
Teagasc Quality Assurance Manual

For Teagasc Further Education Programmes

Developed in line with QQI Core Statutory

Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016/QG1-P2)



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Chapter 1 Governance and Management of Quality

This chapter outlines the structures in Teagasc governance and management of quality assurance as a provider of further education and training.

1.1 Governance

Teagasc Mission and Legislative Framework

The Teagasc mission is to “support science-based innovation in the agri-food sector and wider bio economy so as to underpin profitability, competitiveness and sustainability”.

Teagasc is mandated under the **Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act 1988**, 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”.

Teagasc publishes a **Statement of Strategy**¹ every 3 years, which sets out goals, priorities and high-level strategic actions for the period in question. The Statement is prepared in consultation with staff and a range of external stakeholders and represents Teagasc’s response to the opportunities and challenges facing the organisation and the agri-food sector during the 3 years.

Teagasc also publish an **Annual Report**² which provides information on the achievements, activities and accounts of the organisation.

Teagasc Organisational Structure and Governance

Teagasc is structured into three directorates (Research, Knowledge Transfer and Operations) reporting to the Teagasc Director who in turn reports to the government appointed Teagasc Authority. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is the ‘parent’ government department for Teagasc.

¹ <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2017/Statement-of-Strategy-2017-2020.pdf>

² <https://www.teagasc.ie/about/our-organisation/annual-reports/>

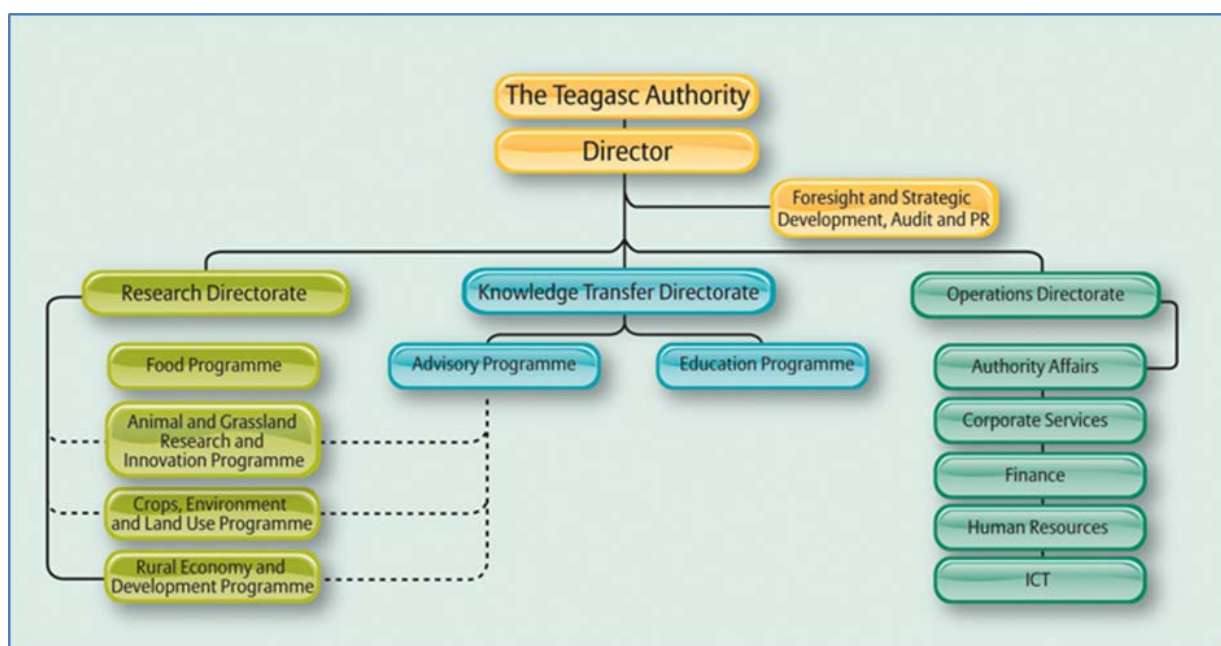


Figure 1.1 Teagasc Organisational Chart

Teagasc Governance

Under the **Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies** Teagasc is required to have a written **Code of Conduct** and to demonstrate the organisation’s commitment as a public sector body to the highest standards of governance. Teagasc has adapted the Civil Service Codes of Standards & Behaviour to devise the Teagasc Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct is available on Teagasc’s public website³.

Business Planning in Teagasc

Teagasc performance is managed internally through business planning, productivity analysis and the Performance Management Development System (PMDS); and externally through reporting requirements of government departments – the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Line managers have a particular role and responsibility for quality assurance and performance for ensuring that objectives set are clear and equitable in the context of the business unit objectives.

Figure 1.2 depicts the business planning process for Teagasc Education. It follows a planning process starting at Level 3 Business Plans and culminates with a Level 1 Business Plan completed by Senior Management.

Level 3 annual business plans are prepared by the Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU), Colleges and Regional Centres. The Head of Education then prepares a Level 2 business plan for presentation to the Director and Senior Management, who in turn develop a single overarching Level 1 business plan for the organisation which is presented and approved by the Teagasc Authority. Progress against planned activities is reported on biannually. Teagasc submits a Programme of Activities to DAFM annually in respect of its research, advisory and education programme activities.

³ <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/about/corporate-responsibility/Code-of-Conduct--2020.pdf>



Figure 1.2 Teagasc Business Planning Process

Each business plan includes a risk register which identifies risks pertaining to the individual unit. It outlines additional actions to be taken to mitigate against the risks identified. The risk register allocates responsibility for the implementation of controls to named individuals and sets a time frame for the management of risks.

At Education Programme level, quality assurance risk is addressed through internal verification and independent authentication, internal validation of programmes and staff and learner codes of conduct, all of which are addressed in more detail in later chapters.

Delivery to programmes of other providers is governed by an agreed Memorandum of Understanding between Teagasc and the relevant higher education provider. Business plans are reviewed and monitored through a series of scheduled meetings. These meetings provide discussion fora and facilitate the flow of information between the various Teagasc departments. Meetings include:

- Teagasc Authority meetings (monthly)
- Teagasc Authority Committee meetings (quarterly or as required)
- Senior Management meetings (weekly)
- Senior Management Group – communications meetings (monthly)
- College Principal meetings (monthly)
- CDSU meetings (monthly)
- Education Officer meetings (biannually).

The Teagasc Internal Auditor together with External Auditors monitor performance and compliance with regulatory, legal requirements and best national and international practice.

The findings of audits and external evaluations are reported to senior management, the Authority and the relevant Head of Programme (this being the Head of Education for Education reports) and to the relevant business unit manager. Academic-related evaluations and reports are also reported to the Academic Council and the Teagasc Education Forum. Included in reports are recommended actions and monitoring requirements. The Head of Education, in this regard, informs the Curriculum Development and Standards Unit, College Principals and Regional Managers, and reports to Senior Management. Further details of evaluation in Teagasc are provided in Chapter 11.

Protecting the integrity of Academic Processes and Standards

Teagasc is a semi-state body, whose education programme is independent of commercial considerations. Structures are such to allow for independent QA academic decision making in Teagasc education, free from the direct influence of stakeholders, the Teagasc Authority and

Senior Management. Development and delivery of education programmes are managed by experienced and appropriately qualified staff. The revised *Teagasc Policy on Security and Integrity of Assessment* outlines in more detail the policy and procedures around this.

Teagasc as an Education Provider

Teagasc is the primary provider of accredited further education and training (FET) for the land-based sector in Ireland. Teagasc has a major input into higher education and postgraduate education delivery through its extensive partnership with the higher education sector. Teagasc also provides short courses and continuous professional development across the land-based and food sectors.

Teagasc is a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) registered provider of further education at Levels 4, 5 and Level 6.

At Level 7 and Level 8, Teagasc partners with Institutes of Technology, University College Dublin (UCD) and University College Cork (UCC) to support delivery of their degree programmes.

The Teagasc Level 7 Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management is validated by University College Dublin.

At Level 9 and Level 10 (Masters and PhD), Teagasc provides a Walsh Scholarship programme that sponsors learners to work and carry out applied research in Teagasc while achieving their Masters or PhD qualification with the partner University or Institute of Technology.

Further Education in Teagasc

This quality assurance manual focusses on Teagasc's quality assurance system for its further education provision. All further education courses in Teagasc's education provision are governed by and subject to Teagasc's further education quality assurance processes and procedures.

Programmes of further education in Teagasc include:

- QQI accredited full-time programmes serving the agriculture, horticulture, forestry and equine sectors
- QQI accredited part-time and distance education programmes serving the agriculture sector
- QQI accredited short courses serving the agriculture, food and horticulture sectors
- Non-accredited short courses serving mainly, but not limited to, the farming community.

Teagasc Education Programmes

Teagasc education programmes are managed by the Head of Education and are delivered through a network of four Teagasc colleges, three linked Teagasc supported private partner colleges (privately owned but part-funded by Teagasc to deliver Teagasc programmes), and 12 Regional Education Units based in Teagasc advisory regions. The Teagasc Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU) develop, monitor and review Teagasc education programmes. Teagasc supported private partner colleges operate to a service level agreement.

The **Teagasc colleges** are:

- Ballyhaise College, Co. Cavan (Agriculture, Machinery, Forestry, Pigs* and Poultry)
- Clonakilty College, Co. Cork (Agriculture)
- Kildalton College, Co. Kilkenny (Agriculture, Machinery, Horticulture, Equine)
- College of Amenity Horticulture, National Botanic Gardens, Dublin (Horticulture).

*The Teagasc Pig Husbandry Knowledge Transfer Department inputs to Level 5/6 pig production programmes delivery.

The **Teagasc supported private partner colleges** are:

- Gurteen College, Co. Tipperary (Agriculture and Machinery)
- Mountbellew Agricultural College, Co. Galway (Agriculture)
- Salesian Agricultural College, Pallaskenry, Co. Limerick (Agriculture and Agricultural Mechanisation).

Colleges also input into specific Higher Education (HE) programmes of some Institutes of Technology and Universities.

Regional Education Centres

The Teagasc advisory service is delivered through 12 regional units. Each region provides an advisory service and delivers training courses. The advisory regions (Figure 1.3) operate a Regional Education Centre in one or more locations in the region. Regional Education Centres typically deliver part-time and distance education programmes.

The Teagasc Animal and Grassland Research Centre at Moorepark, Fermoy, Co. Cork, supports the delivery of both a UCD Level 8 programme and UCC Level 8 programme in agricultural science.

College Farms

The Teagasc colleges and the supported private partner colleges have substantial land and physical resources at their disposal for practical instruction and demonstration of commercial farming. The total combined area farmed at colleges amounts to just over 1,000 hectares and includes over 1,200 dairy cows, almost 300 suckler (beef) cows, 1,000 ewes and close to 100 hectares of tillage.

Colleges also have an extensive range of farm machinery, equipment and modern workshops for practical teaching purposes. There are also specialised resources, gardens and facilities at Teagasc horticultural colleges to enable hands-on learning. Likewise, the equine courses at Kildalton College have the resources to allow learners to work with horses on a daily basis. Our forestry teaching resources at Ballyhaise College include commercial and natural woodland sites, dedicated skills workshops and forestry machinery simulator facilities.

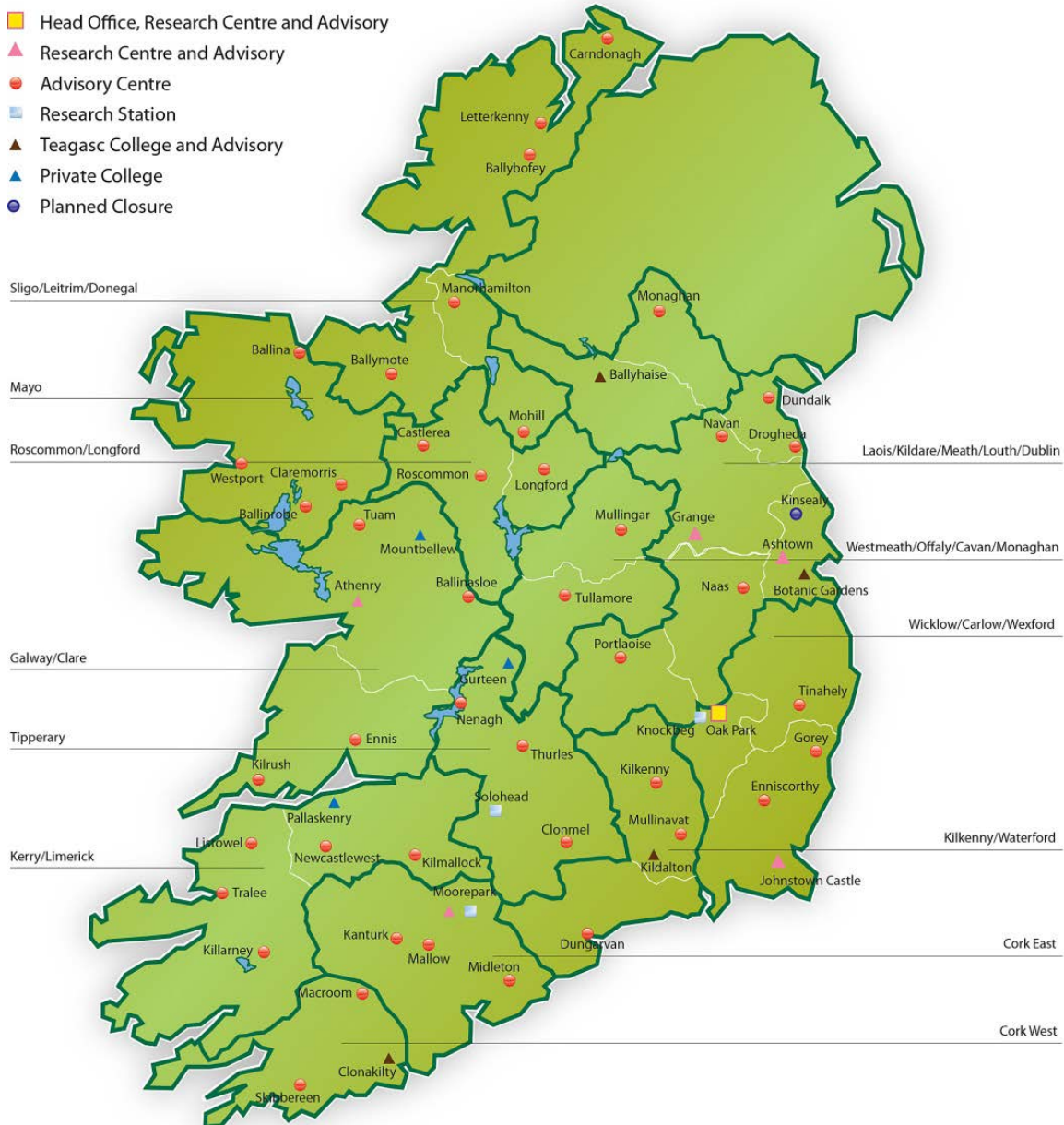


Figure 1.3 Teagasc Location Map

Training Hosts

Teagasc has over 1,500 registered host units that provide *in-situ* work experience for agricultural, equine, forestry and horticultural learners. A further 50 commercial farms known as ‘Education Benchmark Farms’ are utilised for learner projects, benchmarking exercises, skills training and learner discussion group visits.

Teagasc ConnectEd

Teagasc ConnectEd programmes provide access to Teagasc research, training, knowledge resource, Teagasc publications, online tools and webinars to professionals and businesses working with the agri-food sector.

Teagasc Continuous Professional Development for Farmers and Growers

Teagasc offers continuous professional development (CPD) courses to farmers, Teagasc graduates and the wider land sector. Training is delivered through accredited and non-accredited focused short courses.

1.2 Management of Quality Assurance – Teagasc Education Governance Structure

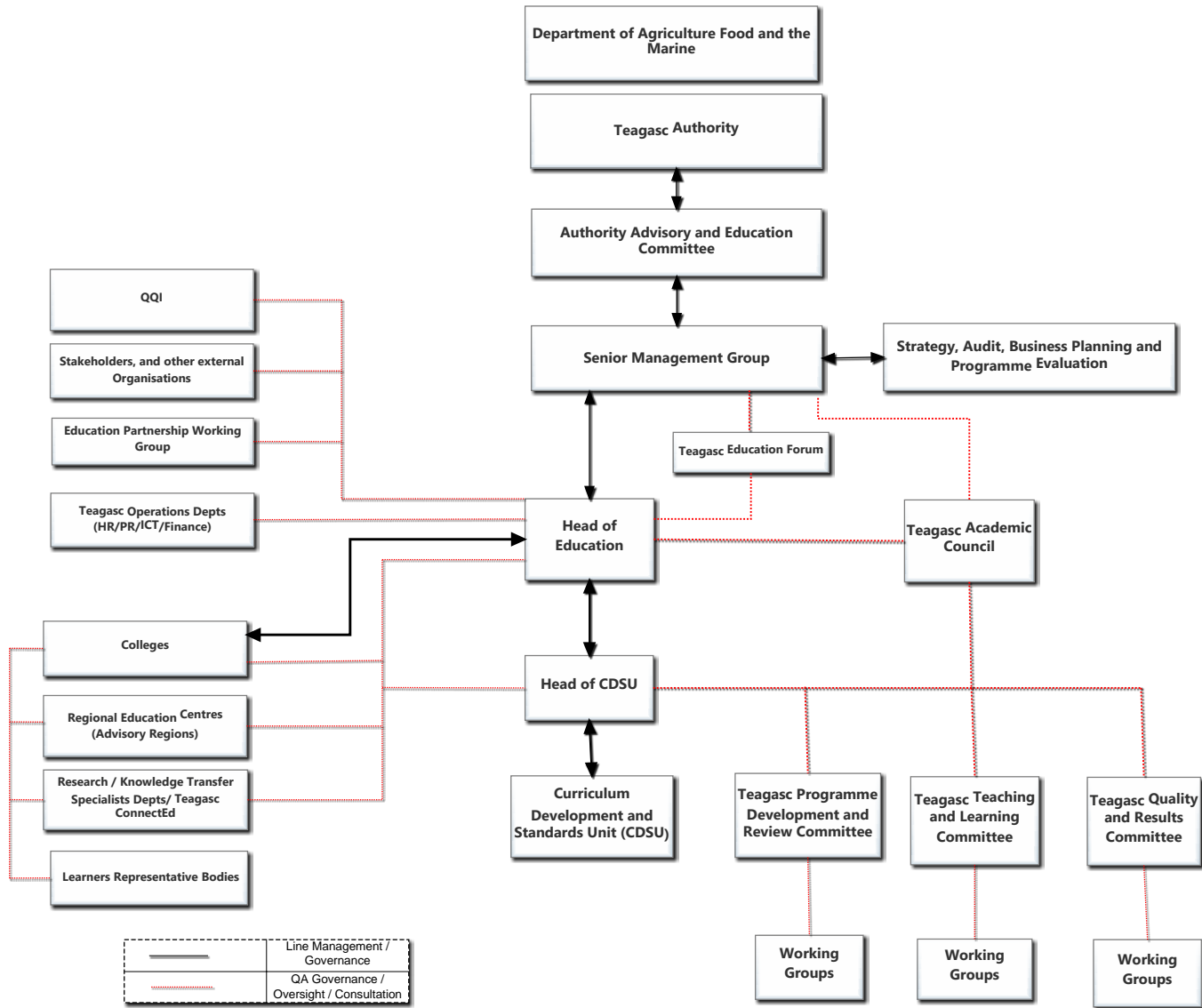


Figure 1.4 Teagasc Education Quality Assurance Governance

Teagasc Education Governance Structure

Figure 1.4 depicts Teagasc education governance structure and its relationship within the overall Teagasc organisation.

Teagasc Education Line Management Governance

Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM)

Teagasc is a public state agency, operating under the Department of Agriculture and the Marine. Quality management, monitoring and compliance processes for state bodies, including the approval of an annual budget based on an agreed annual Programme of Activities, an annual business planning process and Teagasc Statement of Strategy.

Teagasc Authority

The Teagasc Authority is responsible for governance of the organisation and meets on a monthly basis. The Authority also has five committees as follows: Advisory and Education Committee, Audit & Risk Committee, Nominations Committee, Operations Committee and Research Committee. The Advisory and Education Committee examines activities and issues relating to Teagasc advisory and education. It makes recommendations to the Authority on decisions referred by Teagasc management.

Senior Management Group (SMG)

Teagasc Senior Management Group consists of the Teagasc Director, The Head of Research, the Head of Knowledge Transfer (Education and Advisory) and the Chief Operations Officer. The SMG meet on a weekly basis, and report to the Teagasc Authority. Their primary role is to approve and co-ordinate of all activities in Teagasc, ensuring best practice in governance.

Strategy, Audit Business, Planning and Programme Evaluation

Teagasc has both internal audit function and an external audit (Comptroller and Auditor General) processes. Business Planning, Risk Management are covered in more detail in Chapter 2. Business plans and audits are carried out by this unit for the Teagasc organisation, and reports are presented to the SMG, who action perceived areas of weakness within the Teagasc organisation.

Head of Education

The Heads of Programmes report to SMG, and their primary role in Teagasc, is the development and management of their respective programmes, i.e. Research, Advisory or Education programmes. Each programme has dedicated administration and quality assurance departments. The Head of Education is responsible for the Education Programme in Teagasc. The colleges involved in Teagasc Education report directly to the Head of Education as does the Head of Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU). The Head of Education therefore is the direct reporting link to Teagasc SMG, takes direction and guidance from SMG and implements decisions taken at SMG level.

Head of CDSU

The Head of CDSU manages quality assurance and curriculum development for Teagasc Education. This role requires working closely with the Head of Education to ensure linkages across Teagasc and outside of Teagasc, and co-ordination of the Teagasc Education Structure. This entails consultation and liaison with Teagasc Academic Council and its committees in programme and policy development and review, and with colleges and regional centres on the implementation of quality standards and programme content. Directed by the Head of CDSU, the CDSU itself supports the work of the committees of the Academic Council, and supports the delivery of the education programme in Teagasc. Separation from line management functions ensures independence is maintained between CDSU and the rest of Teagasc.

Teagasc Education Quality Assurance Governance Oversight

Teagasc Academic Council (TAC)

The terms of reference for the TAC are published on the Teagasc public website.

Under its remit the Teagasc Academic Council has a responsibility for overseeing academic and quality assurance matters within Teagasc. Its core function is to oversee academic quality assurance for the purposes of enhancement, accountability, and quality improvement. Its remit does not extend beyond academic and education quality assurance matters.

It has three standing committees with both permanent *ex-officio* and nominated members, on a 3-year term, including learner and external representation. The committees are:

- Teagasc Programme and Review Committee
- Teagasc Teaching and Learning Committee
- Teagasc Quality and Results Committee.

Teagasc Programme and Review Committee

Established under the Teagasc education quality assurance governance structure, its role and responsibilities as delegated to it by the Teagasc Academic Council is to oversee the development of proposed new education programmes and the review of Teagasc further education programmes. Responsibilities include continuous improvement of programme content, programme design and accessibility, and monitoring of same.

Teagasc Teaching and Learning Committee

Established under the Teagasc education quality assurance governance structure, its role and responsibilities as delegated to it by the Teagasc Academic Council is to oversee the planning and co-ordination of staff training and to advise on appropriate teaching resources, methodologies and assessment practices. Responsibilities include monitoring teaching and learning feedback from staff and learners, support of learners including support in blended learning, reporting to the Academic Council and devising recommendations on continuous improvement in Teaching and Learning practices in Teagasc.

Teagasc Quality and Results Committee

Established under the Teagasc education quality assurance governance structure, its roles and responsibilities as delegated to it by the Teagasc Academic Council are to oversee quality assurance and results procedures for Teagasc further education programmes. Responsibilities include internal self-monitoring of quality assurance procedures and key performance indicators of Teagasc Education specifically. Findings are reported to the Academic Council for its consideration and feedback.

