Petit
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1. Background

Teagasc assessment policy requires that assessments be conducted to a standard and that assessment procedures are applied consistently and fairly to all learners. Likewise Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Statutory Core Guidelines require providers to ensure integrity of assessment. Breaches of Teagasc assessment security and integrity processes and procedures or assessment malpractice represent major quality assurance non-compliances. Potentially there can be significant adverse implications for Teagasc as an education provider. Equally there can be significant consequences for Teagasc learners, Teagasc staff and education contractors whose actions lead to a breach assessment security and integrity.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this Policy is to inform Teagasc managers, Teagasc staff, education contractors and learners of their responsibility to comply with Teagasc requirements and procedures relating to assessment security and integrity.

3. Applicability

The Policy applies to all Teagasc education and training programmes and to programmes of all Teagasc linked providers where Teagasc has a role in assessing learners

As such it applies to:

- All programmes leading to a QQI award (major, minor, specific purpose or other)
- All Teagasc linked higher education programmes
- Teagasc programmes/course leading to awards from awarding bodies other than QQI
- Any other Teagasc education and training activity where assessment is an integral part of the course whether accredited or not accredited.

It applies to all Teagasc staff, Teagasc subvented staff in private colleges, staff directly employed by private partner colleges, to education contractors, their personnel and to all learners engaged in such programmes.

This Policy will be:

1. Published on the Teagasc intranet and public website
2. Linked to the learner application process
3. Linked to the Teagasc Tutor Handbook
4. Linked to the Learner Handbook, and
5. Advised to learners at course induction events.

4. Policy Statement

1. This policy is drawn up with regard to two QQI documents:
 - a. *QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, April 2016 Quality Assuring Assessment – Guidelines for Providers Revised 2013 (Version 2 – revised 2018).*
2. Managers and all staff involved directly or indirectly in delivering education and training programmes (as listed above) must make themselves aware of this policy, and implement its procedures
3. All education contractors and their personnel must be made aware of this policy at initiation of service delivery.
4. Learners must be advised of this policy as part of their course induction.
5. This policy is developed according to Teagasc education policy development procedures as led by the Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU).
6. This policy will be reviewed as and when necessary.

5. Procedures

Teagasc education management will communicate this policy to all Teagasc education staff. Managers of colleges, regional education centres and of other Teagasc locations and units involved in education and training have a duty and responsibility to bring this policy and its best practice procedures to the attention of their staff, to education contractors that they engage and to all learners. All staff and contracted personnel must adopt best practice and appropriate precautions and exercise due care and vigilance to ensure that assessment is not compromised.

The following outlines key practices and procedures in relation to assessment security and integrity but is not intended as an exhaustive list. Local managers should ensure that agreed protocols are in place and clearly communicated to staff and that guidelines and requirements issued by CDSU be adhered to in respect to the below procedures and practices. Staff must adhere to best practices indicated.

Creation of exams and assessments

Exams and assessments must be created with regard to module specifications

- Exam papers should be created on PCs/laptops that are password protected. (Teagasc laptops are also encrypted)
- Staff must never share their IT password with any other person
- IT equipment used to develop assessments must be properly maintained and secure at all times
- Staff must lock their personal computer when unattended

Visibility of exam questions

- Operate a need to see approach. Exam questions/papers must only be seen by staff that have an absolute requirement to view them, e.g. co-examiners/relevant peer verifier(s) and course internal verifier. This applies both to hardcopy and digital versions of exams.

Handling and storage of hard copies of exams

Exam paper hardcopies must be printed/ copied in a secure fashion with all copies accounted for. Copies for printing should only be sent to photocopiers that require unique staff password identification to print documents. In the absence of password protected printers, a test print should take place first to ensure that exams are being printed at the location intended.

- Exam paper hardcopies must not be left unattended even for a short time or in an insecure manner where others can see or pick up or copy.
- A local procedure should be in place in regard to the storage of hardcopy exam papers from printing to distribution at exam time. Designated storage locations, access permission to stored papers and risk control measures should be defined.