Co-ordination of Council and Committee activities

The work of the above three standing committees is assisted by working groups that are established as required. The Head of CDSU assigns and directs CDSU staff in their involvement in working groups and committees. The working groups report to their respective committees. The output and recommendations of the standing committees is co-ordinated through the Head of CDSU and presented to the Academic Council for its consideration. The Head of Education in turn, authorises the implementation of Academic Council approved academic decisions. Academic decisions of the Academic Council are reported to Teagasc SMG and the Teagasc Authority Advisory and Education Committee and are monitored to ensure alignment with Teagasc high level mission, policies and goals. Academic decisions that substantially impact on or alter the Teagasc organisational mission and strategic goals require the explicit approval of Teagasc SMG and the Teagasc Authority.

Planned initiatives by the Academic Council committees are sanctioned by the Head of Education before commencement to ensure alignment with Teagasc mission, policies and goals.

Non-permanent members of the Academic Council and its committees are appointed from their respective staff and learner representative cohorts through transparent and fair procedures that are determined and monitored by the Academic Council. The standing committees' membership also includes an invited external person with relevant experience and expertise.

Additional Governance Oversight Linkages to Teagasc Education

Teagasc Operations Directorate

The Teagasc Operations Directorate which incorporates HR, Health and Safety, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Finance, Corporate Services, GDPR and other corporate functions directly link to the Head of the Education in Teagasc and to the heads of education business units in exercising and ensuring overarching corporate governance best practice and input from external third parties.

QQI

QQI, as the awarding body that makes the awards for Teagasc Accredited education programmes, and to whose policies and procedures Teagasc Education aligns and operates.

Teagasc Education Forum

The Teagasc Education Forum, a dedicated consultative external body with a focus on Teagasc education provision, the needs of industry and of learners.

Teagasc Partnership

Teagasc Partnership (Education working group), focus on staff and operational issues.

Other Stakeholders and External Organisations

These include education providers, placement hosts for Teagasc programmes, land sector representative organisations, land and agri-food industry and services, state organisations and other interested third parties.

Operation of Quality Assurance Governance

The Teagasc Authority and Teagasc SMG through the Head of Education ensures that the Teagasc Education Governance Structure is operational and fit for purpose. The Head of Education can also bring to the attention of the Academic Council areas of concern raised by Teagasc SMG and external parties.

The Head of CDSU co-ordinates the operations of the Teagasc Education Governance Structure. As such, inputs and outputs from the Academic Governance structure are co-ordinated by the Head of CDSU. The Head of CDSU can also bring to the attention of the Academic Council areas of concern raised from internal Teagasc structures.

The committees focus on specific educational areas and oversee work carried out by working groups established under their remit. Output from the committees is presented to the Academic Council through the Head of CDSU. The Academic Council reviews and issues recommendations on the work presented, and gives oversight to the quality assurance governance processes. The Head of Education then implements academic decisions. Teagasc SMG and the Teagasc

Authority Advisory and Education Committee monitor that academic decisions align with Teagasc's organisational mission and strategic goals and explicitly consider academic proposals that have a fundamental bearing on these areas.

The format separates roles of those who manage (Head of Education), those who approve academic decisions (Teagasc Academic Council), those who develop/support, monitor and review (Academic Council Standing Committees and their associated working groups supported by CDSU), and those who deliver (Colleges/Regional Centres) Teagasc education programmes and Teagasc SMG and the Authority who maintain overall oversight of Teagasc Education activities.

The academic governance structure processes:

- Enable Teagasc to achieve its educational objectives
- Are embedded on a cross-organisational basis and in Teagasc culture
- Separates academic decisions from other considerations and decision makers within Teagasc
- Considers risk thereby maintaining academic integrity and standards
- Proactively engages in internal and external evaluation
- Facilitates externality and learner input.

Further detail on key role positions in Teagasc Education

Teagasc Head of Education – Further Detail on Role

The Head of Education reports to Teagasc Senior Management and oversees the implementation of the Teagasc national education programmes. In addition to the being Chairperson of the Academic Council and overseeing the function of the Teagasc Education Governance system, the role entails:

- Development and implementation of national educational business plan and risk registers
- Management of national education programme
- Management of Teagasc colleges, CDSU, educational staff and resources
- Determining resource needs and allocation for existing and new programmes and bringing cases to Teagasc SMG on same
- Determining future strategic needs of the land sector in regard to education and training and championing of new delivery models/approaches
- Management of the Teagasc educational budget
- Reporting/monitoring for Teagasc management, the Authority and DAFM as required
- Liaison with external stakeholders
- Giving effect to academic decision made by the Academic Council, reporting on Academic Council decisions and outputs to the Teagasc SMG and the Teagasc Authority Advisory and Education Committee
- Programme evaluation and compliance including Whole College Evaluation, Internal Auditor Report, Data Protection, Health and Safety, farm compliance.

The Head of Education has direct line management responsibility for the four Teagasc colleges and CDSU. Line management at the three Teagasc supported colleges lies with the relevant College Principal. Line management for Teagasc staff based in the 12 regional units lies with Teagasc Regional Managers.

With the support of the Teagasc Senior Management Team, the Head of Education is the budget holder for the Teagasc Education Programme. The CDSU is a separate entity funded from the Teagasc Education budget.

Head of CDSU – Further Detail on Role

The Head of CDSU reports to the Head of Education, in addition to co-ordinating the operations of Teagasc's Academic Governance Structure; the role entails:

- Liaising closely with the Head of Education
- Assisting the Head of Education in the academic operation of Teagasc's Education Programme
- Actioning policies and procedures approved by the Academic Council
- Managing education quality assurance processes and procedures in Teagasc
- Directing the operations of CDSU
- Advising on curriculum development and educational quality assurance matters
- Ensuring quality assurance underpins Teagasc education and training activities
- Ensuring compliance with QQI policies
- Ensuring continuous enhancement of Teagasc's education and training provision and the standards attained by learners.

Operation of Teagasc Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU)

The CDSU supports the academic governance structure in Teagasc. The CDSU is independent of the day-to-day management operations at colleges and regional education centres. It has no input into staffing, operations, budgets or management of the college/regional centres. The main CDSU functions are supporting the academic governance structures in development, monitoring and review, and teaching and learning. This reinforces the protection of academic integrity in Teagasc. Staff within the CDSU are experienced across a range of educational and technical fields reflective of Teagasc education provision and quality assurance procedures. Where supplementary expertise is needed, staff from within Teagasc, or other external stakeholders or specialists in the relevant field can be engaged to support the staff of the unit. In addition, CDSU staff co-ordinate training and education seminars and workshops pertinent to their respective roles, ensuring that staff are continuously updated, facilitating innovation and best practice in Teagasc education.

Key CDSU overall roles and operational responsibilities include:

- 1) Supporting Teagasc's Academic Governance Structure as directed by the Head of CDSU
- 2) Supporting the Teaching and Learning Committee
- 3) Supporting the Quality and Results Committee
- 4) Supporting the Programme Development and Review Committee
- 5) Liaising with governmental bodies and state organisations where required
- 6) Managing learner information and quality assurance communications for Teagasc Education.

CDSU Overall Roles and Operational Responsibilities

The Head of CDSU directs the work undertaken by the unit as outlined below.

1) Supporting Teagasc's Academic Governance Structure as directed by the Head of CDSU

- Appointing CDSU staff to lead or assist the committees of the Academic Council
- Active participating in committee working groups
- Preparing and compiling files of committee working groups

2) In conjunction with the workings of the Teaching and Learning Committee, CDSU support education staff delivering Teagasc education programmes by:

- *Co-ordinating the development and provision of workbooks and other support materials.* Teagasc develop and provide a range of materials for use in the delivery of its programmes. These include module specifications which provide guidance to staff and learners on learning outcomes and assessments. Workbooks and software programmes provide technical information relevant to the learning outcomes of the programme.
- *Supporting education staff in supporting the learner.* Learners, without prejudice, are invited to declare specific learning difficulties. Access officers carry out a needs assessment and co-ordinate learner supports as appropriate, providing reasonable accommodation. Different levels of support are available, depending on individual needs. Learner support is specifically addressed in Chapter 7.
- *Quality assuring practical learning periods at host units*
Work practice and practical learning are key elements in Teagasc training programmes. Work practice in Teagasc, is completed during practical learning periods (PLPs). To ensure learners' experience meets with programme and industry needs and individual learner expectations, PLPs in Teagasc are co-ordinated and managed nationally in partnership with colleges. Key processes in quality assuring PLPs at host units include:
 - Managing and overseeing the placement of learners in compliance with Teagasc policy and requirements
 - Briefing hosts on PLPs, their aims, objectives and what it is to be a training host
 - Communicating with hosts and addressing their concerns
 - Supporting hosts in complying with legal obligations
 - Monitoring host insurance, health and safety practices and compliance with Child Safeguarding requirements.
 - Supporting the learner while on PLPs
 - Managing accidents or unforeseen circumstances during PLPs
 - Maintaining the host register
 - Monitoring and reporting on PLPs as an effective training methodology
 - Maintaining a collaborative relationship with hosts.

Details of quality assurance of practical learning periods are provided in Chapter 6.

- *Managing the provision of training support systems such as Teagasc's virtual learning environment (Teagasc Moodle) and Teagasc's learner management system (Quercus) and other systems external to Teagasc*

Digital education support systems used in Teagasc include but are not limited to:

- Teagasc's learner management system (Quercus)
- Teagasc's public website
- Teagasc's internal (intranet) website (TNet)
- Online survey software for collecting learner feedback
- Teagasc developed specialised IT applications
- Teagasc's virtual learning environment (Teagasc Moodle)
- External third-party software.

Teagasc's use of digital training support systems includes but is not limited to:

- Allowing applicants to apply using an online portal
- Storing applicant and learner personal information
- Managing learner results
- Providing feedback of assessments to learners
- Providing prospective applicants with necessary information about Teagasc training programmes
- Supporting learners during their training using Moodle and other software packages
- Enabling learners to access assessment results on Quercus.

Further details of the use and management of Information Technology systems in Teagasc education is in Chapter 8.

- *Co-ordinating in-service training for staff in technical and pedagogical best practice*
Teagasc recognise the need for staff continuous professional development both as a necessity to ensure quality training and as a staff development tool. Teagasc has a staff development and training programme that is aimed at up-skilling staff primarily in transversal skills. Staff training in Teagasc education has a more defined focus on equipping staff with the knowledge, skills and competencies required to be effective trainers. Education staff training includes pedagogical and technical training for all education staff and additional induction training for new staff. Annually a comprehensive training schedule for education staff is managed within the CDSU.

Details about in-service training for Teagasc education staff are given in Chapter 4.

- *Facilitating standardisation days allowing staff to benchmark approaches to delivery and assessment*
The distributed delivery model used in Teagasc requires a standardised approach to ensure consistency between all centres in their approach to delivery and assessment, course management and marking. Standardisation days promote community of practice, present an opportunity for networking and staff interaction, affording staff the benefit of mutual experience, the opportunity to ask questions of and to contribute to programmes, and an ability to effect change. Details about standardisation days in Teagasc education are provided in Chapter 4.

- *Organising Teagasc's National Education Staff Conference*
Comprising presentations and workshops designed specifically for education staff, the National Education Staff Conference is a multi-functional event which showcases innovation and best practice in training. It promotes community of practice, provides a forum for staff to express opinions, and highlights Teagasc's mission and strategy and engaging both education staff and Teagasc senior management enhancing common goals. It also strengthens linkages between staff and Teagasc senior management.
- *Interacting with national and international agri-sector representative organisations to input into Teagasc's education programmes*
Structures within Teagasc encourage collaboration nationally and internationally across the agri-sector. Educational programmes are no exception to this ensuring that best practice is incorporated into education and training. The Teaching and Learning Committee oversees the makeup of working groups to ensure input from national and international bodies is included in delivery of programmes. In addition, the Committee continually monitors and reviews pedagogy developments internationally and reflect this as part of training and support to staff.

3) In conjunction with the Quality and Results Committee, CDSU implements quality assurance processes and procedures in Teagasc Education through:

- Holding standing membership and actively inputting into structures of the Teagasc Education Governance Structure by virtue of their role
- Implementing quality assurance in Teagasc education. Areas of responsibility are delegated to staff within the unit. In colleges and training centres, quality assurance roles are delegated to staff who liaise with the CDSU. The operation of quality assurance is outlined in Chapter 6.
- *Independently authenticating courses prior to submission for certification to QQI*
The CDSU is independent of Teagasc advisory and research business. Within Teagasc education, the CDSU is also independent and separate from course delivery and assessment. This arrangement enables the CDSU to oversee quality assurance in Teagasc education and to independently authenticate its education programmes. Chapter 6 outlines how this operates.
- *Under direction from the Head of CDSU, support the development and implementation of Teagasc's Quality assurance policies and procedures in line with QQI policy*
CDSU is the link unit for Teagasc to QQI. The Unit continually refers to QQI policies and procedures, developing, implementing and reviewing Teagasc's own policies to align with those of QQI. Teagasc education policies also extend to elements of course work delivered by both subcontractors and practical training hosts. Policies are developed by the Quality and Results Committee, and are presented through the Head of CDSU to the Teagasc Academic Council to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

Working groups co-ordinated by the Head of CDSU report to the Development and Review Committee, and include learners, agri-sector industry representatives, and other parties external to Teagasc, to encapsulate diversity and innovation where possible in development work.

Policies and procedures approved by Teagasc's Academic Council are implemented by the Head of Education and have a formal standing and form part of strategic management of Teagasc education and training. Policies and procedures are published to Teagasc's website under the education section.

- *Monitoring the effectiveness of Teagasc programmes through direct learner feedback, learner surveys, graduate surveys and collaboration with agri sectors.*
Reporting to the Quality and Review Committee, CDSU as part of programme monitoring/review and self-evaluation activity, monitors and reports on the effectiveness of Teagasc programmes primarily through surveys completed by learners and graduates. Feedback from stakeholders and various agri sectors provides further feedback from a different perspective. Reports with the appropriate level of detail are distributed through managers, with a synopsis published on Teagasc's website under the education section. In addition, Teagasc's internal auditor, and Whole College Evaluation provide a further dimension to programme evaluation.
- *Self-evaluation, monitoring and review*
Monitoring and review reports are reported by the Head of CDSU to the Head of Education and Teagasc's Academic Council. Teagasc Senior Management, the Teagasc Director and Teagasc Authority are also furnished with a report from the Head of Education, and actions are implemented by the Head of Education or the Head of CDSU as appropriate.

4) Supporting the Development and Review committee

- *Reviewing, updating and issuing module specifications across all education programmes*
As part of review and with input from stakeholders (e.g. learners, staff and agri-sector representatives), Review Groups will review and recommend updates to module specifications. Recommendations are ratified by the Teagasc Academic Council before being authorised, published and implemented by the Head of CDSU. Details of programme and module content are available on Teagasc's website under the education section.
- *Issuing guidelines to staff on specific programme requirements*
The CDSU supports the implementation and delivery of programmes by issuing internal guidelines, newsletters, memos and memoranda of programme implementation to staff. These provide specific guidance particular to programmes, underpinning the quality assurance system and programme validation.
- *Ensuring land-based training is targeted in line with best practice and Irish/EU regulations*
Teagasc's mandate under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act 1988 includes the provision or procurement 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. Reporting to the Development and Review Committee, designated staff from the CDSU collaborates with Irish governmental departments, European organisations, industry organisations and other stakeholders in determining education and training needs for the agri sector. In addition, input from Teagasc specialists inform programme review and development committees of up-to-date regulation and practices for the sector.

- *Teagasc's training provision aligns and adopts national and international best practice for agri-sector industries*
The Development and Review Committee oversees Teagasc collaboration with agri-sector representatives and practitioners at a national, European and international level through its various activities, to inform programme review and development.

5) Liaising with governmental bodies and state organisations for the purposes of:

- *Adjudicating on equivalence of agriculture qualifications (for the Irish Revenue Commissioners, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and other interested parties)*
Teagasc is the recognised lead body by Irish governmental departments for education and training in the agri-sector. As such Teagasc has a defined role in adjudicating on the equivalence of national and international training programmes for the purposes of recognition of a 'trained farmer' for various state schemes and incentives. More detail is provided under recognition of prior learning, Chapter 3.
- *Advising on training standards required in the land-based sector to meet EU directives*
Teagasc fulfils its mandate under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act 1988, by designating a CDSU staff member to specialise in advising Irish governmental departments on training standards required in the land-based sector. This staff member also plays a role in guiding the shape of, and ensuring that Teagasc educational programmes reflect the training standards required to meet EU directives.
- *Recognition of Teagasc courses by agri-sector practitioners across farming, horticulture, forestry and equine*
CDSU collaborates with practitioners of the agri-sector in Ireland and in other jurisdictions. Such collaborative arrangements lead to a recognition nationally and internationally of Teagasc training programmes.
- *Opportunity for learners and staff to expand their horizons through collaboration with European and international agri-sector organisations*
Teagasc collaborates in the European and international realm as part of its business. This presents opportunity for staff and learners to broaden their experience. Examples of this are information sharing and fact-finding visits to education providers in other countries. Learners can complete practical learning periods in another jurisdiction with authorised organisations and mentors. Further information on collaborative work is available on the Teagasc website, and is provided to learners at relevant times in their respective programmes.

6) Managing learner information and quality assurance communications for Teagasc Education

- *Information and data management is fit for purpose and complies with GDPR*
Internally Teagasc's ICT department provides support to staff through Teagasc's intranet (TNet). Externally Teagasc publish details on its website providing information such as a site map, privacy policies, freedom of information, site accessibility.
- *Public information and communications are clear, relevant and adhere to agreed conventions*
Teagasc's public relations department issue guidelines on corporate styles for presentation templates, Teagasc website layout and publication design. Guidelines are mindful of corporate image, clarity and accessibility for the reader. In addition, CDSU is mindful of QQI requirements and guidelines pertaining to educational information and publications in particular. As part of its remit, CDSU monitors educational publications for compliance with Teagasc corporate, and QQI requirements and guidelines.
- *Other parties involved in education and training provision in Teagasc understand their role*
To enrich its educational programmes, Teagasc works in collaboration with other parties. These include but are not limited to host units for practical learning periods enhancing the learner experience, and contracted training companies with particular expertise that complement existing Teagasc staff strengths.

Teagasc Colleges / Private Colleges / Teagasc Regional Education Centres

Key roles and responsibilities of colleges and regional education centres:

- Delivery of Teagasc educational programmes
- Maintaining quality standards in delivery and management of programmes
- Implementation of Teagasc quality assurance policies and procedures
- Co-ordination of internal verification and results approval
- Inform development of programmes, policies and procedures with subsequent adoption
- Complete and implement business plans and risk registers
- Conduct self-evaluation with agreed follow-up actions.

Curriculum Development and Standards Unit Staff (CDSU)

Table 1.1 gives an outline of staffing, roles and responsibilities of the CDSU.

Table 1.1 Teagasc CDSU Staffing and Responsibilities

Position	Role and Areas of Responsibility
Head of Curriculum Development and Standards Unit	Management of CDSU with overall responsibility for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of the CDSU • Supporting and co-ordinating the operation of Teagasc’s Governance Structure • Support improvements in teaching and learning approaches • Support programme development and review • Manage budgets control and staff management
National Authentication and Standards Specialist	Lead person in quality assurance with responsibility for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of Teagasc independent authentication and results approval process • Input into the development and updating of Teagasc assessment, internal verification and independent authentication policies • Organisation of in-service standardisation training on Teagasc QA procedures
National Practical Learning Period (PLP) Specialist	Lead person in placement of learners on PLPs with responsibility for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordination of Teagasc PLP programmes including safety management and insurance issues • Recruitment, registration and review of Host Units and Benchmark Farms • Management of foreign work experience • In-service training of PLP Officers & Hosts • Independent authentication and quality assurance support

Position	Role and Areas of Responsibility
National Learning Support Specialist	<p>Lead person in Teagasc’s learner support system with responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development, updating and promotion of Teagasc learner support and access policies and practices • Co-ordination of the Teagasc Applied Programme • Support and training of Access Officers • Independent authentication and quality assurance support
National Online Learning, RPL and In-service training Specialist	<p>Lead person in recognition of prior learning of agricultural training in Ireland with responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of Teagasc Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process • Issuing of Letters of Equivalence for legacy, misplaced and non-Irish awards • Advising DAFM, Revenue, Teagasc staff and external customers on educational requirements for Young Trained Farmers status • Adjudicating awards made by foreign awarding bodies against agricultural national training standards for the purposes of Irish revenue and DAFM schemes • National in-service training co-ordinator for Teagasc education staff • Support to distance education programmes

Position	Role and Areas of Responsibility
<p>National QQI Co-ordinator/Quality Assurance Specialist</p>	<p>Lead person for Teagasc compliance with QQI policy and procedures with responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading programme validation in Teagasc • Liaising with QQI • Assist in developing Teagasc policies • Support for Quercus education management system and other Teagasc software packages • Independent authentication and quality assurance support
<p>National Education Resource Specialist</p>	<p>Lead person for curriculum and support materials with responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and update Teagasc curriculum, module specifications, workbooks and other teaching support materials • Develop and update Teagasc programme memoranda quality assurance and education policies • Develop and update Teagasc course prospectus • Maintain the education resources section on the staff TNet intranet. • Co-ordinate Education Resource Development teams and liaise with internal subject matter experts • Support external education development initiatives such as EU Research Projects • Support the Teaching and Learning and Programme Development and Review committee
<p>National Education IT Resource Specialist</p>	<p>Lead person for Education IT systems with responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Teagasc’s online learning platform (Moodle). • Support and training of administration and teaching staff in the effective use of Moodle • Support the Teaching and Learning Committee • Managing and updating education content on the Teagasc public website and Teagasc intranet • Managing and updating Teagasc IT education policies • Liaising with providers of external IT software pertinent to Teagasc education • Supporting staff in the use of third-party software • Staff support with IT packages including Quercus education management system • Investigating and developing innovations in IT and other related technologies for use in Teagasc education
<p>Teagasc National Apprenticeship</p>	<p>Lead person for the development and co-ordination of Teagasc</p>

Position	Role and Areas of Responsibility
<p>Programme Co-ordinator</p>	<p>apprenticeship programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the development and rollout of Teagasc apprenticeship programmes • Co-ordinate the promotion of Teagasc apprenticeship programmes • Management of apprentice applications, enrolment and employer set-up • Co-ordinate and brief employers participating in apprenticeship programmes • Co-ordinate the recruitment and selection of apprentices • Liaise with SOLAS, the Apprenticeship Council, Higher Education Authority, industry apprenticeship consortia, employers, land-sector stakeholders, and Teagasc staff/management in respect of apprenticeship conditions, quality assurance and the effective delivery of quality programmes • Co-ordinate and engage in the development of remote learning approaches including the development of online course resource materials • Maintenance of Course Implementation Memoranda, apprenticeship Learner Handbook, policies/procedures, an annual apprenticeship programme delivery plan • Report on apprenticeship training as required
<p>National Online Media Specialist</p>	<p>Lead person for Teagasc in online media platforms with responsibility in Teagasc education for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Teagasc services through the implementation of the Teagasc digital media strategy • Training and support to staff in the use of digital media • Using online media techniques, processes and tools to improve overall efficiency and impact of Teagasc programmes • Developing video tutorials and digital support materials for staff and learners • Using Facebook Live and other digital channels to promote Teagasc activities • Developing technologies to facilitate remote access to Teagasc training programmes

Position	Role and Areas of Responsibility
National Farm Machinery and Milking Equipment Specialist	<p>Lead person for Teagasc in Mechanised equipment for the land-based sector including responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Teagasc staff, farmers and the agricultural industry in the area of farm machinery, milking machines, dairy equipment and the safe application of pesticides • Assisting in the formulation of standards for the installation and testing of milking machines • Developing Teagasc resource material and modules specifications on farm machinery, milking equipment and parlour design
CDSU Administration	<p>Lead Administration person for CDSU with responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration support to Head of CDSU and CDSU staff • Co-ordinating CDSU budget including receipting and managing expenditure • Managing workbook preparation, publication and distribution • Registration and administration of PLP Hosts and Benchmark Farms • Administration and recording of Teagasc education meetings • Co-ordinating events such as staff in-service training conferences and educational events • Providing administration support to education development work in Teagasc

1.3 Embedding a Quality Culture

Teagasc as a semi-state organisation 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.