Distribution and storage of digital copies of exam questions

- Final agreed versions of exams should be in PDF format.
- A secure local procedure should be in place in regard to the storage of digital exam papers on staff computers/network drives until they are printed. Exam questions should be stored on a secure Teagasc system such as the Teagasc DMS (i.e. not on Cloud such as "Google docs", dropbox etc.). Access to DMS 'exam folders' must be restricted to a needs must basis. Staff access to digital exam folders must be reviewed throughout the academic year to cater for staff movements.
- Exam questions/papers must not be stored on computer locations (e.g. shared drives) where others including learners might potentially access them (as stated questions/papers should only be seen by those who have an absolute requirement to do so)
- Exam questions/papers must not be stored on memory sticks. Where it is necessary to use a memory stick for the purposes of transferring exam material only encrypted memory sticks may be used, and the exam material must be deleted once transferred.
- Exam questions/papers must not be emailed except when essential and only to those who have an absolute need to see them.
- If emailing a softcopy of exam papers to computers external to Teagasc, the file should be password protected. (Word files must be password protected. (When saving a Word file to PDF the PDF version must be also protected when saving).
- Emailing should be through organisational (i.e. Teagasc, private college, contractor) email accounts rather than personal email accounts.

Vigilance and care regarding learner revision classes and working examples

- Exam question must not be communicated verbally to learners or to others in advance of assessment.
- Any 'class examples' used for teaching purposes or revision tutorials must not be exactly replicated in exam questions. The parameters and variables of any class examples must be altered.

Assessment invigilation

- Assessments invigilation resources must be sufficient to ensure that an invigilator(s) is present in the exam hall/assessment area at all times
- New invigilators must be properly briefed as to ensuring best practice at invigilation. (Refer to the Teagasc Tutor Handbook for further guidance).
- Learners must not be allowed to bring unauthorised materials or equipment into the assessment location. Mobile phones must be left in the exam hall if a learner is going to the toilet
- Learners must not be allowed to communicate with each other during assessment (unless learner interaction is a feature of the assessment)
- Learners must be adequately distanced from each other in the exam location
- Learners must be monitored/escorted if they leave but intend returning to the exam location (e.g. toilet break). Adequate invigilation cover should be in place to allow this
- Learners not known to the invigilator must present identification on request.

Protocols for handling and storage of learners' hard copy assessment scripts

- Mislaying or losing learner scripts can have substantial implications for the learner and for Teagasc
- Learners should receive clear instruction re identification (e.g. name/ learners unique Quercus ID number) details to be provided on their scripts including on any additional notepaper provided.
- All scripts (exams/assignments/projects etc.) templates must provide for clear learner identification details.
- The onus is on the learner to submit their exam script and complete the identification details. Invigilators should check that learners leave their full script with their identification details completed before the learner leaves the exam location.
- Learners must sign formally 'sign in' to confirm that they sat the examination. At the beginning of the assessment the invigilators must record the number of exam scripts distributed.
- At the end of assessment, invigilators must count the number of learners' scripts submitted. The total should be formally recorded by the invigilators on the learner attendance 'sign in' record. The scripts and attendance records must be transferred securely to a designated person or storage area.
- Local protocols should be in place re secure storage and filing of learners' scripts for internal verification and external verification purposes in line with Teagasc QA guidelines.
- Scripts must be maintained and disposed of as per the relevant GDPR retention guideline for Teagasc education programmes.
- Where scripts are required to be transported to a partner institution, agreed protocols and records must be in place for same.

Recording of learners results

- Staff, college and centre management have a duty to ensure that learner results are collated and entered on Quercus accurately.
- As results are entered on Quercus, they should be saved and calculated on an on-going basis.
- Course co-ordinators, internal and external verifiers may occasionally run a Quercus report log to establish when and who amended module results on Quercus. All results must be internally verified and formally approved at local level.
- Learners results must be 'locked' on Quercus following local results approval
- Teagasc nationally have a responsibility to ensure local results are externally verified and nationally approved and accurately submitted to QQI for Certification.
- Learner results should not be circulated /transferred digitally. Where there is an absolute requirement to do so (e.g. to a partner institution, results must be password protected or

encrypted). If results have to be transferred by hard copy, secure transfer procedures must be put in place.

Protocols in place where Teagasc conduct assessments on behalf of Partner Institutions

- In the case of partner Institutes of Technology/Universities exams, partners must be consulted with and their assessment security and integrity policies and practice fully complied.
- Colleges should have a nominated member of staff to liaise with education partners and college staff in regard to best practice re protocol and transfer requirements for exam questions and scripts.
- Agreed protocols must be in place by partner institutions regarding exam question setting, storage and transfer of exam questions, learner scripts and learner results between Teagasc and the partner institution with recording logs if necessary for key aspects of such transfer.

Protocols in place where contractors conduct assessments on behalf of Teagasc

- Agreed protocols must be in place re exam question setting, storage and transfer of exam questions, learner scripts and learner results between contractors and Teagasc.
- It is the responsibility of colleges and centres to communicate required local protocols to contractors.
- It is the responsibility of the contractor to ensure that their personnel adhere to Teagasc requirements.

Repeat exam papers

- In Teagasc education programmes questions on a repeat paper must be at a minimum 50% different to the original paper.

Controls in place for online assessment and remote assignments

Online and remote assessment includes:

- Scheduled fixed time online exams undertaken on campus/centre computers
- Scheduled fixed time online exams undertaken on learners own devices
- Assignments completed remotely (off campus).

Summative online exams should be conducted through Moodle or a Teagasc recognised equivalent. Formative assessment may be conducted on other platforms, provided they are secure and where the formative assessment is used summatively, learners are readily identifiable. The procedures indicated below must be implemented to ensure questions are secure from learners and others.

- Exam questions uploaded to Moodle must be password protected and not accessible (hidden from students) until the appointed exam time.
- Learners should not have access to the Moodle exam questions bank for the purpose of revision or preparation for an exam
- Online exams should ideally be taken in face to face time. Where this is not possible, protocols should be in place to invigilate the assessment.
- Online exams must be held at a fixed time and for a fixed and limited duration
- For multiple choice exams:
 - The number of questions created by the tutor(s) must exceed the number of questions to be attempted by the learner so that all learners do not receive the same questions
 - Questions and suggested answers must be randomised so that learners do not receive questions/answers in the same sequence

- Learners must not be able to log out and re-login once they submitted their online exam without college/centre approval which may be given in certain *force majeure* circumstances.

For remote assignments learners should be given clear instruction as to the required submission mode for the assignment (e.g. by hardcopy, by email- to whom, by uploading via a specific digital platform). The assignment template must provide the learner's identification details (Name, unique Quercus ID number) and a self-declaration that the assignment is the learner's own work.

Measures for oral and video assessments?

Oral assessments may occur:

- As a specified assessment format within the programme module requirements. In such cases clear marking templates must be in place and all learners must be treated in a consistent manner. A note taking template and procedures should be in place to record key points made by the learner.
- In situations where Teagasc deem assessment by video submissions to be acceptable, learners should be provided with a guidance notes as to what is required and the health and safety protocols to be implemented.

Learner support (scriptors and readers)

- By way of reasonable accommodation to learners having a specific physical or learning difficulty, a scriptor / reader may be provided for a written assessment or the assessment. A consistent protocol must be followed to ensure learners being accommodated are treated equitably. Scriptors and readers must be given clear instruction on how to conduct the assessment
- Learner support must not confer any advantage or disadvantage
 - Scriptors or oral examiners must not answer the question on the learners' behalf

Learner Personation?

- Personation presents a greater risk where a large numbers of learners are enrolled on an individual course and staff have less familiarity with individual learners. The nature of Teagasc courses generally means staff are familiar with their learners. Nevertheless personation could potentially arise at two levels:
 - Assessment - a person other than the registered learner undertakes an assessment
 - Course - personation- a person other than the registered learner undertakes the course.
- The scale of personation risk for Teagasc is likely to be lowest for full-time and part-time students and potentially increasing for distance education students. College and centres should be vigilant at all times. At application a learner must provide:
 - A copy of his /her birth certificate
 - Evidence/Proof of PPSN (Personal Public Service Number) e.g. copy of Public Services Card (front and back), copy of Drugs Payment Scheme Card etc.
 - A copy of driver's licence (front & back) if applicable
 - Photos must be obtained for each learner and it is recommended that a course ID (photos/names) list should be available for each course.
- It is recommended that staff are familiar with the course ID list.
- A learner attendance record must be in place for all assessments
- Learners should in as far as possible be assigned a given desk at written exams
- At least one of the exam location invigilators must be familiar with the learner cohort being assessed.
- Where assessment invigilators do not recognise a learner present in the exam location they may request evidence of learner identity.

- For remote assessments Teagasc reserves the right to contact learners to verify identity and to remotely monitor online examinations at its discretion.
- For remote assessments cameras may be used as part of invigilation where this is deemed necessary and feasible.

Vigilance in relation to the risk of Plagiarism in respect assessment work submitted by learners

- Assessors need to be vigilant to the risk of plagiarism in assessment which may include but is not limited to:
 - Representing work completed by and/or authored by another person (including other learners, family, work colleagues and friends) as their own.
 - Procuring work from a company or external source including the internet such as an “essay mill”
 - Copying work from any source or medium without reference (i.e. website, book, journal article).
 - Taking a passage of text, or an idea, and summarising it without acknowledging the original source.
 - Passing off collaborative work as one’s own.
 - Piecing together sections of others’ work into a new whole.
 - Submitting another learner’s work with or without their knowledge.
- All learner assignments and project work must include a declaration template that must be signed by the learner declaring that assignment/project work to be their own original work.
- Plagiarism detection software should be utilised as necessary. [Many Teagasc Level 5 and 6 agricultural assignments are for a given farm situation however but use of detection software may be a requirement for higher education assignments or advised for some Teagasc further education assignments].