The Teagasc Academic Council working maintains oversight for academic governance in Teagasc education including developing and adopting policies and procedures, enhancing and improving content and delivery of programmes, and monitoring quality of same. 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. Learners and staff are represented on Teagasc’s Academic Council and its committees, to ensure oversight and consultation in the development of policies, procedures and course materials, and to provide feedback on an on-going basis to ensure programme improvement and implementation.

The Head of Education ensures pragmatic, fit for purpose governance system and practices across education programmes. Directed by the Head of CDSU, staff within CDSU have defined roles, meet on a regular basis, are standing members on Academic Council Committees and support the Teagasc academic governance structure.

Sources to support staff in quality assurance procedures of Teagasc’s education provision include:

- Teagasc’s intranet (TNet)
- Published policies and Quality Assurance Manual on Teagasc’s public website
- Direct access to CDSU members if needed.

Table 1.2 Further Information Relating to Teagasc Governance and Management of Quality

Teagasc Authority:	https://www.teagasc.ie/about/our-organisation/authority/
Teagasc Colleges:	https://www.teagasc.ie/education/teagasc-colleges/
Teagasc Supported Private Partner Colleges:	https://www.teagasc.ie/education/private-colleges/
Teagasc Local Education Centres:	https://www.teagasc.ie/education/local-education-centres/
Teagasc Advisory Service:	https://www.teagasc.ie/about/farm-advisory/advisory-regions/
Teagasc ConnectEd:	https://www.teagasc.ie/about/our-organisation/connected/
Teagasc Statement of Strategy:	https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2017/Statement-of-Strategy-2017-2020.pdf
Teagasc Annual Report:	https://www.teagasc.ie/about/our-organisation/annual-reports/
Teagasc Data Protection Policies:	https://www.teagasc.ie/about/corporate-responsibility/data-protection/

Chapter 2 Documented Approach to Quality Assurance

This chapter describes the basis of Teagasc quality assurance policies and procedures, the processes involved in developing and monitoring these, the management of education contractors plus a synopsis of quality management processes in the wider Teagasc organisation.

2.1 Documented Quality Assurance (QA) Policies and Procedures

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 the agri-food sector.

Teagasc Education quality assurance policies and procedures are published on the Teagasc public website. QA policies and procedures are designed to inform Teagasc management, Teagasc staff, education contractors, learners and any other stakeholders of Teagasc's commitment to quality in its education and training provision and how it relates to Teagasc's overall commitment to quality in all its activities. These policies and procedures:

- Apply or will apply to all Teagasc education including full-time, part-time, distance education, and lifelong learning programmes
- Guide and inform staff and learners of their respective roles and responsibilities
- Give all stakeholders an understanding of what to expect from Teagasc
- Inform learners of their responsibilities for their own development.

The Teagasc Quality Assurance System is documented and available to learners. Key documents include:

- Teagasc Quality Assurance Manual (www.teagasc.ie)
- Learner Handbooks
- Learner induction documentation

Teagasc Quality Assurance Manual

This is Teagasc's overarching education quality assurance document, communicating Teagasc's approach to implementing the Core Statutory Quality Assurance guidelines.

Learner Handbooks

Colleges and centres customise their own Learner Handbooks from a national template. This template is modified or adopted to include course specific relevant information. Learner handbooks are available for download as part of the course application process. Learner handbooks provide learners with information on or a link to topics such as:

- Safety
- Learner Welfare, Dignity and Equality Guidelines
- Learner support
- Centre/college rules and regulations
- Disciplinary processes and appeals procedures
- Assessment Regulations
- Relevant Teagasc policies and procedures
- Information on Quercus (Teagasc's Learner Management System)
- Data Protection
- The Learner Agreement

- Teagasc Quality Customer Service Customer Charter⁴
- Other course information.

Learner induction documentation

Course induction takes place at the beginning of programmes and is designed to introduce the learner to the programme and outline how they will learn at with Teagasc. At induction learners are presented with information on policies and procedures relevant to their individual course and location.

Communicating Quality Assurance Requirements to Staff

Teagasc Education Quality Assurance policies and procedures, including the Teagasc Quality Assurance Manual and Learner Handbooks are published on Teagasc's public website. Communication of these policies and procedures is further supported through a course Memorandum of Implementation, staff meetings, internal memos and newsletters. College Principals, Assistant Principals and Education Officers meetings are held on a regular basis to discuss programme management and quality assurance. To ensure consistency in education quality assurance across the organisation, the Head of Education and CDSU staff holds regular meetings with colleagues based in the Teagasc advisory and research departments who may have some involvement in the delivery of Teagasc education programmes.

Memoranda of Course Implementation for Teagasc Programmes

Every educational programme in Teagasc has an associated Memorandum of Implementation. The Memorandum provides guidance and direction on course delivery and quality assurance. These are internal Teagasc documents which highlight to staff programme-specific requirements and administration tasks. These administration tasks may be particular to a programme, or serve as a reminder for staff to carry out specific procedures. Examples include:

- Programme aims and target learner profile
- Entry requirements and application procedures
- Course registration and administration
- Monitoring of work practice
- Processing of results and certification process
- Transferring and progression arrangements.

Memoranda are revised annually.

Teagasc Education Policies and Procedures

In the context of the Teagasc quality assurance system, a policy is a statement of intent outlining Teagasc principles. Policies can have singular or multiple uses such as to comply with legislation and/or to provide guidance around core principles. Procedures detail the steps of policy implementation.

Policies in Teagasc education form the basis of standard operating procedures for everyone involved in education programmes. Policies are made available to learners on the Teagasc public website. Designated CDSU staff maintain and update the education pages of Teagasc's public website.

⁴ <https://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2019/teagasc-customer-charter-2019-2021.php>

Figure 2.1 depicts how policy and procedures are developed and approved. The need to develop or revise Teagasc policy and procedures can arise through:

- Legislation
- Guidelines issued by QQI
- Feedback from staff, learners or other stakeholders
- Self-evaluation
- External reviews of programmes (Whole College Evaluations).

Policy and procedure development are overseen by the Teagasc Academic Council under the relevant standing committee:

- Teagasc Programme Development and Standards Committee
- Teagasc Teaching and Learning Committee
- Teagasc Quality and Results Committee.

The Head of CDSU assigns a lead person to guide the development of the required policy or procedure in conjunction with the relevant Academic Council Standing Committee. The lead person in consultation with the Committee may establish working groups and consult with relevant stakeholders to develop a draft policy/procedure. The makeup of the working group will depend on the nature of the policy and may include all or some of the following:

- CDSU staff member
- Teagasc teacher/tutor
- Education administration staff
- Learner or graduate
- Other relevant external stakeholders.

The Committee prepares and presents the draft policy/procedure to the Head of CDSU and Head of Education for feedback. If endorsed, the draft policy/procedure is presented to the Teagasc Academic Council for approval. Once approved by the Academic Council the policy/procedure is given effect by the Head of Education and is published. Policies and procedures not approved by the Teagasc Academic Council are returned to the standing Committee for further consideration. Teagasc SMG and Teagasc Authority monitor academic decisions of the Academic Council to ensure alignment with organisational mission and strategic goals (Figure 2.1).

Policies and procedures must be cognisant of and consistent with Teagasc's mission and goals, and with QQI guidelines. They must be written using plain language, appropriate to learners, staff and other stakeholders.

To ensure policies and procedures are fit for purpose, they undergo a development and approval process involving Teagasc staff, stakeholders, CDSU, the Head of Education and the Teagasc Academic Council and the relevant standing committee. The adherence to QA processes and procedures in developing policies and procedures is monitored by the Teagasc Academic Council and through self-evaluation procedures (Chapter 11). Deficiencies or shortcomings identified lead to amendments or updates which follow a similar procedure to that used for policy and procedures development.

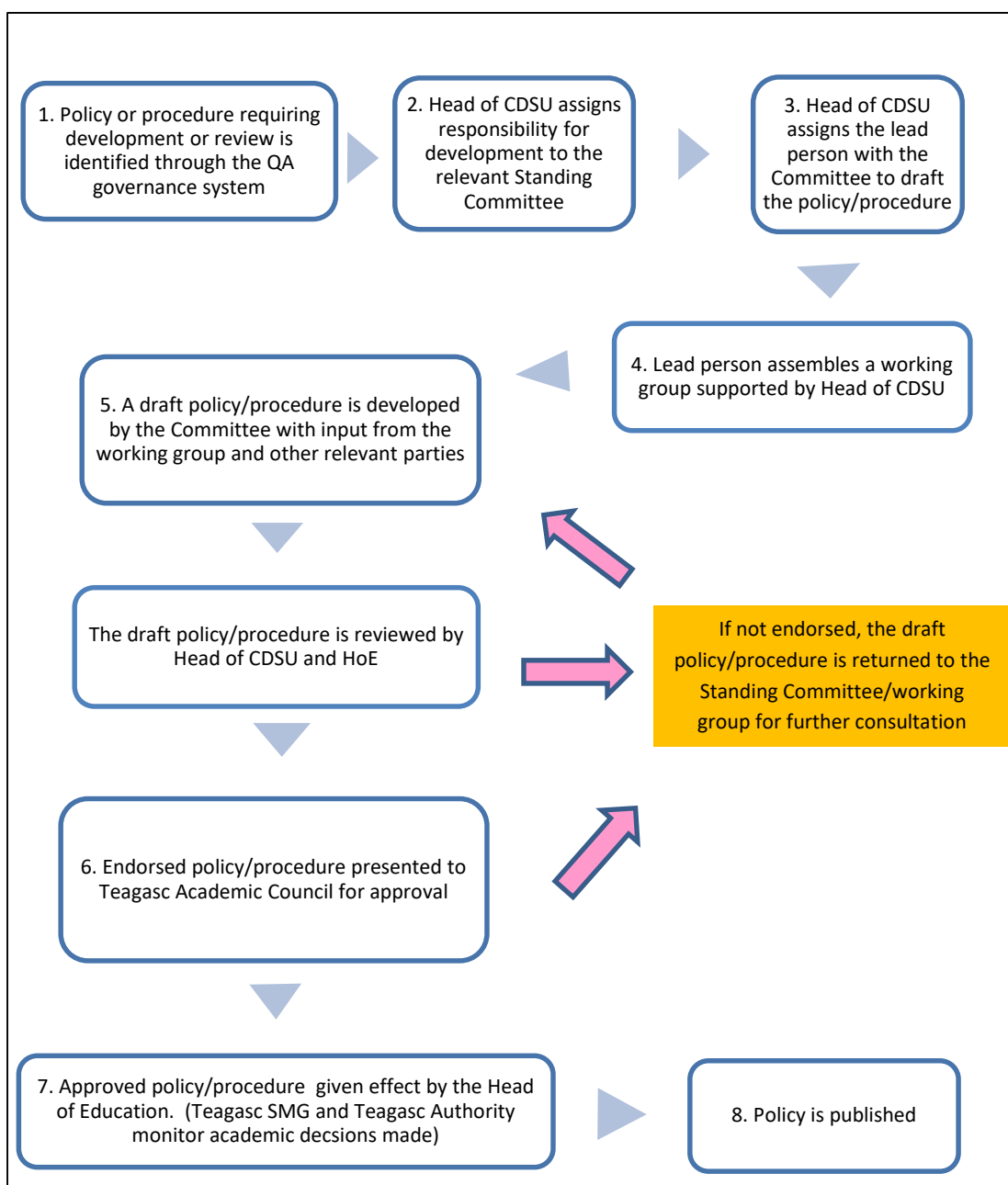


Figure 2.1 Education policy and procedures development in Teagasc

Education Contractor Management in Teagasc Education Programmes

Where required, additional staff resources may be contracted by Teagasc. Contracting requirements are advertised on the e-tender platform and the appointment of contractors is in line with the Teagasc procurement policy. As part of the tendering process, tenderers must provide information on their economic and financial standing, annual company turnover, insurance and tax clearance certificates.

Successful contracting companies are placed on a Teagasc Framework for the Provision of Agricultural Related Education and Training. The framework can last for up to 4 years and at the end of this period a new tender competition is organised if required.

Companies placed on the Framework are then invited to respond to mini-competitions to deliver specified content of programmes across colleges and regional units where the need arises. Engaged contractors are issued a contract that specifies the requirements and compliances to be adhered to. The management of contracts is governed by an overall Teagasc

Contract Management Plan, the implementation of which is overseen by a Contract Engagement Risk Management Committee (CERMC) that is independent of Teagasc Education.

A manual for Colleges & Regional Units in the Engagement of Education Contractors is available to inform and guide managers on the:

- Engagement of Contractors
- Management of Contractors
- Payment of Contractors
- Facilities for Contractors.

All contracted work is carried out under Teagasc quality assurance. Therefore, while contractors are employed by independent contracting companies, delivery of content is on Teagasc premises, to learners registered on Teagasc programmes and in line with a timetable drawn up by the Teagasc Course Co-ordinator. Teagasc sets a schedule for the programme delivery including dates for registration, course commencement, examinations, work experiences, holiday breaks and independent authentication. Quality assurance and the export of results to QQI is the sole responsibility of Teagasc.

Before the commencement of delivery, the local manager meets with the contracting company to agree administration and QA procedures. The Teagasc Manager completes a checklist with each contractor company which includes agreement on:

- Modules to be delivered
- Version of that module is clarified
- Timetabling arrangements
- Assessment requirements
- Internal and Independent authentication requirements
- Teagasc education policies and procedures
- Monitoring of delivery and QA
- End of programme contractors service delivery reporting.

The performance of the contracted service is monitored during the programme by the local manager. Local management will address concerns or issues with the contracting company during the programme. If the service delivery is not to the required standard, feedback on performance and clarification of the required standards is provided. Teagasc reserves the right to request contractors to remove contracted personnel from a programme where delivery standards fail to meet requirements.

At the end of delivery, the local manager completes a Contractors' Service Delivery Performance Report on the contracted service, and submits this report to the Education Programme Administrative Officer, and the Head of Education. Matters evaluated in this report include:

- Timekeeping and meeting deadlines
- Lesson preparation
- Programme delivery
- Learner achievement
- Assessment management
- QA management.

Teagasc reserves the right not to re-engage a contracted service or contracted personnel provided for delivery onto future programmes where the Contractors' Service Delivery Report is unsatisfactory.

2.2 Systematic Implementation of Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures in Teagasc

Teagasc takes a holistic approach towards quality assurance with accountability as a central element. Teagasc aims for continuous improvement of quality. In the Teagasc context, this is done through integration of quality assurance policies and procedures with normal activities including interactions with government departments, industry, employers and learners.

At organisational level the context for all Teagasc policies and procedures is the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, available at www.gov.ie. Ratified by Teagasc Senior Management and authorised by the Teagasc Authority, organisational policies are thus implemented and integrated into normal business.

Corporate Domain for Quality Assurance

Teagasc is an agency governed by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM). On a yearly basis Teagasc submits the following documents for approval by DAFM:

- Programme of Activities
- Teagasc Business Plan
- Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement.

Teagasc as a semi-state organisation has a wide range of quality management processes in place. These are published on the Teagasc Public site and support quality management policies and procedures.

Teagasc Staff Handbook

The Teagasc Staff Handbook is a comprehensive guide to the policies, procedures, codes and standards which exist within the organisation. The staff handbook communicates the roles and responsibilities of staff including a code of practice for staff in relation to behaviour, equality and health & safety. The Teagasc Staff Handbook supports the delivery of a professional and quality service to customers (learners) and fellow staff. A copy of the Teagasc Staff Handbook is available on the Teagasc public website via

<https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/about/opportunities/Staff-Handbook.pdf>

Teagasc standard operating procedures promote a culture of quality in line with Teagasc Standards and Code of Practice (Chapter 4 of Staff Handbook). The Teagasc Staff Handbook is reviewed and updated as required.

Corporate Policy and Procedures

Teagasc has policies and procedures that apply across the organisation. These policies are available on Teagasc's public website. Teagasc corporate quality management and monitoring policies/processes include:

- Business Planning and Risk Management Processes
- Teagasc Staff Performance Management and Development System (PMDS)
- Teagasc Client Information Management System (CIMS/CRM)
- Teagasc Programme Evaluation
- Teagasc Staff Code of Conduct
- Teagasc Quality Customer Charter
- Data Protection policies and procedures
- Teagasc financial planning and control policies and procedures
- Health, Safety and Well Being policies

- Teagasc ICT policies and procedures
- Teagasc Information for suppliers
- Teagasc Protected Disclosures Policy
- Freedom of Information
- Teagasc Child Safeguarding Policy⁵
- Teagasc Blended Learning Policy
- Teagasc Dignity and Respect Policy
- Teagasc Assessment Policy
- Teagasc Assessment Appeals Policy
- Teagasc Learner Support Policy.

In addition to the above corporate examples each Teagasc programme area will have programme-specific policies and procedures. The Teagasc education policies and procedures are detailed in this Quality Assurance Manual. A brief summary of Teagasc research and advisory services quality assurance procedures is given below.

Teagasc Research Programme Quality Assurance

Teagasc Research Programmes have a number of quality assurance mechanisms in place during the stages from project proposal right through to completion of research. These include:

- Internal research project calls which ensure research project funding from Teagasc budget are in line with Teagasc mission and goals.
- Responses to external research project calls undergo an internal check to ensure that they are in line with the Teagasc mission and goals. Any additional internal staff or budgetary resources required have to be approved prior to submission of the project proposal.
- Project milestones and deliverables are agreed as part of the proposal. Progress on completion of these milestones and deliverables is tracked throughout the life of the project.
- Any resources (such as staff time) used in research projects have to be accounted for. For example, staff involved in research projects submits time records (days per month for each project) on a monthly basis. This is then matched to available budget for that project.
- In addition, the Walsh Scholarships Programme, which typically involves Teagasc in partnership with a higher education institution, has a two-dimensional quality assurance management system. The partner higher education institution has their quality assurance policies and procedures. Teagasc research also keeps track of progress on completion of milestones, deliverables, and scientific publications in particular. Key performance indicators for Teagasc research include:
 - Peer reviewed scientific journal publications
 - External funding
 - Number of Walsh Scholarships completed
 - Number of research projects completed
 - Patents files
 - Invention disclosures filed.

⁵ <https://www.teagasc.ie/about/corporate-responsibility/child-safeguarding-policy/>

Teagasc Advisory Quality Assurance

Teagasc Knowledge Transfer (Advisory and Education) also has a set of quality assurance checks in place. Teagasc Advisory has a number of quality assurance processes and procedures in place including:

- Customer Relationship Management System which securely records:
 - Staff activity and output
 - Staff interaction with clients
 - Service delivery to clients
 - Essential client information related to service provision.
- Teagasc Quality Customer Service Charter, Customer Action Plan, and Complaints Management System
- Teagasc Advisory Best Practice Protocols for situations such as:
 - Administration of client applications for schemes and services
 - Secure storage and use of client data
 - Farm visits
 - Seminars and conferences
 - Discussion groups
 - Operation of monitor farms
- Key performance indicators include:
 - Client numbers
 - Client visits and consultations
 - Discussion group activity
 - Farm planning client interactions
 - Environmental support client interactions
 - Grant applications
 - Farm walks and farmer meeting and open days.

Collaborative Arrangements

Teagasc at organisational level has memoranda of understanding and agreements with multiple research, education and advisory organisations. Teagasc and Teagasc supported private partner colleges join with higher education providers (universities and institutes of technology) to deliver programmes at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level 7 and level 8. The higher-level institutions have their own quality management processes which Teagasc adheres to.

2.3 Academic Domain for Quality Assurance

At Teagasc education level, policies and procedures are approved by the Teagasc Academic Council, with decisions monitored by senior management and the Teagasc Authority Advisory and Education committee. They are implemented by the Head of Education, Head of CDSU and education staff in colleges and advisory regions. Amendments and updates follow if required. Policies and procedures are communicated by the Head of CDSU in usable formats via the public website, staff meetings and e-mail. This ensures that quality assurance policies and procedures are:

- Documented and robust
- Fit for purpose, practicable and implementable
- Have a formal standing in Teagasc
- Are consistent with relevant legislation
- Align with Teagasc mission statement and stated goals
- Informed and comply with QQI guidelines.

Academic Policy and Procedures

Teagasc education policies and procedures apply across all programmes. Policies are available on Teagasc's public website. Teagasc education quality management and monitoring policies/processes include:

- Teagasc Policy on Access, Transfer and Progression
- Recognition of Prior Learning
- Assessment Policy and Practice
- Internal Verification and Independent Authentication of Assessments
- Assessment Review and Appeals policy
- Teagasc Dignity and Respect Policy
- Procedure for Processing Final Results
- Teagasc Compensatory Policy
- College/Education Centre Accident and Injury Policy
- Learner Support Policy
- Teagasc Blended Learning Policy
- Teagasc Dignity and Respect Policy
- Teagasc Assessment Policy
- Teagasc Assessment Appeals Policy.

Chapter 3 Programmes of Education and Training

This chapter describes how Teagasc manages education and training programmes outlining programme development and approval, learner admission, progression, recognising prior learning and programme monitoring and review.

3.1. Programme Development and Approval

Teagasc provides training to the land-based sector. The focus of Teagasc education and training is such that the development of new programmes is limited to meeting the training needs of the sector. Programme development is a distinct and separate activity to programme review and revision.

The genesis of programme development can vary and can be multi-factorial. Revised award standards, initiatives from industry, research findings and changes in farming land sector regulation and wider stakeholder feedback including staff and learners are often catalysts for new programme development in Teagasc. In practice, Teagasc's suite of land sector further education programmes has remained relatively stable. New programme development is primarily driven by revised QQI Level 5 and 6 land sector award standards. Consequently, new programme development is not normally a frequent activity in Teagasc.

The Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU) is primarily responsible for education programme development in Teagasc. It works with the Teagasc Academic Council Programme and Review Committee, and associated working groups in developing programmes for submission to the Academic Council. Education programmes are designed and developed with a clear focus on learner and industry needs and in line with Teagasc organisational goals. Figure 3.1 gives more detail on the process of development, role separation, approval and submission to QQI for validated programmes.

Teagasc programme design, development and approval complies with QQI policies and procedures. Key programme development stages, timelines, dependencies, risks, resources, actions and responsibilities are identified and mapped.

When developing programmes, Teagasc consults widely with stake-holders including:

- QQI
- Teagasc staff including education, advisory and research
- Sector employers and industry
- Learners (past and present)
- Teagasc Education and Training Forum
- Teagasc senior management and Teagasc Authority
- External bodies involved in the programme (e.g. work practice host farmers)
- Partner institutions
- Relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Further Education Development

Figure 3.1 gives the steps involved in Teagasc’s further education new programme development leading to QQI validation.



Figure 3.1 Teagasc’s further education programme development leading to QQI validation

Programme development takes into account the requirements on the National Framework Qualifications, to include planning for access, transfer and progression (More detail about learner access, transfer and progression in Section 3.2). The Teagasc process of education programme development and QQI validation is shown below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Key Elements in FET Programme Development and QQI Validation

Systematic Programme Development Requirement	Teagasc approach and key points
Programme alignment with national and Teagasc strategy and policies	Approval by Teagasc Head of Education to develop the programme aligned to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teagasc’s statutory remit, mission and strategy statements • Teagasc policy • Development of the new programme in the context of Teagasc current and intended future education offering • Level appropriate to NFQ • MIPLOs (minimum intended programme learning outcomes).
Mapping out programme approval and development	Approval by Head of CDSU for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timelines and dependencies for key stages of programme development (e.g. peer review, QQI application, QQI report, external validation panel).
Programme Development and Review Committee	Programme Development and Review Committee and associated working groups supported by CDSU in carrying out development work
Learner, staff, external experts and stakeholder involvement	Consultation with relevant stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of views and feedback from the consultation process • Fulfil vocational needs of the sector.
Realistic and reasonable learner effort requirement for successful programme completion	Cross-reference during programme design with experienced staff in regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expected hours required to deliver and assess learning outcomes • Expected hours required by learner’s own efforts, reflection and study.
Module specification development	Programme design and module specification development take account of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum intended module learning outcomes (MIMLOs) • Developed by Teagasc Education Resource Leadership Teams consisting of subject matter experts • Peer reviewed by staff pre-programme validation • Peer reviewed by external subject matter experts/validation panel as part of programme validation.
Teaching and learning approach	Design takes account of learner profile, learning style and future learner competencies. Adequate resources are made available for course delivery and assessment in particular with regard to skills training.
Learner placement provisions	Programmes are designed to provide well-structured placement opportunities for learners with registered host units.
Access transfer and	Programme design clearly defining programme entry, transfer and

Systematic Programme Development Requirement	Teagasc approach and key points
progression (ATP) routes	progression routes. The intended programme(s) ATP should enhance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • existing Teagasc education provision • related programmes of other providers including partner colleges • clear progression routes with regard to the national framework of qualifications.
QQI procedures	Programme development adhering to QQI guidelines and procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme validation criteria (core and specialised) • Critical meeting dates of QQI Programmes and Awards Executive Committee.
Best international practice	Consultation with subject matter experts at development and programme validation stages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teagasc research • European or International experts.
Compliance with regulatory requirements and consultation with professional bodies	Consultation with and recognition of the proposed programme by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry and employers • State departments and organisations • Regulatory bodies • Other education providers • Related organisations.
Separation of programme development and approval to apply to QQI for programme validation	The programme is developed by the Programme Development and Review Committee working group. This group is responsible to lead the development of the identified programme. The Teagasc Academic Council oversees the development process, and through the Head of CDSU is presented with the developed programme for formal approval. This process is separate from programme development.

Internal FET Programme Approval

At delivery level Teagasc will typically have many of its individual programmes running concurrently in different centres. Internal programme approval in Teagasc ensures:

- Co-ordination of education provision
- Alignment of programmes with regard to QQI validation
- Sufficient resources are in place before any programme can commence.

This requires college management or Course Co-ordinators to submit a written programme proposal for approval to the Head of CDSU. Only approved programmes can commence. This process is internally known as 'Course Validation'. This is not to be confused with the QQI term 'Programme Validation'.

Table 3.2 Internal Course Validation (for Approving Programme Commencement)

	Systematic Programme Approval	Teagasc Approach and Key Points
1	Quantify and agree resources	Programmes are outlined in the college or advisory region business plan and the necessary resource provision is agreed with the Head of Education and Teagasc senior management.
2	Internal Course Validation	<p>Course Co-ordinator submits a 'Course Validation Form' accompanied by supporting documentation such as programme plan and timetable and contact hours to Head of CDSU.</p> <p>Validation checks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined course timeframe • Contact hours in line with agreed QQI validated programme • All mandatory modules are included • Compliance of the programme against the award requirements • Staffing resources are adequate • Timetable and assessment schedule • Blended learning approach to delivery and assessment.
3	Programme Approval	The programme is approved or declined based on the above criteria.

3.2 Learner Admission, Transfer Progression and Prior Learning Recognition

Teagasc has a consistent approach to learner admission, transfer, progression and prior learning recognition incorporating current regulations applied in a transparent manner and in accordance with national policies for Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP). Details of admission, progression and recognition of prior learning will be available through the Teagasc public website.

Teagasc aims to treat all learners equally, developing programmes accessible without discrimination to a diverse range of learners. Teagasc provides reasonable accommodation to those with learning difficulties as outlined in the section on Learning Support (Chapter 7).

Teagasc ATP policies and procedures are designed to be fit for purpose. Staff and learners are informed of their role, and the steps involved in the relevant process. Staff are informed through course memoranda, and internal communications. Learners are informed through induction, learner handbook, and the public website.

Admission to Teagasc Courses

Teagasc admissions policy provides that Teagasc is committed to ensure that all learners can avail of fair and transparent entry arrangements to all programmes provided by Teagasc. Learners have access to accurate and reliable information via the Teagasc website and prospectus to enable them to plan their learning. A particular focus in the admission process is providing the prospective learner with the information they need to have a clear understanding of the award, entry requirements and the broad programme content areas.

In implementing its policy on access Teagasc will ensure that:

- Entry arrangements are indicated on the Teagasc public website, brochures, Teagasc Course Prospectus and on www.qualifax.ie, and www.careersportal.ie.
- Decisions on allocation of places on programmes are transparent and in accordance with procedures set down in the Course Memorandum of Implementation or as directed by the Head of Education.
- All applicants are treated in a fair, equitable and consistent manner.
- Teagasc appeals procedure (see Chapter 5) allow appeals against decisions made by Teagasc should applicants be unhappy or perceive unfair, inequitable or inconsistent treatment in the application process.
- All programme brochures and the Teagasc Course Prospectus:
 - Provide a clear indication of the title of the award, the award code, duration, the awarding body and its position on the Framework of Qualifications
 - Give a broad indication of the subject matter (modules) and the course structure.

Transfer and Progression

Teagasc is committed to on-going improvement for transfer and progression arrangements for all its courses. Teagasc programmes provide transfer and progression routes for holders of major awards through the National Framework of Qualifications.

Progression, transfer routes and any specific transfer requirements agreed between Teagasc and other providers and clearly communicated to learners through Teagasc's Course Prospectus and through Teagasc's website. Programmes can be adjusted to enable learners make successful transitions while maintaining the terms of the programme validation. In implementing its policy on transfer and progression Teagasc:

- Provides guidance to staff on transfer and progression in Course Memoranda of Implementation
- Provides guidance on transfer and progression as part of learner induction to the programme
- Liaises and co-operates with all relevant awarding bodies
- Identifies transfer arrangements such as the Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS) in the Teagasc course prospectus and programme brochures
- Ensures that particular requirements for transfer or progression, (e.g. award at merit, possession of particular modules, procedure for allocation of limited places etc.), is clearly outlined in the Teagasc Course Prospectus and individual programme brochures
- Makes necessary adaptations to Teagasc programmes to facilitate participants in making subsequent successful transfers or progression
- Monitors progression rates through graduate surveys
- Transfer and progression routes are highlighted during open days and career events
- Information briefings to Teagasc Level 5 learners regarding Teagasc Level 6 programme options
- Course Co-ordinators support learners who wish to progress using the higher education links scheme.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Teagasc operates a 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) policy which is used to evaluate skills and knowledge gained through prior qualifications (Recognition of Prior Certified Learning [RPCL]) and lifelong learning (Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning [RPEL]) in a fair and transparent manner.

The purpose of both RPCL and RPEL in Teagasc is to:

- Facilitate entry into programmes
- Give recognition to qualifications placed on the National Framework of Qualifications/ European Framework of Qualifications
- Enable exemption from components of a Teagasc programme
- To enable the issuing of letters of equivalents for awards not listed by Revenue/Department of Agriculture and Food for the purposes of Young Trained Farmer status.

More detail on the Teagasc RPL process and eligibility for this process is available in the Teagasc Recognition of Prior Learning policy and protocol available on the Teagasc public website.

3.3 Programme Monitoring and Review

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, requires providers of a programme of education and training to establish procedures for quality assurance and maintain the quality of education and training provided.

The Programme Development and Review Committee with the support of working groups carries out this review process on behalf of the Academic Council.

Teagasc provides programmes that frequently run concurrently in a number of locations. To aid co-ordination of programmes, the following processes are in place:

- Programmes are validated and set up centrally on the Teagasc Learner Management (Quercus) system
- Internal learner transfer and progression among Teagasc courses is managed centrally
- Results compilation, approval and export to QBS (QQI's Business System) for certification following independent authentication are a central function.

Teagasc, in delivery of its programmes incorporates an embedded process as part of normal business which allows for continuous review, monitoring and improvement. This allows for the identification of training needs, modification and adjustment of a programme or delivery method within a programme. Consequently, revised programmes are published and implemented in accordance with programme approval and implementation procedures.

Programme delivery is reviewed regularly to confirm that the programme remains appropriate and that it is 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 independent authentication, and an Independent Authenticator's observations, comments and recommendations. Topics which are reviewed include:

- Module specifications
- Learner workload
- Learner completion rates
- Progression rates
- Assessment methodologies and effectiveness
- Teaching methodologies
- Learner support
- Grades.

Amendments to module specifications are made by CDSU consulting relevant staff if required before being ratified for delivery in future programmes. The QQI webpage infograph can be found via: <https://infographics.qqi.ie/Provider/Details/PH00021>

Table 3.3.1 describes methodologies involved in self-monitoring.

Table 3.3.1 Self-Monitoring Carried Out in Teagasc Education

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff survey 	<p>Formal feedback provided by staff at the end of a programme to inform the review process towards continuous improvement. A formal staff survey was introduced in 2020 on foot of the gap analysis conducted.</p>	<p>Online survey</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner surveys 	<p>Formal feedback provided by learners at the end of a programme with a focus on programme organisation and running, content, delivery and overall satisfaction</p>	<p>Online surveys providing anonymous (name optional) direct feedback on the learner experience. Results are collated and analysed for trends, comments and unexpected outcomes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardisation days 	<p>Formal and informal discussion between staff involved in delivery forming a community of practice</p>	<p>Scheduled, organised and facilitated (by CDSU), a particular focus on content, delivery and assessment informs change in module specifications</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Farm Enterprise Staff Discussion Groups 	<p>On-farm discussion and benchmarking of technical production and financial performance of college farm enterprises</p>	<p>Scheduled bimonthly</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with other providers as necessary. 	<p>Formal/informal meetings with other (external) providers</p>	<p>Typically formal meetings, arranged by CDSU manager, exchanging practices and programme implementation or by colleges with their respective HE partner</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal verification (IV) 	<p>Internal quality assurance co-ordinated by the centre manager appointed internal verifier and carried out by peers involved in delivery</p>	<p>Based on a sample of assessments, the focus for IV is on assessment and results management</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent authentication (IA) 	<p>Independent quality assurance co-ordinated and conducted by the National Authentication and Standards Specialist (NASS)</p>	<p>IA strategy developed and conducted by NAAS, centred on quality of provision, delivery and assessment with a particular focus on high-risk areas, historical</p>

Programmes of Education and Training

		performance and comparison with other centres
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from staff 	Formal and informal feedback on any aspects of programme content, delivery, assessment and running.	Pathways of communication typically but not exclusively include independent authentication, College Principal's monthly meetings and standardisation days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audits conducted by Teagasc's Internal Auditor 	Independent review primarily focussing on performance and compliance with internal procedures, accountability and management of Teagasc Education	Includes a review of overall management but uses risk-based strategy for focus on specific areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistical reports 	Statistics extracted from Teagasc's education management system, analysed for key performance indicators	Statistics prepared for the Head of Education reviews educational metrics, reporting to Teagasc senior management and Teagasc's Academic council, implements necessary changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Enterprise Review 	Internal review of college enterprises against industry-recognised performance indicators	College enterprises are reviewed with input from Teagasc Knowledge Transfer specialists (independent of Teagasc Education) industry standards and best farming practice benchmarks

Teagasc evaluation processes are addressed in Chapter 11.

Chapter 4 Staff Recruitment, Management and Development

This Chapter outlines Teagasc's recruitment policies and procedures, how Teagasc takes responsibility for the quality of its staff, and how it provides staff with support allowing them to carry out their work effectively.

4.1 Staff Recruitment

The delivery of Teagasc training programmes is very dependent on having the staff capacity and capability to provide effective and quality teaching and learning experience to our learners.

Management at college level rests with a College Principal, while teaching is primarily delivered by teachers and technicians. Teachers deliver theory in the classroom, while both teaching staff and technicians deliver practical skills instruction. Administration and farm staff also support training programmes and are heavily involved in the management of the colleges. Other specialised staff supporting training at college includes placement co-ordination officers (work experience) and Access Officers (learner support).

Management in a regional unit rests with a Regional Manager. Teaching and skills training are led by Education Officers supported by colleagues in administration and the Teagasc advisory service.

Delivery for specific enterprises (pigs, forestry, organics etc.) training is supported by Teagasc research and specialist advisory staff.

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. All 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.

Teagasc is an equal opportunities employer and it extends to all areas of recruitment. The following are typical steps in Teagasc's recruitment procedure:

- Equal opportunities in advertising, recruitment, candidate selection, pay
- Job specifications are published on the Teagasc website
- Specific application forms relevant to the role
- Advertising to the widest possible audience
- Shortlisting using clear and justified criteria
- Competency-based interviews
- Interview boards with a relevant external expert and gender balance
- Formation of panels with sequential employment offers to successful candidate
- Use of referees in candidate employment.

The recruitment process in Teagasc takes account of:

- Contracts of employment
- Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act
- Data protection
- Freedom of information
- Recruitment appeals process
- Monitoring the recruitment process.

Teagasc has an agreed overall staff complement and is allowed to recruit staff within the terms of its delegated staffing sanction from the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) when required. Additional staff recruitment beyond Teagasc's delegated staffing sanction limits requires Teagasc to present a business case to DAFM and the Department of Public Enterprise.

Internal Staffing Sanction in 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 and the Head of Education staff monitor resources needed 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.

Staff Recruitment and Engagement

Successful recruitment and training of managers, teachers, technicians, administrative and farm staff with sufficient knowledge, experience and expertise is considered vital to developing and delivering consistently high-quality education programmes.

Teaching staff must hold a relevant NFQ Level 8 (Honours Degree) qualification in Agricultural Science or equivalent. A pedagogy qualification is desirable. Where teaching staff do not hold a recognised qualification in pedagogy, they are encouraged and supported to undertake such training. Technicians engaged in practical instruction and demonstration are required to hold a Level 6 qualification (Advanced Certificate/Higher Certificate) or higher in a relevant discipline.

A key element of the process is the screening of candidates based on academic qualification and relevant experience. Teagasc typically recruits Agriculture Development Officers either for the role of a teacher or an advisor. It is not unusual in Teagasc for teachers to transfer into an advisory role and *vice versa*. Details of Teagasc Recruitment Policy are available on the Teagasc public website.

Candidates have to meet essential criteria set by Teagasc before being called for interview. Appointments are made based on competency-based interview. A 1-year probation (with stage reviews at 3 and 7 months) applies to all new staff. Performance of new staff during the initial probationary period is monitored and reported by their line manager to the Teagasc Human Resources Department. Guidance support and training is available through management and the Teagasc Human Resources Department.

New education staff undertake an induction programme which outlines and introduces the Teagasc:

- Introduction to pedagogical teaching methods
- Curriculum
- Course memoranda
- Syllabus and module specification
- Staff Handbook⁶ including code of conduct
- Quality Assurance procedures and policies
- Teagasc Moodle platform
- Quercus (Teagasc learner management system).
- Teagasc T learn (internal online platform offering generic training modules)

4.2 Staff Communication

Teagasc teachers, technicians, support staff and management operate together to deliver common programmes. Teagasc has several channels for communicating with staff, both formal and informal. Formal communication includes:

- Management meetings
- Staff meetings
- Course implementation memoranda
- Business plans
- Staff consultation workshops as part of strategy exercises
- Education newsletters, e-mail circulars and staff intranet (T-Net)
- Internal verification and independent authentication discussion and reports
- Annual education staff conference
- Programme review
- Feedback from learner surveys on programme delivery.

Informal communication occurs during networking opportunities. Staff have informal access to:

- Managers
- CDSU staff
- Their peers
- Teagasc Workvivo (internal informal updating and idea-sharing platform).

Teagasc operates a partnership process 'Teagasc National Partnership' involving staff, staff union management and senior management representatives. Under the partnership process Teagasc maintains an Education Partnership Working Group to facilitate discussion and engagement on Teagasc education issues.

Teagasc conducts periodic staff surveys across all parts of the organisation to allow staff to input into the priorities and initiatives around supporting and developing staff.

⁶ <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/about/opportunities/Staff-Handbook.pdf>

The Performance Management Development System (PMDS) process together with regular staff meetings also provide additional opportunity for staff members to be kept informed of issues relating to their programme areas.

4.3 Staff Development

Teagasc has been proactive in targeting areas where staff development is needed. The current Teagasc People Strategy is available via

https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2018/Teagasc_People_Strategy.pdf

Teagasc is committed to the development of staff through in-service training and targeted formal education programmes agreed through the staff Performance Management and Development System (PMDS).

Performance Management Development System

Through a one-to-one discussion with a line manager, PMDS aims to:

- Clarify and manage individual workload
- Receive feedback on individual role and performance
- Identify development needs and career paths.

All staff development is documented, either through the PMDS system, the Staff Training and Development system, in the business planning process or otherwise as required by Teagasc Human Resources.

Each staff member in Teagasc meets three times per year with their line manager:

- At the start/end of the calendar year reviewing and signing off on past performance and targets and agreeing new targets in their PMDS. Individual training requirements are also discussed at this meeting
- An interim meeting to monitor progress and discuss issues.

In terms of technical knowledge and skills, teaching staff continuously have the opportunity to develop their skills on college units. Teagasc staff also have access to regular topic-specific training from Teagasc Advisory Specialists and research officers. CDSU convenes standardisation days to train staff in the quality assured delivery of course modules and skills training.

National and International Effective Practice

Staff are encouraged to engage in communities of practice through:

- Enterprise discussion groups
- Annual staff conferences
- Regular staff meetings
- In-service training
- International meetings and conferences
- Staff study and educational trips
- Webinars
- Involvement in external professional networks
- EU projects.

It is Teagasc practice that learners have the opportunity, and are encouraged, to provide feedback. Feedback may be informal or formal. Formal feedback is collected through learner surveys conducted towards the end of every course. Respondents are asked to rate course content, delivery and learning experience. Responses are sent to college or centre management for dissemination and follow-up actions including staff development. Summary responses are also presented to Teagasc Senior Management, and the Teagasc Authority.

Staff Training and Development

Teagasc has a staff training and development unit. Approval is first sought from line management before undergoing a central prioritisation process. The PMDS process helps to identify training needs.

Teaching and Training Qualifications

Teagasc recognises the importance of pedagogy and teacher training including blended learning approaches. Under the quality assurance governance structure, the Teaching and Learning committee working CDSU makes/reviews proposals for staff pedagogy up-skilling. Staff are encouraged to undertake additional professional training that leads to a recognised qualification. Staff apply for this through the PMDS process. Teagasc Education Staff are encouraged to participate in targeted programmes including postgraduate Level 9 Teaching and Learning programmes. Education staff can also attend relevant modules for Teagasc advisory staff as well as development programmes and short training courses for staff in the areas of Leadership, Management and Administration which held from time to time. These are delivered by external providers having been developed in consultation with the Teagasc Human Resources Department.

Wherever possible, staff are given the chance to lead project or work areas which can benefit themselves, the organisation and the learner. Innovative education approaches are showcased at the annual Teagasc Education Staff Conference.

Education Staff Induction Training

CDSU staff organise a dedicated induction training programme for new teaching staff. This focusses on quality assurance, Teagasc education policies, teaching approaches, skills delivery and assessment. Staff complete a Level 6 Certificate in Teaching Strategies as part of this programme. Training on the delivery and assessment of the theory and skills associated with major land-based enterprises is also provided.

Technical In-Service Training for Education Staff

In consultation with the Teaching and Learning committee, CDSU co-ordinates technical in-service training (land-based technical production methodologies, sustainability, finance, safety and welfare) for educational staff which is typically provided by Teagasc's Knowledge Transfer specialists with Teagasc research staff input as required. CDSU also organises workshops and training events focussing on education delivery and quality assurance. Training schedules are circulated and staff can elect to attend training events. Staff also have the opportunity to suggest and put forward particular training for attention.

Chapter 5 Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are core activities of Teagasc Education. This chapter addresses how the quality of teaching and learning is monitored and improved. This includes how it is informed, applied in practice, and translates to the learning environment.

5.1 Teaching and Learning

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 course design.

Teagasc Teaching and Learning Philosophy

Creating 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.

In striving to implement its teaching and learning philosophy, Teagasc takes particular cognisance of:

- The occupational knowledge, skills and competency occupational requirements of farmers and those working in the land sector
- The alignment of Level 5 and 6 minimum intended programme and module learning outcomes to the land sector knowledge/skills/competency occupational needs
- Ensuring that industry standards and farming best practice are demonstrated for learners to see and experience utilising college commercial land sector enterprises, equipment and workshops of colleges and access to Teagasc research and knowledge transfer programmes/centres
- Exposing learners to commercial farms/land sector enterprises, the wider food chain, agri services and regulatory stakeholders
- Creating participatory and 'hands on' teaching and learning activities and environments that promotes learner engagement, fosters assimilation and integration of learning and knowledge, skills and competency enhancement
- The particular value of providing real-life experiential learning situations through the Teagasc network of host farms and units
- Furnishing high quality and up-to-date learning materials and resources and learning platforms that foster the learning process and learner reflection
- Ensuring that learner assessments formats and assessment workload are appropriate to the programme level and required learning outcomes
- The diverse learning and physical ability of learners and the need to provide reasonable accommodation in terms of learner support and the need for alternative applied routes for some learners
- Ensuring that learners, in all respects, are treated in a fair, equitable and consistent manner and that 'open' communication channels are in place
- The need for on-going engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that Teagasc programme content and teaching and learning approaches are responsive to changing skillsets and requirements and to changing policy direction in key areas such as sustainability, climate change and land use.

Monitoring Teaching and Learning in Teagasc Education Programmes

Under the academic governance structure, the Teaching and Learning Committee have oversight of teaching and learning initiatives in Teagasc.

Monitoring at institutional/college level

At institutional level monitoring takes the form of independent Whole College Evaluations (led by the Department of Education and Skills) giving feedback to staff on the learning experience in classroom and practical settings. Colleges/centres are directed by the Head of Education with the assistance of CDSU to implement the recommendations arising from such reviews. Actions are followed up on and monitored by Teagasc Head of Education and CDSU. Local quality assurance and teaching and learning risks may if relevant be addressed in Teagasc internal audits.

Programme level monitoring

The Teagasc quality assurance governance structures monitor the quality of teaching and learning through processes at programme level such as independent authentication, comparable module performance, completion rates, learner satisfaction surveys, and graduate surveys (5 years graduated). The Head of CDSU on foot of monitoring, actions either a review group or development group as appropriate to address the issues. National quality assurance and teaching and learning risks may if relevant be addressed in Teagasc internal audits.

Monitoring at learner level

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 Co-ordinator, 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 by 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 consciously and subconsciously 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 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.

Table 5.1 outlines formal monitoring activity on an on-going basis in Teagasc education programmes and typical resulting actions.

Table 5.1 Formal Monitoring Activity and Resulting Actions

Monitoring	Practice	Typical follow-up actions
Learner attendance and engagement with training and materials	<p>Attendance is monitored – either manual recording attendance or using an electronic learner time recording system</p> <p>Learner engagement is monitored during training sessions</p>	<p>Poor attenders are contacted, and advised about the consequence of non-attendance. If mentoring is identified as a need it is provided where required</p> <p>Where learners are perceived not to be engaging in course sessions the tutor in the first instance intervenes and if necessary, the Course Co-ordinator, Access Officer, assigned mentor or college centre management</p>
Learner performance at assessments	<p>Technicians and teaching staff monitor assessment results</p> <p>Learner results are posted to Quercus (learner management system) which is also used to inform learners of their results and to monitor learner performance</p>	<p>Concerns are raised with the learner in the first instance and may be followed up by the Course Co-ordinator, Access Officer, assigned mentor or centre management if required</p>
Learner behaviour	<p>All staff</p> <p>Disruptive, and behaviour outside of acceptable norms</p>	<p>Unacceptable behaviour where possible is dealt with by the tutor</p> <p>Where required the Course Co-ordinator or management may be involved</p>
Informal feedback and observations from staff and learners	<p>Informal feedback is welcomed</p>	<p>Feedback received by the relevant person, when warranted will be followed up by appropriate staff</p>

Teaching and Learning

Monitoring	Practice	Typical follow-up actions
Start of course, during course and end of course learner surveys and Interim learner surveys	Surveys are co-ordinated centrally and conducted online	Curriculum Development and Standards Unit analyses and reports on responses. Follow-up actions by managers where required
Inspections by the Independent Authenticator at practical skills training and assessment	Practical skills delivery may be monitored for quality delivery. Assessments are monitored to ensure consistency across centres, fairness and best practice in assessment is followed	The Independent Authenticator's report will be given to the Course Co-ordinator and centre management. Any follow-up actions are monitored by the Independent Authenticator
Learner completion rates and grades achieved	The Independent Authenticator compiles statistical analysis of completion rates and grades achieved across all centres	Results outside expected norms are reported and followed up by the college/centre
Five-year graduate surveys	Managed centrally, and targeted at graduates 5 years' post-graduation, the survey focusses on effectiveness of courses and programmes	Findings are reported to Senior Management and the Teagasc Authority, and the Teagasc Academic Council
Whole College Evaluation	Conducted independently focussing on the total provision in a college or centre	Findings are published on the Department of Education and Skills website, the Teagasc website. Recommendations are followed up by education management both locally and nationally and if relevant by the Teagasc internal auditor

These mechanisms allow Teagasc Education staff to monitor the quality of learning that is taking place in the programmes delivered, the satisfaction of learners with these programmes, and the reflections of graduates from these programmes.