6. Interim policy in the current context

The on-going COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a fundamental shift towards greater use of remote and online assessment across the education sector and within Teagasc. As such remote and online assessment practice is dynamic and accordingly security and integrity processes are evolving.

Where remote and online assessment is being used, each tutor must develop an assessment plan that incorporates a range of assessment types that will

- Provide for different learner types
- Allow for detection in anomalies in results
- Indicate plagiarism

Invigilation for remote and online examination is technically feasible in principle. It is however very difficult in practice to simultaneously implement across a large body of students, is challenged by the range of devices learners may be operating on. It is also potentially very expensive and or resource demanding depending on the option chosen. Cameras on devices should be used for monitoring where deemed necessary and feasible.

This policy and associated procedures will be kept under continual review in light of technology developments and practice across the education sector and of relevant QQI guidelines relating to online assessment.

7. Enforcement

- This policy is enforced at an overarching level by Teagasc senior management, and the Head of Education and Head of Curriculum Development and Standards.
- Managers of colleges, regional education centres and of other locations and units have responsibility for enforcing this policy and for implementing best practice procedures and protocols re assessment for education and training activities within their remit
- Staff that breach/transgress assessment security and integrity requirements are subject to the processes of Teagasc staff disciplinary code.
- Contractors who breach assessment security and integrity requirements are liable to have contracts terminated.
- Learner conduct in regard to assessments is set out in the Learner Handbook. Learners who engage in misconduct in regard to assessments will be subject to the disciplinary processes set out in the Teagasc Learner Handbook.

8. Definitions and Terms

Assessment Malpractice	Any action or practice that undermines the fairness of assessment
CDSU	Curriculum Development and Standards Unit, Teagasc Kildalton College, Piltown, Co Kilkenny
DMS	Document Management System
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (www.qqi.ie)
Integrity	The overall processes and controls governing the conduct of assessments are sufficiently robust to minimise the risk of conscious or unconscious transgression of assessment practice and security.
Learners	Any person registered on a Teagasc education training programme or course or with a partner college part of whose training and assessment is run by Teagasc
Moodle	A virtual learning environment used by Teagasc to communicate with learners, provide course notes and learning materials and to conduct online exams.
Personation	Purposefully presenting in the capacity of/ or under the identity of another with the intent to deceive.
Plagiarism	A body of work submitted by the candidate, claimed to be their original work but that is substantively not the original work of the candidate.
Quercus	Teagasc Learner Management System
Security of assessments	Procedures required to prevent examination content or questions become known to a learner or learners in advance of their assessment

9. Related Documents

Teagasc Assessment Policy

Teagasc Learner Handbook - learner conduct and disciplinary code, assessment procedures.

Teagasc Blended Learning Policy

Teagasc Tutor Handbook

Teagasc Quality Assurance Manual QQI Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, April 2016 and Quality Assuring Assessment – Guidelines for Providers Revised 2013 (Version 2 – revised 2018).

10. Revision History

Revision date	Version	Summary of Changes
19/09/20	V0.6	Approved by Teagasc Education Quality Group
02/09/20	V0.5	Edit and review by J Hanlon /J Maher CDSU and T Pettit, HoE
27/07/20	v0.4	Edits based on feedback College Principal/Asst. Principal
08/07/20	v0.3	Minor edits based on feedback of Teagasc Director
29/06/20	v0.2	Edits on foot of circulation to CDSU staff
25/06/20	V0.1	Draft document for circulation

Basic best practice procedures

- Do not leave exam papers 'lying around' in your office or photocopy room
- Create your exams on secure computers
- Never give your computer password to anyone else
- Computer should be password locked when unattended
- Do not store exam papers on 'open' staff and learner shared computer drives
- If using a shared secure space, user access should be reviewed each year
- Circulate exam questions/papers to only to those with a need to see – e.g. co-examiners/verifiers
- Should a memory stick be used to transfer an exam paper it should be encrypted. If emailing an exam paper/questions to external sources (e.g. partner organisations) it should be password protected
- Do not verbally communicate actual exam paper questions to learner
- Make sure exam rooms and halls are adequately invigilated
- Ensure that repeat papers sufficiently different to original papers
- Ensure that learner results are checked, securely maintained and accurately inputted on Quercus.
- Be aware that Learner Personation, while highly unlikely, could occur at examinations could occur at an exam and with part-time and distance education courses having large cohorts of learners being a greater risk.