Teagasc is committed to listening to and acting on the feedback of staff which occurs formally through the Teagasc College structures, through local centre management, through the operation of CDSU, and informally through staff interaction. All colleges delivering Teagasc programmes have an assistant principal, who is responsible for overseeing the quality of learning at their college. Feedback about programmes gained from these formal and informal mechanisms is channelled through local staff meetings, Assistant Principal Meetings, College Principals meetings, CDSU meetings, and Teagasc Academic Council, Teaching and Learning Committee, the Teagasc Education Forum and other fora, to Teagasc Senior Management, and the Teagasc Authority. Feedback from industry stakeholders is gathered during regular programme reviews, during Whole College Evaluation, and from graduates in the 5-year graduate surveys conducted annually.

Good communication is a critical element of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning. All teaching staff are readily contactable by phone and e-mail. Staff meetings, in-service training and the Teagasc Education Staff Conference provide opportunity and fora for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

At organisational level Teagasc is committed in its *statement of values* to be: “Professional, responsive, efficient, accountable and independent through endeavouring to attain scientific excellence in all our activities and by working in partnership with other organisations to meet the needs of our stakeholders”.

Excellence is striven for, through many initiatives including oversight from the Academic Council and supporting committees, Teagasc’s Programme Evaluation Unit, external peer reviews, Teagasc Code of Conduct, Teagasc staff survey and Teagasc’s Customer Action Plan. Excellence including self-monitoring and improvement are reflected in Teagasc policy and initiatives.

5.2 A Provider Ethos that Promotes Learning

Teagasc has an open community that values critical reflection and fosters professional and personal development for learners and staff. Through established recruitment procedures, staff have the required qualifications and experience in their field of expertise to teach and train in a professional manner. Staff are easily contactable, and accessible to learners and to peers. Formal interactions, events and informal networks provide opportunities for discussion for both staff and learners.

Teagasc’s Approach to Supporting Education Staff

Teagasc’s staff development programme (PMDS) and in-service training with a focus on technical and pedagogical training aims to ensure that staff are appropriately equipped to deliver to the standards set by Teagasc’s customer action plan. Inexperienced staff team up with or are mentored by an experienced staff member. CDSU staff are also readily contactable for additional support.

Staff teaching skills are developed through peer-to-peer support, regular management meetings, CDSU briefings, standardisation days and in-service training. The learner experience is monitored by the Academic Council and supporting committees, and improved through processes such as internal and independent authentication, communities of practice, discussion groups, learner survey responses, and Whole College Evaluation reports. In addition, Teagasc encourage teaching staff to undertake formal pedagogy training at levels appropriate to their delivery, i.e. training at NFQ Level 6 or Level 9.

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 surveyed and learner responses inform the reflection of management and teaching staff with respect to content and delivery.

Where the need for programme improvement is required, this becomes the remit of the Programme Development and Review committee.

Teagasc's Approach to Supporting Learning in its Programmes

Teagasc aims to be inclusive for learners with differing levels of ability and disability. This is underpinned by the learner support policy. Both the Academic Council Teaching and Learning committee have oversight roles in respect to academic aspects of learner support.

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 co-ordinated by the Course Co-ordinator ensuring that learners' assessment load is manageable.

CDSU in conjunction with the Teaching and Learning committee 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
- Noting teaching and training approaches by other providers on a national and international level
- Enabling staff at Teagasc education conferences 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 supporting all learners, and 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 through its Student Assistance Programme. Teagasc also seeks to direct learners to learner supports and/or academically more appropriate programmes that may be available from other providers.

- 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 Virtual Learning Environment (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.

Teagasc operates a Health and Safety management system for the safety of staff, learners and third parties and that reflects Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and best practice requirements. The safety management system is overseen local Health and Safety Officers and management and nationally by two Teagasc corporate safety officers.

Welfare extends to providing a safe and secure environment for all stakeholders, an environment that is supportive of mutual respect where the individual is valued. The Teagasc staff handbook and the Learner Handbook provide guidance and the basis for welfare in practice.

Learner Complaints, Reviews and Appeals

A complaint is a grievance with a service or process. A review is for a reconsideration of decision made by the original decision maker. An appeal is a request for a decision to be reconsidered at a higher level independent of the original decision maker.

Teagasc provides for the following processes:

- Customer (learner) complaint
- Non-academic review and appeal
- Academic review and appeal.

Customer complaints

Teagasc has an established Quality Customer Service (QCS) complaints procedure for dealing with customer complaints. This is for complaints about Teagasc services or processes. If the issue cannot be resolved locally a learner can refer their grievance to the Teagasc Complaints Procedure. Complaints are separate from appeals procedures.

Teagasc procedures for dealing with complaints

Teagasc is committed to delivering a high-quality service to all of its customers engaging with Teagasc Education, Research, Advisory or Operations. Learners are regarded as customers. The QCS complaints procedure is outlined as part of Teagasc Customer Charter. The vast majority of issues/complaint are dealt with on a proactive basis by managers and staff before they reach the formal QCS complaints stage.

The stages of the formal QCS customer complaints procedure are:

- Written complaint to Principal/Manager
- Complaint referred to Head of Programme if unresolved
- Complaint referred to Quality Customer Officer for review by an independent staff member if still unresolved.

At the beginning of the process Teagasc outlines the steps involved in the complaints process. At all stages of the process, the complainant receives regular updates on the status of their complaint. If at the end of the Teagasc Complaints process, a learner is not satisfied that their complaint has been adequately resolved by Teagasc, they can refer the issue to the Ombudsman, or the Ombudsman for Children.

Details of Teagasc's customer charter and complaints procedure are published on the Teagasc website <https://www.teagasc.ie/about/customer-service/>. Figure 5.1 gives a brief summary of the steps involved in the Teagasc Education Learner complaints procedure.

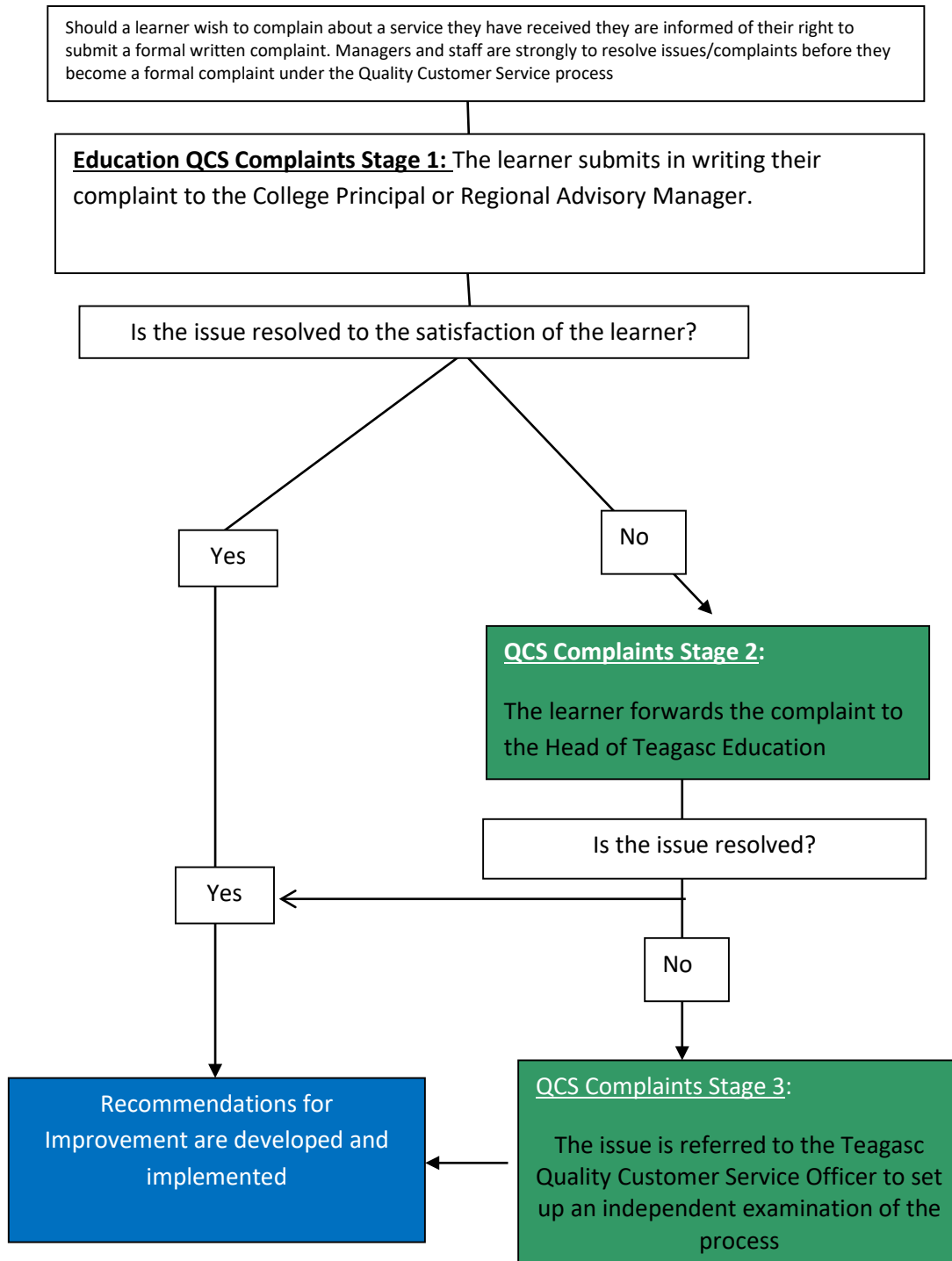


Figure 5.1 Teagasc Education Learner Complaints Management Process

Non-Assessment Review and Appeal Processes

A non-assessment appeal is a formal process by seeking a reconsideration of a decision made by Teagasc is requested in relation to education matters, but not specifically related to assessments. The policy and processes are published on the public website. Appeals not resolved locally are managed by the Head of Education by means of an appeals panel.

A learner or an applicant may wish to appeal a decision from Teagasc. Non-assessment appeals relate to any other decisions made by Teagasc Education which could affect the learner or applicant. The appellant must submit in writing a request for an appeal, verifiable supporting evidence which addresses the appeal criteria, and payment of a fee if applicable. The appeal must be lodged within 5 working days of the decision being communicated. Appeals will only be considered where there are valid grounds in line with this policy, as specified and evidenced by the appellant.

Under this appeals process, the appellant is entitled to:

- a review at the same level at which the decision was made,
- and or to an appeals panel, directed by the Head of Education which is independent of the original decision.

Details of appeals are listed in the appeals policy as published on the public website.

Learner Assessment Review and Appeal

This is specifically for a learner to lodge an assessment appeal. It can be at two levels; at modular level, and at final results level. Both of these are described in the following sections.

Modular Level Assessment Review and Appeal

Where a learner wishes to have an assessment result reconsidered, the Teagasc's Assessment Review and Appeal procedure is followed. A review is a reconsideration of an assessment result at college or centre level. An appeal is a reconsideration independent of the college or centre.

This procedure is outlined below and is published on the Teagasc public website. An assessment review and appeal process is for candidates who have queries regarding assessment results at modular level, on the basis of perceived irregularity or inequity in the assessment process. In this context, the term 'assessment' may mean a written examination script, a practical skills assessment, an assignment or any other part of the assessment procedure.

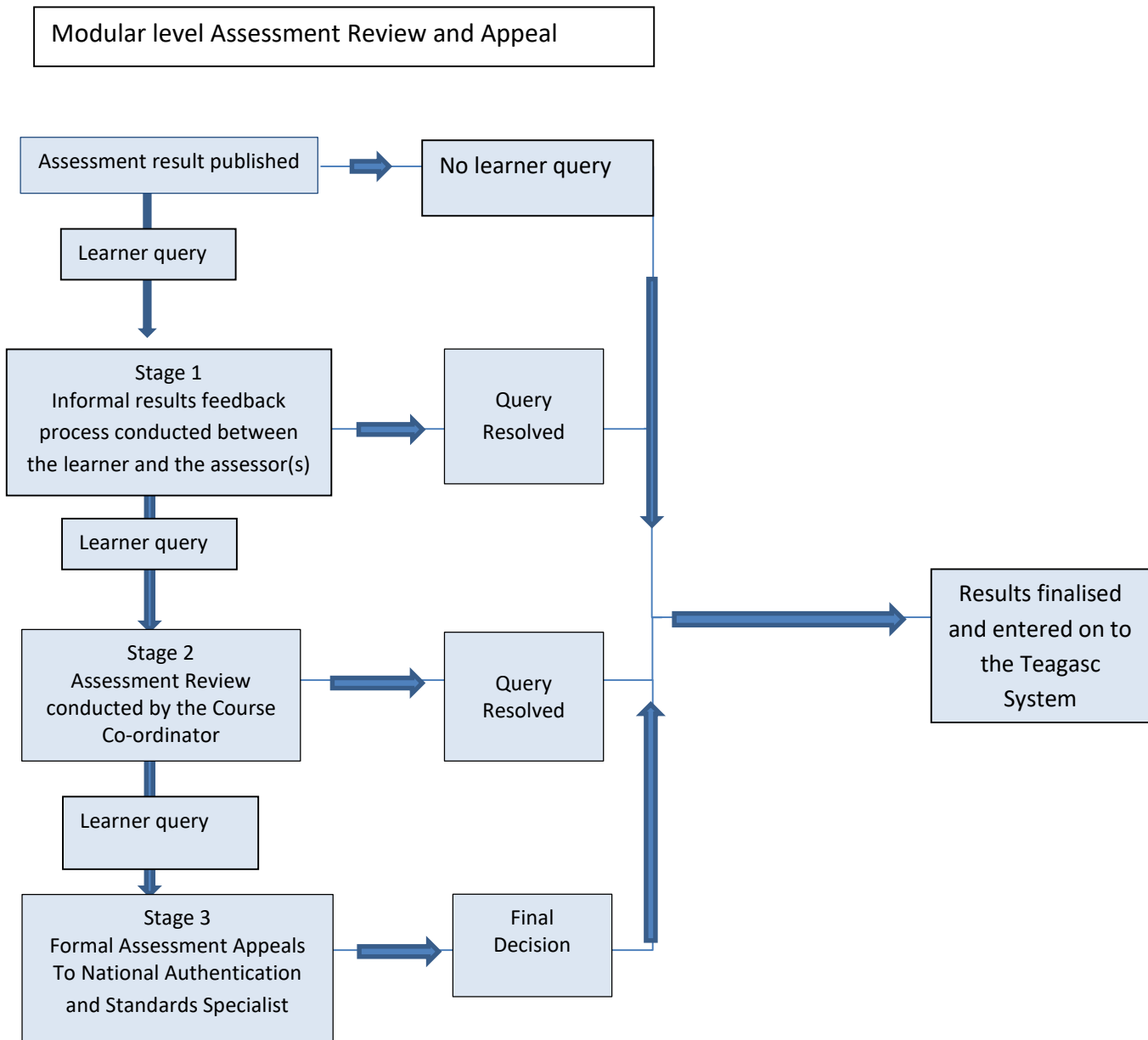


Figure 5.2 Teagasc Assessment Appeals Process

Final Results Appeal

Learners can also appeal their final results, before results are sent to QQI for certification. Learners have 14 days from receipt of their final results statement in which to lodge this appeal. After the 14 days have elapsed, the final results are sent to QQI. If the learner lodges an appeal, the college or centre contacts the National Authentication and Standards Specialist, who manages the final results appeal.

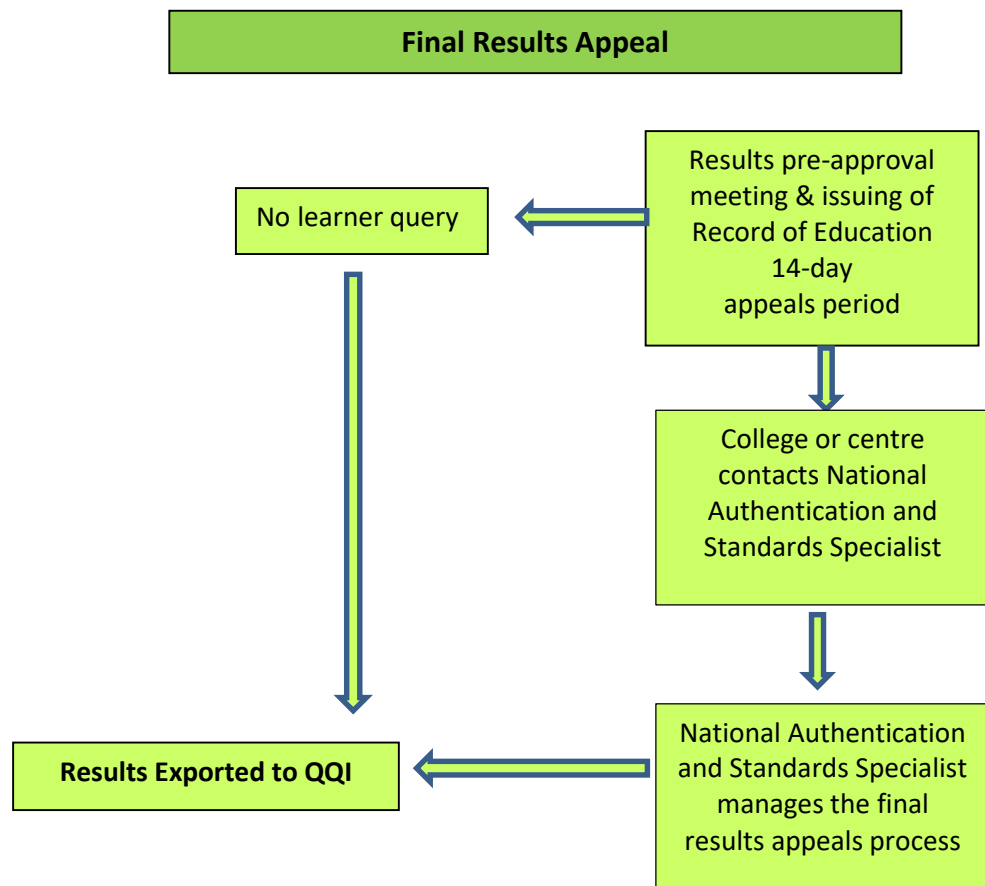


Figure 5.3 Teagasc Final Results Approval

Following the completion of the provider's Appeal Process, the results for the learner(s) concerned are forwarded to QQI as the final result.

Principles of Operation for Assessment Appeals

The appeals procedure involves a review of the Assessment Process for the specific learner concerned; including where appropriate the review of learner evidence and the assessment results. The individual/assessor who evaluates a learner appeal is not the individual/assessor who made the original assessment decision. The only evidence which may be presented by the learner at appeal is that which has already been presented for assessment. New evidence may not be added by the learner for the appeal. The learner is informed of the outcome of the appeals process within an agreed timescale.

5.3 National and International Effective Practice

In line with its mission Teagasc engages with the wider national and international community of practice to enhance teaching and learning. Activities include:

- Involvement of international subject matter experts in programme reviews
- Whole College Evaluation
- Partnerships with Institutes of Technology and Universities
- Education staff conferences
- Educational Research (UCD/Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme – Masters in Innovation Support)
- Attendance at national and international conferences
- Liaisons with College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE [Northern Ireland])
- Discovery visits to UK and European colleges.

Teagasc staff engage with national and international bodies and other providers of education. Staff can request to attend identified events and seminars. Teagasc also engages in EU initiatives and projects on an on-going basis and staff may request to become involved as appropriate.

5.4 Learning Environments

Teagasc strives to have a high standard training environment in all of its colleges and training centres, employing a range of elements to support this such as supplying resource materials and workbooks. It also provides access to college farms, Teagasc research centres, benchmark farms, practical workshops, equipment, materials and facilities.

Teagasc programmes and training environments are monitored through Whole College/Centre Evaluation, external validation, end of course learner surveys and reviews of college farm enterprise, physical premises, equipment and facilities. Academic quality oversight is provided by the Teagasc Academic Council and supporting committees.

Contexts in which Learning Opportunities Emerge

The Teagasc college network (with its associated commercial farm enterprises, workshops, computer labs) provides ideal learning and training environments for its learners. In these environments, real learning opportunities emerge for learners. College facilities provide opportunity to learners to apply knowledge, practice skills and develop competency in their chosen vocational area. Classroom and practical training widen the learning opportunity and reinforces theory. Action learning is a central teaching and learning approach for Teagasc courses using participatory delivery methods. Teagasc aims to provide a learner-centred action orientated teaching and learning environment. Teaching and learning are supported by dedicated software programs and accessible tools designed for industry and readily available to learners. Informal contexts are wide ranging and depend on the individual to recognise and reflect on these learning opportunities. Learners are guided in the formal programme to recognise and to capitalise on these informal learning opportunities. Formal learning opportunities tend to occur as part timetabled events.

Blended Learning

Teagasc aligns with QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes. Teagasc Education employs Moodle as a blended learning platform. Tutors and learners can communicate in discussion fora. Electronic copies of workbooks, *proforma* project templates, and other learning support materials are provided. Excel tools, PowerPoint presentation and videos are also made available.

Regional Education Centres

Regional Education centres are a central part of Teagasc programme delivery, primarily providing accessible courses to mature learners and farming practitioners. Courses are co-ordinated and managed by dedicated Education Officers and support administration staff. Courses, run from regional centres are supported by the Teagasc advisory service. Regional Education centres have access to college facilities and benchmark farms to underpin theory, and demonstrate and assess skills.

Off Campus

In Teagasc further education programmes, off-campus learning takes place on registered host units. Units are inspected for facilities and hosts attend annual briefings on regarding placement operation, requirements and best practice. Hosts have to operate to high industry standards and use technologies as part of their business.

On transnational host placement, Memoranda of Understanding combined with specialist learner placement agencies monitor and support learner experience. Learner feedback reports are monitored and where hosts or providers do not meet the required standards, follow-up actions include revisiting Memoranda of Understanding and cessation/termination of agreements.

Additional provisions are made for learners under 18 years and vulnerable adults on placement. Full details are included in Teagasc's Child Safeguarding Statement is published on Teagasc's public website www.teagasc.ie.

Physical Premises, Equipment and Facilities

Teagasc's QQI validated Level 5 and 6 education programmes are delivered through its network of seven colleges (four Teagasc colleges and three linked private colleges) that provide full-time, part-time and distanced education options; and 12 Teagasc Advisory Regions that provide adult education through the part-time and distance education options.

Teagasc seeks to ensure that premises, equipment and facilities are maintained and developed. Through college enterprise review, enterprises are benchmarked against each other and against industry norms. Discussion groups involving college enterprise leaders provide a forum of shared knowledge and support.

All Teagasc centres and other venues used in education provision are regularly vetted for teaching and learning facilities and health and safety standards. Learner surveys specifically gather data about the facilities provided at Teagasc centres, from classrooms and catering to farm enterprises and car parking.

All practical learning period (PLP) host units are visited and assessed by dedicated college PLP coordinators who conduct regular visits to learners on PLPs and maintain contact with learners while on placement. Host facilities are also monitored through learner comments in PLP diaries and through end of PLP learner evaluations.

Chapter 6 Assessment of Learners

This chapter outlines how Teagasc operates a fair, consistent and professional approach to learner assessment and administration for its further education provision. Teagasc’s assessment policy can be found on its public website (www.teagasc.ie).

The processes of quality assurance governing assessment of learners and programme provision are managed by the Head of CDSU, and overseen by the Teagasc Academic Council and its committees.

Further Education (FE) Quality Assurance Governance System

Independent Authentication

The National Authentication and Standards Specialist reports directly to the Head of CDSU, and leads the Quality and Results Committee. Other members of CDSU, or designated, pre-approved and trained staff to assist with independent authentication.

These Teagasc staff are independent of and separate from the course design, development, delivery and assessment; affording them objectivity and freedom to express opinion, approve provisional results, report anomalies to the Head of CDSU; or if necessary to report directly any causes of major concern directly to Teagasc’s Director of Operations and failing a satisfactory response, to QQI.

External Authentication

The National Authentication and Standards Specialist, in preparing annual authentication plans, will allow for a level of external authentication in the process to ensure that external perspectives are brought to the process.

6.1 Teagasc Assessment Philosophy

Overseen by the Teagasc Academic Council, objectivity is key to Teagasc’s philosophy on assessment as outlined below, and applies to all of its education provision.

Teagasc’s philosophy on, and approach to assessment is “assessment to a standard, applied consistently and fairly”.

Fairness is contingent on being consistent on 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.

This philosophy is underpinned by four precepts depicted in Figure 6.1.

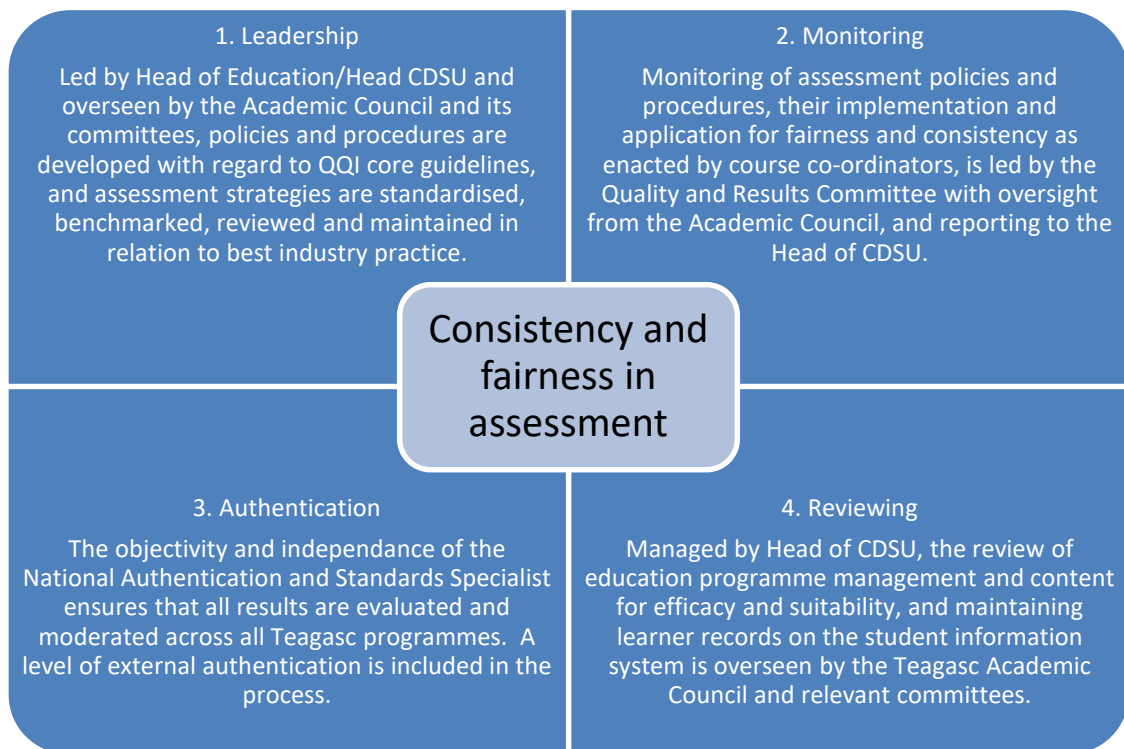


Figure 6.1 Teagasc Assessment Philosophy

Teagasc Further Education Assessment Process

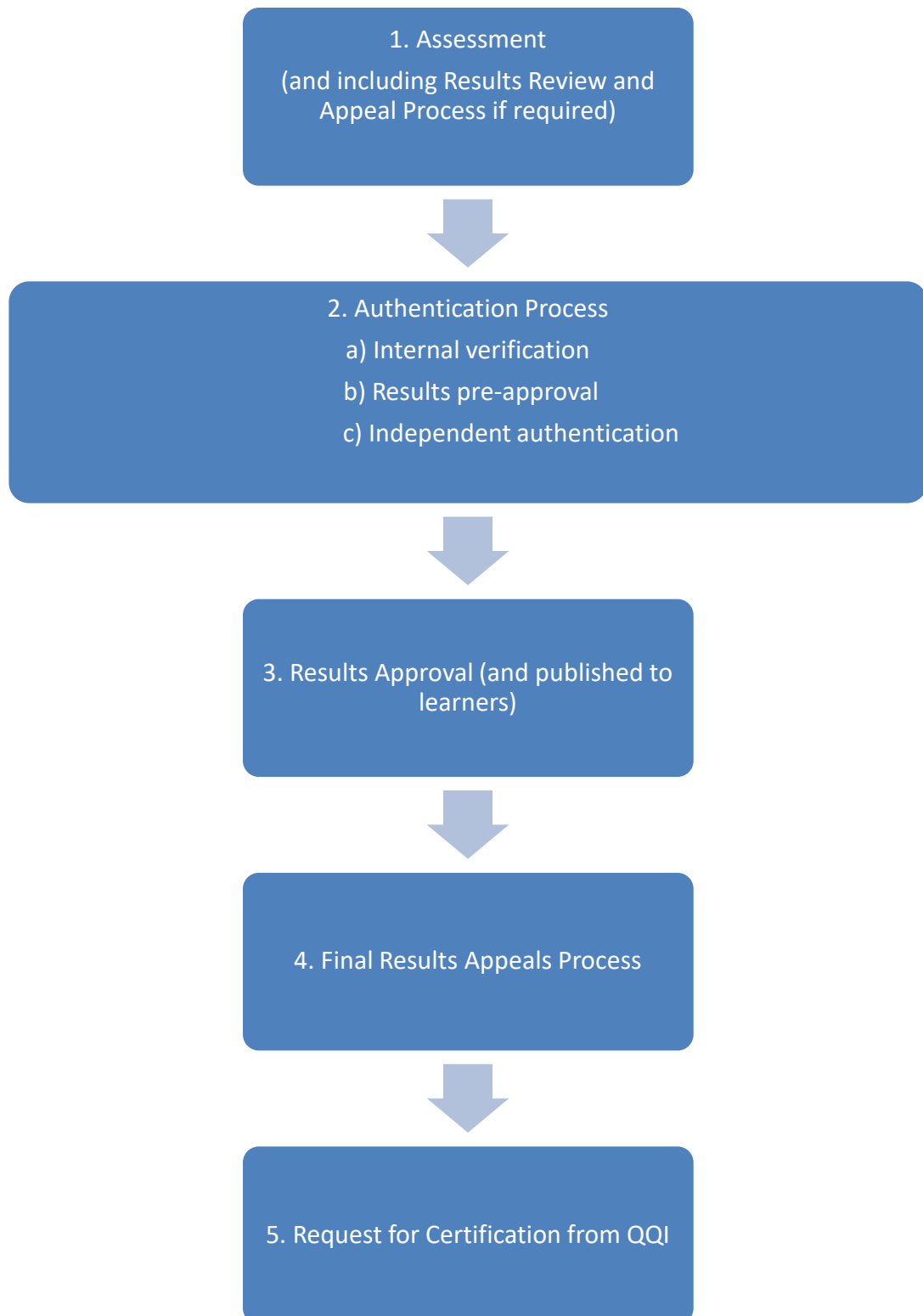


Figure 6.2 Key Stages in the Teagasc Further Education Assessment Process

How Teagasc Assessment Philosophy Operates in Practice

Teagasc Assessment Philosophy Precepts 1 and 4 (Leadership and Review) in Practice

Overseen by the Academic Council, leadership and review facilitates development, standardisation and implementation of policies, procedures, and strategies within programmes. The following explains how this works in practice.

Under precepts 1 and 4 of Teagasc's Assessment Philosophy, the Programme Development and Review Committee carry out review and development of module specifications in line with both the respective award standard and relevant minimum intended programme learning outcomes. A key priority is maintaining a central focus on the learner, and on teaching and learning practices. The Academic Council standing committees support leadership and review, ensuring standardisation of assessment strategies within modules. Activities include:

- Each module specification has a standard format, identifying the relevant QQI component award and detail the delivery and assessment of the learning outcomes in the context of the programme and its learning outcomes
- The same module specifications apply for each respective Teagasc programme irrespective of the college or centre location
- Module specifications are reviewed annually and have a lifespan of 1 academic year, starting in September and finishing in August
- The Teagasc staff intranet has the most up-to-date version of the module specifications. If anyone involved in delivery does not have access to the Teagasc staff intranet the specifications are replicated on Moodle, accessible to staff
- Academic years are managed as sessions within Teagasc to ensure consistency and coherence in programmes. Sessions align with the academic year
- Courses that start and finish in a particular academic year or session, remain identified as that session
- Learning outcomes and their assessment are addressed in the module specifications
- All assessments are prepared according to the module specifications.

Teagasc Assessment Philosophy Precept 2 (Monitoring) in Practice

The second precept of Teagasc’s Assessment Philosophy, Monitoring, is overseen by the Teagasc Academic Council and its standing committees, and managed by the Head of CDSU. Monitoring takes place at all stages of programme across FE as outlined in the table below to ensure consistency and fairness in Teagasc education provision. This section will hereafter focus on monitoring of delivery and assessment. All activities associated with education programme implementation – be it delivery, assessment, or administration are monitored by the National Authentication and Standards Specialist – ensuring a consistent approach is used across all of Teagasc’s education provision.

Table 6.1 Indicating How Monitoring Informs Assessment and Programme Performance

Monitoring criteria	Metric/process used
Interest in Teagasc programmes	Applications on learner management system
Annual enrolments	Learner registrations on learner information system
Programme delivery progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Principal Meetings reports • Learner results entry to learner management system • Learner placement with hosts • Independent authentication processes during programme delivery • Programme start and finish dates, planned and realised
Completion rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent authentication reports • Learner management system report analysis
Learner grades	National Authentication and Standards Specialist analysis and report on learner grades across all centres
Learner support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests for learner support from applicants
Gender balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender statistics in Teagasc programmes
Monitoring of the training environment in hosts units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement visits by Placement officers • Meetings with hosts • Reports from learners
Procedures used	Independent authentication
Learner satisfaction	Analysis of end of programme learner satisfaction surveys
Programme effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-year graduate survey • Interaction with Teagasc Education Forum • Consultation with industry • Whole College Evaluation
Quality of physical resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole College Evaluation • College Enterprise Evaluation
Assessment procedures	Assessment practices are monitored by the Academic Council committees supported by CDSU staff. Findings are included in independent authentication reports

Assessment of Learning Achievement. Monitoring of Assessment

The precursors of assessment (programme design, delivery and administration) are key to ensuring that assessment is fair and consistent. The monitoring function ensures that these precursors operate in unison and align to Teagasc's philosophy.

This is co-ordinated by the National Authentication and Standards Specialist, and overseen by the Quality and Results committee, but involves CDSU as a whole and other Teagasc staff where additional resources are needed. A level of external authentication is also provided for. Key monitoring activities include:

- Monitoring of procedures used in programme delivery and assessment
Programme administration, delivery and assessment are independently monitored by CDSU. Concerns raised to the Head of CDSU instigates appropriate actions, involving Teagasc Head of Education where required.
- Monitoring of the training environment in host units
Teagasc has a 'duty of care' towards learners, with particular focus when learners are training remotely off campus. All practical learning settings (host units, skills demonstration and benchmark visit farms) are assessed and monitored by the National Practical Learning Period (PLP) Specialist on an on-going basis in order to ensure an effective learning and safe work experience for learners from the relevant Teagasc training courses.
- Assessment/monitoring of hosts is carried out on placement visits by experienced staff. Every learner on placement is visited at least once during placement. In addition, hosts must supply evidence of safety compliance with electrical installations, compliance with risk assessment and health and safety, compliance with animal welfare where applicable, and proof of correct and adequate insurance. In addition, hosts must attend induction meetings for updates and requirements for Teagasc training programmes.
- Monitoring learner grades
The National Authentication and Standards Specialist analyses learner grades achieved and repeat assessments across colleges and centres, and within modules. This informs not only learner attainment, but also trends in marking and scores achieved in modules, highlighting learner aptitude, standards across centres, and identifying areas requiring review or further monitoring.
- Monitoring assessment procedures
Led by the National Authentication and Standards Specialist, assessment procedures are monitored for their implementation and effectiveness. Assessors and invigilators follow module specifications and tutor guidelines in relation to security of assessment, preparation for, running of and integrity of assessments.
- Summary reports area drafted and presented to the Quality and Results Committee and the Academic Council.

Teagasc Assessment Philosophy Precept 3 (Independent Authentication) in Practice

External Authentication for FE courses is referred to as *independent authentication* in Teagasc.

Internal Verification

Internal Verification is a critical element of the Teagasc Quality Assurance process. This process takes place internally in each college/centre, with an internal verifier appointed to co-ordinate the process which typically involves:

- Assisting the Course Co-ordinator with assessments to ensure that they are run properly
- Updating local management and assessors about changes in the Memorandum and the Modules Specifications
- Liaising with the Independent Authenticator, local management and peer verifiers for FE programmes
- Co-ordinating peer verification in the course
- Quality assuring peer verification
- Co-ordinating results pre approval meetings
- Maintaining an Internal Verifier's Folder
- Overseeing the publishing of results on the learner management system (Quercus)
- Issuing final results after independent authentication
- Operating the Learner results appeals system.

The same process of Internal Verification is used in Teagasc programmes. The process is carried out in conjunction with local management and overseen by the National Authentication and Standards Specialist.

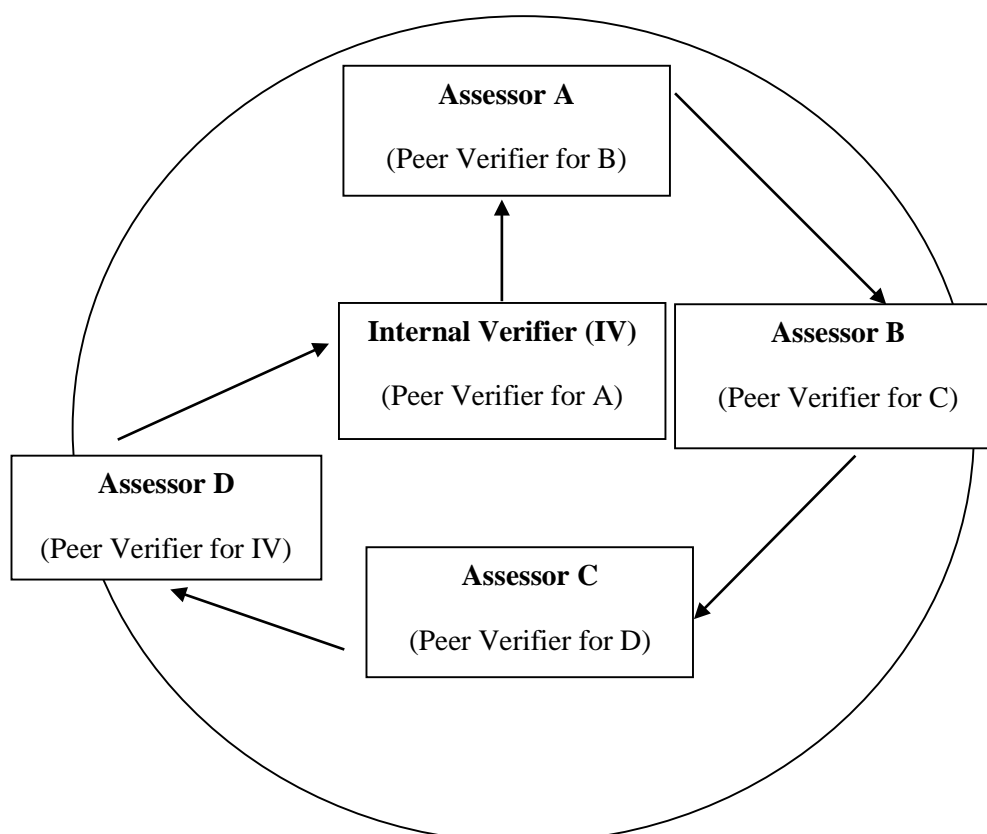


Figure 6.3 Teagasc Peer Verification Circle

In Teagasc, peer verifiers act as and fulfil the role of internal verifiers. As such internal verifiers are subject matter experts in their own right. Therefore, internal verifiers not only carry out the functions of cross-checking marks with those recorded on the learner management system (Quercus), but also verify at local level the standard of assessments.

Key components of the Teagasc Internal Peer Verification process are:

- Internal verification completed by a subject matter expert
- Assembly of Module Verification Folders
- Peer review of assessment instruments before presentation to learners to ensure that they are to the correct standard
- Peer review of corrected scripts/diaries to ensure that they are all corrected to a standard, including a process of marks moderation, and an appropriate mark recorded on the front cover of the assessment
- Peer review of assessment papers/assignment briefs to ensure that they align with module specification
- Checking assessment results are recorded accurately on the learner management system (Quercus).

In addition, skills standardisation days for staff ensure safe, fair and consistency in delivery and assessment of skills. The National Authentication and Standards Specialist may attend skills delivery and assessment as part of monitoring.

Internal Verifier's Folder

The internal verification process generates an Internal Verifier's Folder. This must be maintained throughout the duration of a course and made available to the National Authentication and Standards Specialist the QQI Observer if applicable. The contents of the Internal Verifier's Folder include:

- Minutes of all meetings held in connection with internal verification including results pre-approval meetings
- Copies of Assessment Papers/Brief (Form AP) for each peer verifier in the Peer Verification Circle
- Copies of Corrected Assessment (Form CS) Scripts/Diaries for each peer verifier in the Peer Verification Circle
- Copies of Assessment Appeals
- Results listing from the final internal results pre approval meeting
- Copies of correspondence relating to the programme.

Results Pre-Approval Meeting

A meeting of all assessors involved in the programme approves results as being the final set for independent authentication. Once results have been approved, results are locked on Quercus and forwarded to the National Authentication and Standards Specialist. This information is the basis for results sampling.

The following documentation is made available by the Course Co-ordinator:

- Results Pre-list (learner overall performance for the programme)
- Record of Education for each learner
- List of tutors and associated modules delivered.

This is carried out prior to the visit of the Independent Authenticator. Results are locked at the results pre-approval meeting so they cannot be changed. The Independent Authenticator selects a representative sample across the group presented for authentication. The sample size is determined by the square root of the number of learners, with individuals drawn across all grades achieved for that programme. Exemptions, compensation and extraordinary results are also included in the independent authentication process.

Results Approval

After independent authentication, results are approved by the Independent Authenticator and learners are informed of their final results. Learners have 14 calendar days to appeal results. Once 14 days have elapsed, final result export reports are prepared and cross-checked with reports by the Results Approval Panel to ensure a full and accurate results export to QBS. The Results Approval Panel also analyse results or trends for unexpected patterns and learner results across grades at course and module levels, and also and between centres. The analysis is presented to the Head of CDSU, and subsequently to the Head of Education and the Academic council. The Head of Education reports on this area to the Senior Management and Authority. The Teagasc Independent authentication processes are detailed below.

Results Approval Panel (RAP)

The RAP has the following key roles in the assessment and authentication processes:

- Consider verification and authentication reports and the processes therein
- Agree that the results can be put forward for QQI certification, thereby approving the results
- Recommend/take corrective action where appropriate.

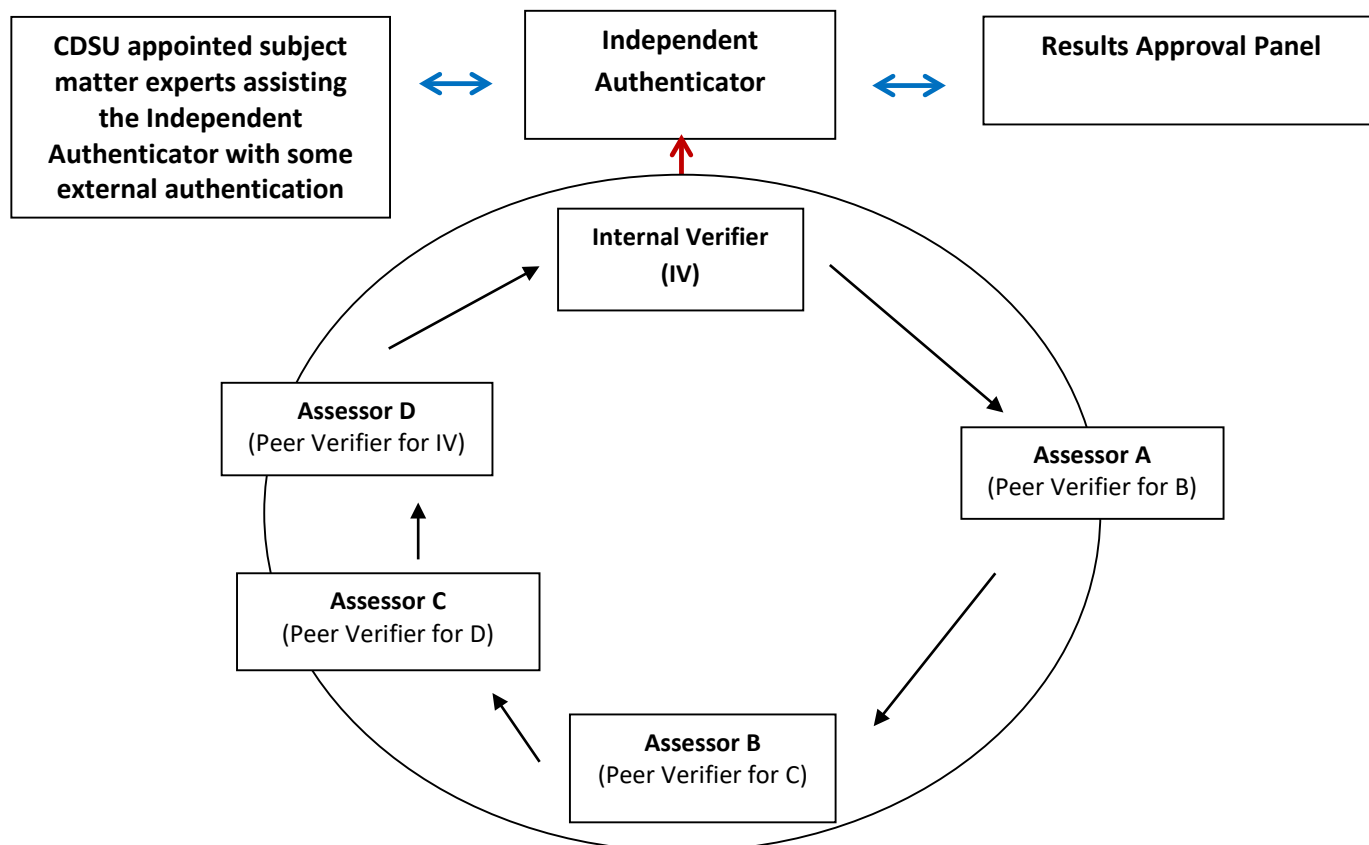


Figure 6.4 Interaction Between Teagasc Internal and Independent Authentication Process

Exporting Results to QQI

The process of the final sign-off of results is overseen by the Quality and Results Committee, carried out by the Results Approval Panel, with the Head of CDSU responsible for managing the process.

Based on results entered on to Quercus, results export reports are developed by the Quercus National Administrator, and cross-checked with independent authentication reports to ensure consistency between independently authenticated programmes and results entered onto Quercus. Details such as:

- Award and programme details
- Number of learners verified
- Number of learners verified by gender
- Modules verified
- Success rates (grades awarded at pass, merit and distinction)
- RPL and exemptions
- Total numbers for certification
- Total numbers per award type and level must align across Quercus and the Independent Authenticator's report.

Reports are reviewed, cross-checked and summarised by the Quercus National Administrator. The Results Approval Panel cross-check before results are exported to QBS (QQI export system). Figure 6.5 summarises the complete process. This ensures that the process is independently verified by someone who is not directly involved in the process.

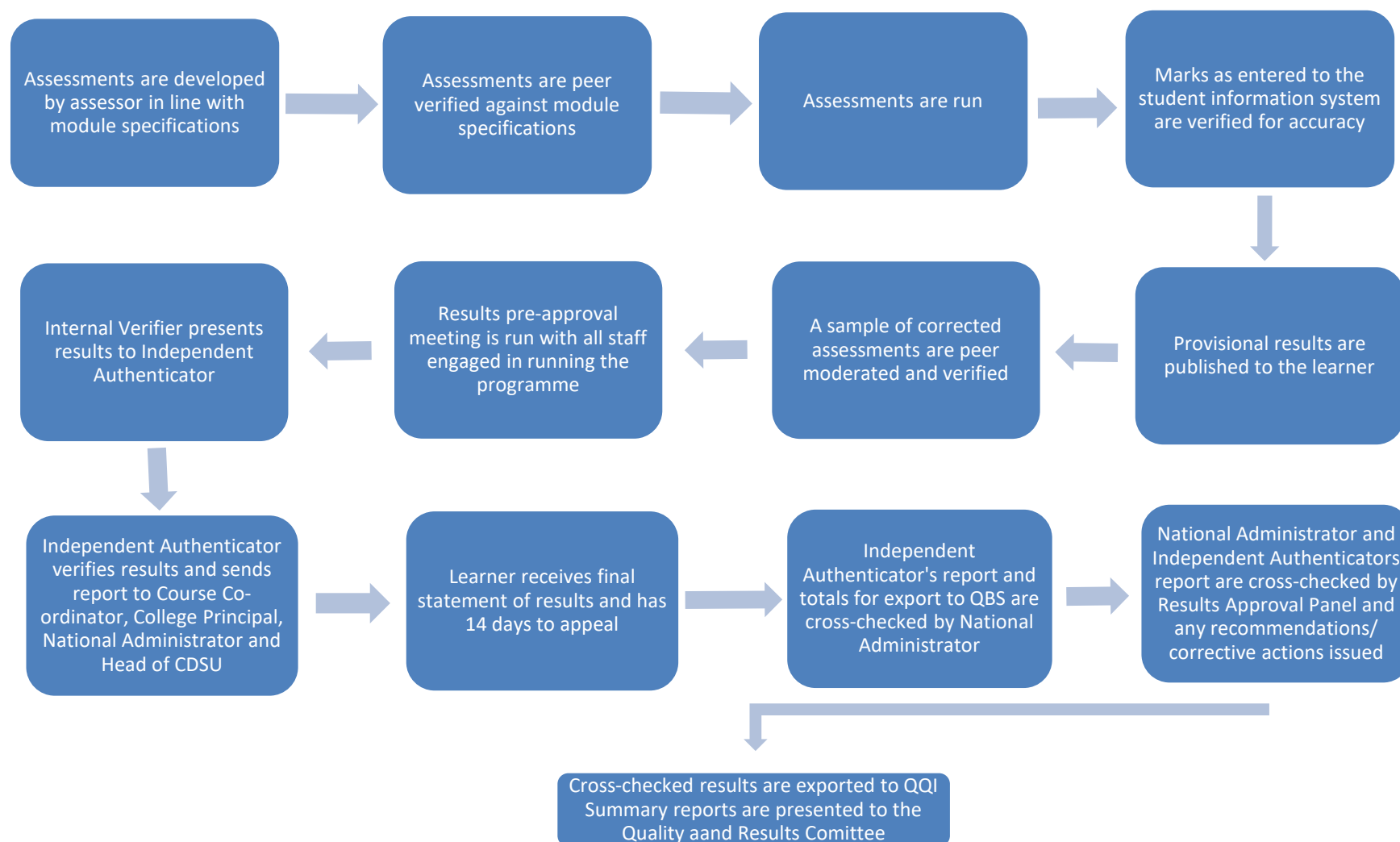


Figure 6.5 Quality Assurance of Assessment Development, Independent Authentication and Export Process

Independent Authentication Strategy

The Independent Authenticator annually develops an independent authentication plan which is based on perceived high-risk areas and noted issues in previous reports. High-risk areas will be the main focus, whereas areas of lower perceived risk, may not always receive the same attention. Every aspect of course delivery and assessment, however, will be examined in detail at least once every 3 years irrespective of risk determination. Therefore, where practice is historically good and risk is perceived as low, the Independent Authenticator may elect to focus on only certain aspects of course assessment or delivery.

Nonetheless, each course and programme in Teagasc is completely independently authenticated at least once every 3 years to ensure that even in perceived low-risk areas that the programme is run and assessment procedures align with best practice and policy. Authentication reports detailing findings, outcomes and recommendations are presented to the following staff:

- Course Co-ordinator
- College Principal/Regional Manager
- Curriculum Development and Standards Manager
- Results Approval Panel and
- Teagasc National Learner Management System Administrator.
- Summary reports sent to Academic Council via the Quality and Results Committee.

Toolkit for Staff Preparing for Independent Authentication

A series of support materials are available to staff on the TNet (intranet) which guide them in preparing for independent authentication. These include:

- Independent authentication booking forms
- Blank internal verification (peer verification) reports
- Ten-point plan for preparation for the independent authentication process
- Documents and checklists used in the independent authentication process including:
 - Internal Verifier Folder guidelines
 - Module Folder checklist
 - Course Co-ordinator Folder guidelines
 - Assessor checklist for internal and independent authentication
 - Internal (peer) verification forms for assessment papers and corrected scripts
- Guidelines for remote authentication where applicable.

6.2 Assessment of Learning Achievement

Teagasc module specifications indicate to the tutor, assessor and learner the content and appropriate assessment strategies. Aligned with QQI award standards and guided by Teagasc module specifications, peer-verified assessments are used to measure learning achievement. The level of knowledge, skill and competency assessed by the learner is measured through the use of many different assessment methods outlined later in this section.

Assessment is Also Used as a Strategy for Planning and Development in Teagasc Education

Feedback and analysis of assessment informs programme teaching and learner supports in Teagasc. Assessments also act as indicators for programme effectiveness. Table 6.2 gives examples of how this takes place in Teagasc.

This process and all actions are overseen by the Academic Council and relevant committees. The Head of CDSU manages the actions.

Table 6.2 How Feedback and Analysis of Assessment Informs Teaching and Learning

Source	Description	Actions
Learner feedback	Learners provide feedback through learner surveys, and informally to staff mentors, tutors and technicians	Where learners raise concerns on assessments, the Head of CDSU will instigate further investigation with staff and the Independent Authenticator
Tutor and technician feedback	Staff developing, conducting and assessing learner performance constantly critique assessment suitability	Assessments are designed centrally but developed locally. CDSU staff members will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct standardisation days with staff to devise best practice for conducting individual assessments • Review assessment techniques to ensure that they are suitable • Review standards in assessments to ensure learner performance is accurately scored
Host feedback following practical learning periods	Practical Learning Period (PLP) Officers monitor host and learner reports of their experience of the PLP	College PLP officer reports concerns to the National Placement Specialist in CDSU. Head of CDSU directs actions in conjunction with the National Placement Specialist
Course Co-ordinator oversees internal verification and results approval meetings	The Course Co-ordinator in overseeing the running of a programme will detect practices (both good and bad) in the programme which will often be confirmed during internal verification and in results	The Course Co-ordinator informs the Independent Authenticator of the overall running of the course, highlighting difficulties, challenges, and good practice

Source	Description	Actions
	<p>approval meetings</p> <p>The Course Co-ordinator also liaises with the Independent Authenticator as the course progresses during the academic year and at independent authentication</p>	<p>This serves to inform the Independent Authenticator and Head of CDSU of challenges and solutions</p>
<p>Benchmarking against national statistics available from QQI</p>	<p>Carried out by the National Authentication and Standards Specialists (Independent Authenticator) – see below</p>	<p>Summary reports presented to the Academic Council, Senior Management and the Authority</p>
<p>Independent authentication (Authentication)</p>	<p>As part of independent authentication, the Independent Authenticator compares and contrasts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner performance across centres • Rigour of exam questions • Feedback from assessors on assessment suitability • Teagasc results against other providers <p>The Independent Authenticator also liaises with the Course Co-ordinator</p>	<p>Deficiencies detected lead to follow-up actions being instigated as directed by Head of CDSU</p> <p>Good practice detected is used as a training tool for other centres</p> <p>Results outside of expected norms, either between Teagasc courses or statistics from other providers, the Head of CDSU will focus a review of standards in identified component awards</p>

Teagasc's Assessment Framework

Assessment procedures and systems are the framework within which Teagasc ensures security and integrity of the assessment process. The execution of assessment procedures is managed locally by the Course Co-ordinator, and is monitored as part of the independent authentication process. Oversight is given by the Academic Council and its standing committees. The main types of assessments used in Teagasc programmes are:

- Written examination
- Assignments and project work
- Practical skills assessment
- Learner records
- Portfolios of work
- Self-directed learning
- Reflection.

All assessment must align with module specifications. Learners are required to pass each assessment type in any one module. For example, any one module might have a written exam, a project and practical skills, all of which need to be passed in their own right.

- **Written examination**
Carried out at various intervals of the programme following the module specifications, written examinations allow for the learner to be examined on knowledge and understanding of multiple learning outcomes. Learner progress is monitored and feedback is given on their progress.

Exam briefs are developed by the assessor. Development of an exam brief includes acceptable answers paper and a repeat paper which must meet Teagasc assessment policy and guidelines. The exam brief is then internally verified through peer verification where a peer staff member reviews the brief, checking for alignment with module specifications, clarity and fairness in questions, typing/spelling errors. The peer-verified exam brief is then initialled/signed by the peer verifier. Exam briefs are kept securely before the exam, and sample answers with marking schemes are retained for independent authentication.

For exam papers in particular which are unseen papers, papers are compiled in advance of the exam, and stored securely. Assessment invigilation details such as seating plans and assessment rules are clearly presented.

Attendance at written exams is recorded with a sign-in sheet. The sign-in sheet provides a cross-check against the number of exam papers at the end of the exam.

- **Assignments and project work**
These assessment types allow the learner to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of specific learning outcomes. Assignments depending on the module specification may be standardised or may be developed by the assessor. Where standardised assignments are available, the Independent Authenticator checks to see that these are used. Standard practice is to provide learners with guidance including:
 - Submission deadline
 - Key areas pertinent to the assignment
 - Acceptable word count range.

Depending on the centre and tutor, instructions for submission of assignments may vary, but all will have common key components:

- Submission of an assignment is date stamped either in a log, physically with a stamp or handed in person to the tutor at the appointed time
- Assignments are managed as a tranche of work, assembled together, corrected, results record and entered onto Quercus (Teagasc learner management system), and assignments retained for independent authentication
- Late assignments are recorded as such.

- Practical skills assessment

Carried out at various stages of the programme following the module specifications, these practical assessments are carried out in a one-to-one practical setting where the learner must demonstrate knowledge, skill and competency to complete specific tasks as outlined in the module specification. Regular feedback is given to the learner.

Standardised checklists for practical skills assessment are available to assessors on Teagasc's intranet (TNet), and are used to ensure a standard approach to skills assessment. It also ensures that core sections of any skills are suitably weighted, ensuring that the essence of the skill is assessed.

- Learner records/portfolio of work

Learner records and portfolios of work are standardised *proforma* documents enabling the learner to demonstrate achievement of relevant learning outcomes. Learners are required to complete and to submit them to the deadline set by the assessor.

The Practical Learning Period (PLP) in Teagasc Education provides the learner with real-life work practice. The PLP is a key component of Teagasc Education programmes. Being remote from the college or centre, the PLP presents particular challenges for quality assurance. PLPs are therefore co-ordinated by the National Placement Specialist. At national level, Teagasc quality assures each of its training hosts. Learners can only be placed with hosts that have been vetted and who attend update sessions. This ensures that hosts not only have the physical resources in place, but that they also understand the spirit of being a Teagasc host.

Host vetting follows procedures agreed with hosts, learners, college/centre, Teagasc Corporate Services, and Teagasc insurance providers, Teagasc Head of Education and the Head of CDSU. During PLP, learners are monitored by tutors and feedback is given to the learner and the host and recorded in the Course Co-ordinator's file.

- Self-directed learning

In its broadest meaning self-directed learning describes a process by which individuals take the initiative, with or without the assistance of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. All learners are encouraged to undertake self-directed learning as part of their learning strategy. In practice learners might use or transfer their skills to real-life situations.

- Reflection

Reflection provides a fuller perspective on experience, which in turn is a building block for learning. Learning through reflection from experience gained in turn leads to greater understanding. Learners on Teagasc programmes are encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences through learner records and portfolios of work mentioned earlier in this section.

Course Co-ordinators

The Course Co-ordinator role is pivotal in managing assessments. The Course Co-ordinator ensures:

- Assessments are scheduled fairly with sufficient notice to learners
- Learner support is provided where warranted
- Assessments are peer verified before the assessment
- Unseen papers are kept in designated secure areas
- Adequate invigilation/supervision is in place
- Assessments are secure and returned to relevant examiners
- Assessments are corrected in a timely fashion and feedback provided to learners
- Results are entered accurately into recording systems
- Appeals are managed according to procedure
- Assessments are retained for independent authentication.

The Course Co-ordinator therefore manages assessments before and after assessment takes place, and ensures that the other elements such as skills and learner record assessment are carried out and assessed in accordance with QQI award and Teagasc programme specifications, assessment rules and regulations and is retained for independent authentication.

6.3 Policies and Procedures Related to the Assessment of the Learner

In order to operate a fair and standardised system of assessment Teagasc have an assessment policy which is available on the Teagasc public website.

Assessment Processes

Assessment processes will vary depending on the nature of the assessment; however, the following overarching principles apply in all cases:

- The assessor/invigilator is responsible and in charge of the running of the assessment
- Each candidate is assessed on their own merit
- Any assessment can be stopped for health and safety reasons
- No candidate is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by the way assessments are run
- Assessments follow Teagasc module specifications
- Teagasc *proforma* documents are used where available and appropriate
- Results are published within 20 working days of an assessment
- A candidate can ask for their assessment to terminate before completion
- If during an assessment, the integrity of the assessment process is compromised, the assessor will terminate the assessment and report the incident to the Course Co-ordinator.
- Learners can appeal their results through Teagasc's appeal procedures.
- Where a candidate presents with special educational requirements, reasonable accommodations may be offered in assessments. The policy and procedures in this instance are discussed in Chapter 7.

Unseen written papers

Unseen written papers are commonly presented to candidates in formal examination situations. Formal examination halls are set out to:

- Mitigate against plagiarism
- Display rules and regulations
- Ensure candidates are as comfortable as possible.

Invigilators ensure that:

- The integrity of the examination hall is maintained at all times (before, during and after examinations)
- Health and safety of candidates is paramount
- The integrity of examination scripts and papers and other material is maintained at all times
- Candidates have sufficient space to simultaneously afford privacy and transparency of the integrity of the examination hall and the assessment process
- Candidates are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by the physical facility or how the examination is run
- A functioning clock is visible to all candidates and that the examination time is governed by this clock
- Candidates are given reasonable advance notice as the finishing time of the exam draws near
- No candidates leave the examination hall with exam materials, answer books or additional paper
- At the end of the examination, candidates are provided with clear instructions before leaving the hall
- All scripts are collected and accounted for before any candidate can leave the examination hall
- No candidate is admitted once any other candidate has left the examination hall
- A sufficient number of invigilators are present to manage the number of candidates
- Candidates who require a comfort break are accompanied in so far as possible
- Candidates can only access permitted materials for the purposes of the assessment
- All assessment materials are returned to the designated secure area directly after the assessment process.

Assessors ensure that:

- Instructions to candidates are clear on all assessments
- Questions use clear language
- Assessments are peer reviewed as part of internal verification
- Assessment follows module specifications
- Unseen papers are securely stored as per local arrangements
- Penalties for late submission is made clear to the learner
- Submission instructions and dates for projects and assignments are clearly stated
- It is clear how the assessment was marked and how the final mark was awarded
- Results are posted to Quercus within 20 working days
- Results as entered on Quercus reflect the actual results
- All assessments are retained and available for independent authentication
- Reflect on results achieved, identifying trends and ensuring that content of the course is relevant and that delivery methods are effective.

Course Co-ordinators ensure that:

- Learner support in assessment is provided where required
- Internal verification procedures are followed and implemented
- An assessment schedule for the course manages the assessment work load for learners
- Learners have sufficient notice of assessments typically a minimum of 1 week's advance notice
- Assessment regulations are posted or are available where assessments are taking place
- Results are entered into Quercus within 20 days following an assessment
- Learners are aware of their responsibilities for assessments at induction.

Learners ensure that they:

- Prepare for assessment
- Present at the appointed time in the appointed location for assessment
- Provide advance notice if possible when they cannot attend
- Respect other learners and the assessor
- Follow health and safety regulations
- Check their results and request a review or appeal within 14 days of results being published on Quercus
- Reflect and learn from their assessment result seeking advice and help where required.

Teagasc as a provider ensures:

- Records of learner assessment maintained
- Results for each learner against each assessment type are recorded on Quercus – the learner management system
- Results are maintained by the tutor and feedback is given to the learner regularly via the Quercus learner management system.

Teagasc Assessment Policy

Teagasc's Assessment policy is built on its assessment philosophy outlined at the start of this chapter. The assessment policy is strengthened by the Teagasc Security and Integrity of Assessment Policy which is published on the Teagasc website.

Fundamental to Teagasc's assessment policy and procedures is the learner. Teagasc's policy is guided by QQI's *Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers Revised 2013*. The following provides a synopsis of Teagasc's assessment policies and procedures.

Learner responsibility

As part of registration learners are provided with the centre's Learner Handbook. The Learner Handbook details learner responsibility. The learner signs that they have read, understand and agree to the content of the Learner Handbook. Where learners have a specific learning difficulty, reasonable accommodation is made so that the detail in the Learner Handbook is clear. It is the responsibility of the learner to be adequately prepared when attending both course and assessment days in the colleges/centres. Learners must ensure they bring appropriate personal protective equipment to practical skills demonstrations and assessments, in line with health and safety guidelines. For skills where a candidate did not attend practical skills instruction training, and where health and safety does not permit the candidate to attempt the skill without such training, then candidates may not be permitted to undertake associated skills assessments. Learners are made aware of this in advance of skills practical training.

It is also the responsibility of the learners to submit course assessments and projects in line with Teagasc assessment policy. Failure to comply with the above guidelines may result in learners failing assessment types and will require learners to sit repeat assessments in order to successfully pass the module. Where learners wish to appeal their results, the learners must lead this process and must follow the Teagasc Learner Assessment Review and Appeals process (Chapter 5).

Assessing learning outcomes of award standards

Based on QQI award standards and learning outcomes, Teagasc module specifications give detailed information on assessment criteria and standards to be followed by all staff when delivering and assessing all modules on Teagasc programmes. Assessments are mapped to each learning outcome, ensuring each learner is graded against the learning outcomes of the relevant award standard, and that all learning outcomes are assessed. Module specifications are available to learners and are the guidelines that maintain quality and standards at module level.

Assessment that promotes and supports effective teaching and learning

Each Teagasc module specification has been developed in order to support effective teaching and learning. Module specifications have been designed to assess learners in the areas of knowledge, skill and competencies in line with the respective QQI award standard. Lesson plans developed locally support teaching and learning.

Formative assessment provides an indication of their learning to individual learner, and takes the form of informal verbal feedback during practical sessions, practice online quizzes and feedback on assignments and quizzes.

Formative assessment strategies used include:

- Verbal feedback during practical skills demonstration and practice
- PLP diary and reports
- Summative assessment is formal assessment in Teagasc and is conducted as directed by the module specification assessment section.

The main assessment techniques used in Teagasc include written examinations, practical skills assessment, learner records, assignments and projects. The appropriate technique is linked to a set of learning outcomes and specified in the assessment section of each module specification. Teagasc require learners to pass each assessment technique as specified in order to achieve a pass grade in any one module, thus ensuring each learning outcome is assessed. Second attempts in a module result in a pass grade for that module. This system requires the learner to have obtained a broad range of knowledge, skill and competencies across each module in the award programme.

Credibility and security of assessment procedures

Integrity of the assessment process is central to credibility of assessment. Everyone involved in assessment has a role to play: learners, administrators, tutors, trainers, assessors, invigilators, learner support staff and Independent Authenticators. This is underpinned with the Teagasc security and integrity of assessment policy.

Learner records are maintained securely on Teagasc's learner management system (Quercus). Final results are locked after the Results Pre-Approval meeting and before independent authentication preventing any changes thereafter. Results can only be un-locked at a national level by CDSU designated staff and the Teagasc Learner Management system information system's National Administrator.

Assessment materials are stored in a secure location with access only by authorised persons. This is important for all assessments both completed and assessments yet to be taken. Assessments

are retained as evidence of achievement of learning outcomes and must be available at the request of the Independent Authenticator.

All assessment materials are developed in line with Teagasc module specifications and guidelines in order to maintain and have a standardised approach across each college and centre.

Guidance for the appropriate assessment technique is provided on each module specification. Assessments are peer verified as part of internal verification before being presented to learners for assessment.

Where written examinations are developed in order to assess knowledge and understanding, repeat written examinations are also written with at least a 50% difference in questions. This maintains credibility and security across written examinations. If a learner sits a repeat written examination the learner will be capped at a pass grade.

The same grading principle applies for written assignments. Where a second attempt at an assignment is required, the learner will be capped at a pass grade.

Where practical skills are being assessed, each learner is assessed individually using Teagasc practical skills assessment checklists. This allows for standardisation of assessment across all colleges and centres. Repeat practical assessments, where required, are similarly carried out individually and the learner will be capped as a pass grade.

All assessment materials are corrected in a timely fashion, with feedback given to learner within 20 working days. A sample of assessment results are checked internally through the internal verification process. Evidence of assessment is retained, and results are stored securely by the assessor before being uploaded to Quercus. Learners should be familiar with and be able to access the learner portal.

It is the candidates' duty to familiarise themselves with the regulations relating to written examinations, assignments and practical assessments and the consequence of infringing these regulations.

Assessment schedules

Assessment schedules serve a number of purposes including ensuring:

- Assessment of learners at appropriate points in the programme
- Good communications so that key assessment dates and assignment deadlines are clear to both learners and assessors
- Learners are not overloaded by receiving too many assessments at the same time
- Over-assessment is not occurring.

Assessment scheduling is part of the role of the Course Co-ordinator and is mapped out by the Course Co-ordinator to ensure that learners have due notice of assessments and a reasonable and practical assessment load. This is included in Teagasc's Internal Validation process.

Learner feedback and rationale for assessment

At induction, assessment and achievement of learning outcomes is addressed. Learners are introduced to the concept of achieving learning outcomes and how this is established. Module specifications are available to each learner. The learner can approach their mentor at any time to seek clarification on assessments and the assessment process. Results are provided through

Teagasc's learner portal as part of summative assessment. Verbal or written feedback may also be provided to learners through their assessors or mentors in cases where the particular assessment lends itself to formative assessment such as skills assessment.

Assessment methodology review and periodic review of assessment procedures

End of course procedures serve to inform review of assessment methodology and assessment procedures.

- Independent Authenticator reports can make comment on course administration and assessment procedures in place.
- Anonymous learner surveys are carried out at the end of each course seek feedback on course provision and organisation of courses. Learners are invited to comment and give feedback on assessments.
- Survey responses are reviewed by the Head of Education and the Head of CDSU. Survey results are summarised and presented to line managers and Course Co-ordinators. A summary of survey findings is presented to the Teagasc Authority by the Head of Education, and the Academic Council. In addition, staff provide feedback to CDSU at the culmination of every course, at in-service training and scheduled meetings.

Teagasc Learner Assessment Review and Appeals Process

There is a system of review and appeal (covered in Chapter 5, Section 5.1) for learners unhappy with their assessment results. Learners are encouraged to regularly check their results on Teagasc's learner portal, and to raise queries with their assessor. Where it is not possible to resolve an issue, the appeal can be escalated.

Chapter 7 Supports for Learners

This Chapter describes the learner support and outlines pastoral care and access to services for learners on Teagasc courses.

7.1 Supports for Learners

Teagasc provides a learning environment that delivers a positive learning experience which enables the learner to successfully complete their chosen programme and develop as a person. To this end Teagasc provides:

- Support for all learners
- Courses of the highest quality delivered with the learner in mind
- An environment that supports and stimulates learning
- Dedicated learning materials including a modular-based series of workbooks
- Skilled, qualified and supportive staff
- A healthy and safe learning environment
- Skills demonstration resources including machinery, livestock, crops and enterprise specific faculties including stables, glasshouses, gardens and farm buildings
- Access to *Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)*
- Accurate information about all programmes
- Fair and consistent enforcement of rules and regulations
- An Access, Transfer and Progression Policy (ATP) which provides equal access opportunities to all potential learners.
- An ethos of dignity and respect
- Reasonable accommodation and dedicated staff for learners with recognised disabilities
- A learner mentoring system
- A dedicated Student Assistance Programme (SAP) for full-time students
- A Teagasc student maintenance grant scheme.

Learning Resources

Learners on Teagasc programmes have access to a comprehensive series of workbooks and other resource materials. All learning resources and learner supports are responsive to the needs to the programme being taught. Learning resources in the most part are developed by the CDSU, in order to facilitate a standardised approach to teaching and learning, with oversight from the Academic Council and its committees.

Learners have access to the latest research findings from Teagasc research centres. Field trips and attendances at research open days form part of Teagasc training programmes.

Promoting the Range of Available Resources and Services

Learners are informed of the range of resources and services available to them through the following means:

- Teagasc Prospectus
- Learner Handbook
- Quality Assurance Manual
- Teagasc Website
- College Open Days
- Contact with management at colleges or training centres
- Engagement with Course Co-ordinators, mentors or an Access Officer

Through in-service training Teagasc staff are instructed in providing assistance to learners and the public at large.

Supports for Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties

Teagasc is an equal opportunities organisation and welcomes applications from learners with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLDs). SLD refers to a difference, challenge or difficulty people have with particular aspects of learning. SLD therefore is an umbrella term and encompasses but is not necessarily limited to:

- Physical disability
- Learning difficulty
- Mental health
- Disorders
- On-going illnesses
- Neurological conditions

Teagasc has a National Learning Support Specialist, who leads and implements Teagasc's *Learning Support Policy* including the development of learner support and access policies. They act as a specialist support for Teagasc education staff and Access Officers and provide in-service training for tutors in the areas of facilitating learning and supportive teaching methods.

Teagasc has an Access Officer at each college and regional centre. The Access Officer arranges for and co-ordinates the provision of assistance and guidance to learners with specific learning difficulties. The duties of an Access Officer include advising potential applicants on Teagasc training programmes, carrying out needs assessments, providing supports to, and monitoring the performance of learners with specific learning difficulties.

Teagasc is committed to supporting all learners within their learning environment using an integrated approach. Figure 7.1 shows the Teagasc Learning Support Pyramid, which highlights the different levels of support available to learners depending on their personal circumstances and supporting medical documentation.

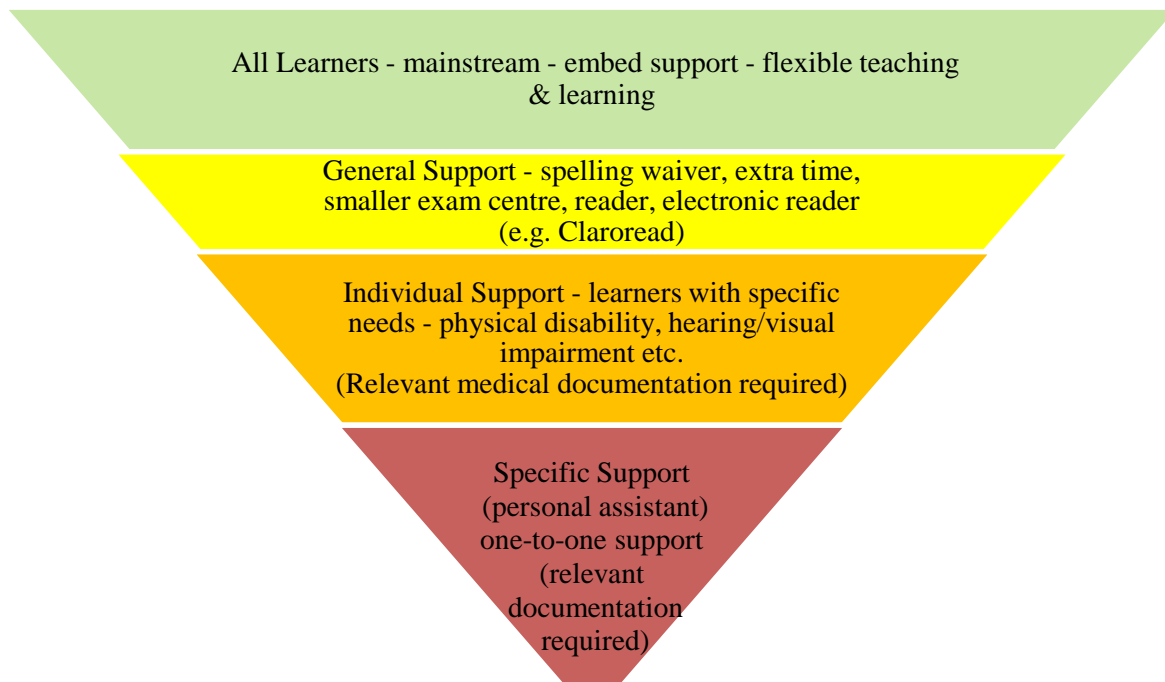


Figure 7.1 Teagasc Learning Support Pyramid

An integrated approach from the perspective of the learner

Teagasc Application Procedures

The following procedures are in place to support the learner both at entry and when undertaking Teagasc education programmes:

- Support with the applications procedure
- Right to appeal a decision regarding entry onto a Teagasc Programme
- Needs assessment meeting with an Access Officer
- Site and facility assessment (if applicable)
- Development of Learner Support Plan
- Review and course exit meeting.

The Teagasc application procedure employs a positive disclosure approach. Disclosure is defined as an applicant informing relevant Teagasc personnel about a disability or specific learning difficulty. There is no legal obligation on individuals to disclose that they have a disability or learning difficulty and some may choose not to do so. Disclosure is not a barrier to entry.

Teagasc seeks to create a supportive environment which encourages disclosure with a supportive response. Disclosure is welcomed so that the appropriate supports may be provided to create a suitable learning environment for all learners.

Staff involved in the Teagasc Application Procedure

Staff title	Description of role in context of application procedure
Administration staff	Staff charged with course administration duties such as managing applications, receipting money, answering and fielding queries
Access Officer	Staff trained specifically in learner support and Teagasc learner support procedures

When application forms are returned to each centre, all application forms are screened by administration staff and/or the Access Officer for applicants who have declared a requirement for learning support.

Needs Assessment Meeting with an Access Officer

On accepting an offer, applicants who have declared a requirement for learning support will be contacted by the Access Officer. The Access Officer makes appointments to meet all learners who have disclosed a disability or specific learning difficulty prior to the beginning of the course. This meeting allows the centre to prepare in advance, and for a Learning Support Plan to be developed to facilitate learning.

The meeting is an informal discussion with the Access Officer, focussing on:

- Personal learning needs and supports previously available to the learner
- Supports that will be available when undertaking training with Teagasc
- Additional or specific supports required by the learner to enable the learner to complete the programme
- Reasonable accommodation available at all Teagasc centres
- Gaps between specific requirements and reasonable accommodation
- Solutions to identified gaps.

All medical documentation or psychological reports which are received by Teagasc remain confidential and are not distributed. Using the information provided, a personal learning support plan is developed by the Access Officer together with the learner. The support plan is then signed off by the Access Officer and the learner.

During the discussion the Access Officer will outline the course content, including the length of classes/practical sessions, physical tasks involved in the course, and the practical learning period if applicable. The discussion will also address any anxiety that the learner may have about the course. The previous learning experiences, highlighting in particular what has helped learning in the past, and ways in which the learner can best learn will be discussed.

Site and Facilities Assessment

Issues of consideration include the physical environment which can present many challenges to learners, especially those with disabilities. Teagasc is committed within the limit of its resources to facilitate access to all relevant buildings and to ensure full participation within the educational environment. A site and facilities assessment is carried out by the National Learning Support Specialist, Access Officer and College Principal/Course Co-ordinator to identify potential areas of risk. The site is then assessed a second time with the learner present.

The information gathered during this process facilitates the development of a Learner Support Plan. Site assessments take place on benchmark farms, host units or other locations utilised as part of the training programme. This is to ensure all appropriate and necessary resources and facilities are available.

Personal Learning Support Plan

Following the initial meeting with the learner and the completion of the learner needs and site assessment an appropriate personalised learning support plan is developed. Following the development of the personal learning support plan, information about disabilities or specific learning difficulties will only be circulated among appropriate staff and only at a level of detail necessary to ensure the learner's learning requirements are met. The learner receives a copy of the learning support plan.

The provision of supports required by the learner is co-ordinated by the Access Officer and Course Co-ordinator. The Access Officer and Course Co-ordinator are supported by the Learning Support Specialist.

Scheduled Review Meeting

A review date is agreed after the first meeting. This serves to monitor progress and to highlight issues the learner may be experiencing during the programme. Learners are encouraged to provide feedback of any problems being experienced so these can be addressed quickly. Learners may be encouraged to participate in the development of strategies to resolve such difficulties. The review meeting also reminds learners of relevant supports available to them. It is the responsibility of the learner to ensure that he/she attends this review meeting.

Copies of the initial assessment interview notes, Personalised Learning Support Plan and other supporting documentation are retained for independent authentication purposes.

Networking

In order to facilitate networking among Access Officers and support staff, meetings are held twice per year to discuss learner demographic and programme demands. Continuous professional development and training days are also provided to Access Officers and support staff. This facilitates best practice, standardised procedures and facilitates discussion on Teagasc policies and procedures and relevant changes in legislation.

Promoting Learner Supports

Teagasc actively promotes learning resources and supports available to learners. A number of means are used which include the Teagasc Prospectus, Learner Handbook and the Teagasc website. Information is made available at open days and through direct contact with Access Officers or other staff.

Benchmarking Learner Resources and Supports

Teagasc holds membership with external agencies including AHEAD (the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) and NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) which help to ensure learner resources and supports are benchmarked against current standards and best practice. Teagasc is also involved in consultation with external bodies such as:

- Education Training Boards
- NCBI (National Council for the Blind of Ireland)
- Irish Wheelchair Association
- Dyslexia Association of Ireland
- Irish Deaf Society
- NALA
- AHEAD.

Consultation with these external networks informs Teagasc policies and procedures, and provides guidance on how learner support requirements can be met. Specific advice on supporting individual learners can be obtained, and Teagasc can refer learners to the support service offered by these agencies.

Non-accredited Programme for Young Trained Farmer Status

Teagasc offers a non-accredited programme for learners with specific learning difficulties (physical or intellectual) which is recognised by DAFM and Revenue as meeting the minimum training for Young Trained Farmer status. This accommodates learners who cannot meet the standards of accredited awards. On successful completion of this Programme, the Head of Teagasc Education issues a confirmation letter to the learner. The letter is recognised by both DAFM and Revenue. In this way the learner is not disadvantaged in applying for various supports and benefits available to young farmers.

There are precise controls on access into this programme to ensure that learners participating have a genuine need of Young Trained Farmer recognition, and that they cannot meet it by any other means.

Feedback on Application Process

Learners are surveyed at the application stage of a programme in order for relevant learner resources and supports to be available and in place at the beginning of a programme. During the programme review meetings with mentors allow the opportunity for learners to give feedback and voice their opinions with regard to delivery, assessments, resources and supports.

Annual Learner Satisfaction Surveys

Anonymous learner surveys are carried out at the beginning, during and at the end of each course which seek feedback on course provision and organisation of courses. Surveys pertaining to a centre or college are reviewed and acted on locally. Survey outcomes are also reviewed by the Head of Education and the Head of the Survey. Composite results are also presented to the Teagasc Academic Council, Teagasc SMG, Teagasc Authority Advisory and Education Committee and The Teagasc Education Forum by the Head of Education. Results from these surveys help in the formulation of business planning objectives and feed into the review of assessment design, criteria and implementation procedures.

Learners are also involved in sessions where key information is gathered and feeds into review and development of teaching and learning resources.

7.2 Pastoral Care

Pastoral care refers to the emotional and personal support of the general wellbeing of learners. Teagasc recognises that the needs and expectations of learners including international learners may vary or change from the time of course application to graduation. Learners can at any stage of a programme raise issues with the Course Co-ordinator, assigned mentor or an Access Officer. To assist in the development of inter- and intra-personal skills Teagasc ensure the following are provided to learners:

- Course induction
- Learner Handbook
- An assigned mentor as necessary
- Access Officer support
- Blended Learning Platform.

All applicants are provided with information on course charges. In addition, international applicants are provided with up-to-date information on programme content, study, English language requirement, accommodation and subsistence costs.

Teagasc as an equal opportunities organisation encourages and supports the integration of all learners in to the learner body. For non-native English speakers, language supports are provided in so far as is reasonable. Non-native English speakers who are applicants for Teagasc programmes are expected to have a minimum level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Dedicated Student Assistance Programme

Teagasc has a dedicated Student Assistance Programme in place which makes counselling and information available to full-time learners. The Teagasc Learner Assistance Programme is a free, confidential service that provides access to a team of counsellors and experts, experienced in personal and college related issues. The service provides learners with emotional and practical support on a range of issues which and provide access to:

- Support and counselling services
- Health information
- Legal assistance
- Financial information
- Consumer information
- Career guidance
- Life coaching
- Mediation information.

Learners can talk to a counsellor or advisor through a telephone helpline at any time (24/7). Information can be accessed online and by using a dedicated app. Support for learners who are non-Irish nationals and their families is also provided. Face-to-face meetings with a counsellor, solicitor, financial advisor or life coach can be arranged free of charge as they are part of the service provided.

7.3 Access to Services

Information and Computing Services

Learners have access to secure information technology services. Online resources are provided to learners through a virtual learning environment (Moodle) and through local shared drives in each college or centre.

Blended Learning Support

For blended and remote delivery and assessment, Teagasc provides learners with the following academic and non-academic supports in the virtual environment:

- Academic support – this comes in the form of learning support and reasonable accommodations including but not limited to: the use of readers and scribes, extra time allowance, subtitles on class videos, assistive technologies, one-to-one tutoring, provision of additional study materials, revision and practice online quizzes and Q&A forums on Moodle. The provision of essential equipment such as laptops and relevant software programmes are also provided through schemes such as the Laptop Loan Scheme or locally by the Teagasc Training Unit to learners meeting eligibility criteria involved.
- Non-academic support – this comes in the form of IT support for issues surrounding poor broadband connectivity, issues around accessing classes and online exams and assessments, resetting of passwords and issues with uploading assignments.

Learner Support Services

Both academic and non-academic learner support services are provided to all learners on Teagasc programmes. These include but are not limited to:

- Support from Access Officers/support staff – tutors
- Learner mentoring as necessary
- Learner Handbook
- Induction days
- Career guidance
- Student Assist Programme – professional counselling and advice service
- Teagasc maintenance grant.

Administrative Services

Administrative services are available in each college and centre to learners. These include access to photocopiers, printers, computers and Wi-Fi services. Clerical and administrative staff are also available in each college and centre and provide assistance to learners where required.

Premises Servicing and Maintenance Services

Each premises used for the delivery of Teagasc Education programmes is managed locally. Buildings, farm buildings and other facilities are maintained to a high and safe standard, and are inspected regularly.

Learner Representation

Teagasc/private college and regional education centres have a learner representative body. This body works in partnership with the college/centre management and staff for the benefit of all involved in the programme. The purpose is to build relationships and provide a forum for discussion with the aim of enhancing the learner experience for all. Learners from all courses at a college/centre will be represented. A schedule of formal meetings is managed by the College Principal or Course Co-ordinator where topics including teaching, assessments, learner support, work experience, policies and facilities can be discussed. Individual learner concerns can also be raised through this process. Members from learner representative bodies are eligible to be elected to the Academic Council and committees.

Guidance

All applicants are provided with information on the programme content, how to make an application, the award(s) associated with the programme, progression and career pathways. Information is made available through the Teagasc public website and Course Prospectus.

Through consultation with Teagasc staff and through the Teagasc Learner Handbook, learners are provided with details on:

- Careers Events
- Higher Options – Progression Routes
- Student Maintenance Grants
- Current and new Agricultural Schemes.

Chapter 8 Information and Data Management

This Chapter outlines the Information and Data Management systems in Teagasc that are relevant to the learner.

8.1 Information Systems

The ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Department in Teagasc is responsible for the provision and maintenance of all ICT-related hardware and software and the security of, and access to, data and network resources. It works with the various business units within Teagasc to design, build and maintain ICT systems which facilitate and adds value to the work of these units including Teagasc Education. An example of this is Quercus (Teagasc's Learner Management System) which Teagasc Education utilises, but Teagasc oversees the system management of.

An ICT Committee is responsible for the consideration and approval of ICT Strategy, business plans, policies and projects. It has an approved set of ICT principles which act as a guide to how ICT Services are delivered.

Representatives of Teagasc Education sit on the ICT Committee to represent education interests at the committee meetings and to relay information from these meetings to Teagasc Education managers.

The Teagasc ICT Department has an ICT Service Catalogue, which is available to Teagasc staff via T-Net (Teagasc's intranet). It sets out the services that are delivered either entirely or in part by the Teagasc ICT Department. It describes the services, how to access them and the levels of service provided (i.e. how quickly access can be provided, the times programmes are available etc.). An ICT service helpdesk is also provided to staff.

ICT procurement in Teagasc aligns with the principles of investment across the public sector. All investments in ICT services must be justified and have a business requirement. Business requirements are approved by Heads of Department, e.g. Head of Education and ultimately by the Head of ICT. Provision of new equipment or software is contingent upon a budget being available from the Teagasc ICT budget.

ICT Department Profiles

Title	Responsibilities
Head of ICT	Oversees Teagasc ICT
ICT Technical Services Manager	Design, build, rollout, maintenance and support of all physical ICT infrastructure including cabling, servers, networks, communications equipment up to, but excluding the PC
Applications Architect	Design, build, implementation, maintenance and support of all Application Systems
Service Delivery Manager	Provision of an ICT service desk, technical and user support together with responsibility for PCs and other end-user equipment
ICT Security/Continuity Specialist	Development, maintenance and implementation of an ICT Continuity Plan and continuous improvement of the ICT security policies, procedures and initiatives
Technical Analyst	Supports infrastructure, servers and storage
Network Manager	Oversees the Teagasc Network and its performance
ICT Administrator – Telephony	Support of all telephony
Applications Analysts	Support Teagasc applications
Service Delivery	Liaise with staff and suppliers

In addition to providing ICT services to Teagasc staff, the ICT Department manages the provision of services to learners in Teagasc colleges and centres, and the extension of certain facilities to staff and learners at Teagasc supported private partner colleges.

Teagasc colleges and centres are equipped with personal computer hardware and associated software to meet the needs of learners. Learners have access to computer laboratories for individual and group work. Teagasc-developed software tools such as the eProfit Monitor, Cost Control Planner, PastureBase and NMP Calculator are made available to learners. These computer resources are serviced, protected and supported by the ICT Department, the ICT Services desk, and nominated local staff.

Complaints / Suggestions

The Teagasc ICT service desk is an outsourced service supporting ICT requests and issues. The service desk is how Teagasc staff access ICT services. For clarity, service desk, services are categorised as follows:

Service Category	Description
Business systems	Business systems such as Integra, CRMS, RMIS, HR system, T-Net etc.
Collaboration	E-mail, video conferencing and voice conferencing
Computers	Desktop PCs, laptops
Desktop software	Desktop software – a list of the desktop software provided, what it does, how to get it and who are the experts in using it
ICT support	Support for ICT systems and facilities. It includes the Service Desk and support engineers either on site or sent out to deal with a specific issue
Media services	Scanning and imaging services
Network and data	Internet access, data storage, access to servers and data network, remote access to the network, 3G cards
Telephony	Mobile phones, smart phones, land lines
Printing	Printers and printing
Security	Security policies and information, user set-up for access to network and systems

8.2 Learner Management System

Quercus (Teagasc's Learner Management System) is a platform used to manage learner application, records, results, and exports to QQI.

It is an external cloud-hosted application that handles system administration, software upgrades, support and security. The system is configurable by the Teagasc National Education Administrator and CDSU staff, in conjunction with and supported by the Teagasc ICT Department. The software provider has a support hub which deals with queries and issues which arise.

Applicants for Teagasc courses can access the system through the Teagasc public website, make an application, send a query, accept offers, and pay fees. Registered learners can access the learner portal to view their fee status and view the results of assessments they have completed.

The system produces reports to manage individual learner records, group reports, quality assurance reports, and course administration. It also provides up-to-date information for planning and national administration of Teagasc programmes. The system is 'organisation' based so that colleges and centres can access their own learners only. Within each centre, access is role based, so staff can only access information that they are required to.

Quercus supports internal verification of assessment results at colleges and centres and it allows the Independent Authenticator to oversee assessment results for independent authentication, assessment appeals, moderation, results export to QQI. Quercus in common with every other software system in Teagasc must comply with Teagasc ICT policies and standards, particularly in the area of security. Staff are guided on best practice when using Quercus to protect data security and comply with GDPR.

Records relating to summative assessment results are retained for the purpose of providing information to learner, quality assurance, and access, transfer and progression. The level of retained data is adequate to issue a Europass Diploma Supplement.

8.3 Customer Management Information System

Learner information is normally managed on the learner management system (Quercus) as described in Section 8.2. Teagasc has a Customer Relationship Management System (CRMS) mainly used for advisory services.

Teagasc staff have access to an internal document management system (DMS) on SharePoint. The DMS gives staff a secure facility to store and protect documents relating to policies and procedures, programme administration, delivery and assessments. The DMS is housed inside the Teagasc network. Access is by invitation only, with staff having the appropriate level of access depending on their role. Access for private colleges is facilitated as required, with staff members in administration or management roles having DMS access at the appropriate level. Access to data on DMS is only provided to staff who need these data to perform their role, and users cannot access data relating to other centres. This system is used by Teagasc Education to securely manage document storage sharing on a range of administration activities.

8.4 Information for Further Planning

Quercus, Teagasc's learner management system produces reports relating to Teagasc education provision, delivery and completion. These reports are reviewed at least annually, and are analysed for trends and unexpected, or out of the norm data. In addition, application rates to programmes, application uptake, learner profiles, learner retention, learner academic performance outcomes and requests for learner support are also monitored so that provision can be made to meet learner needs. The Head of Education, Head of CDSU and the National Authentication and Standards Specialist (NASS) direct the collection of information and performance data assisted in this task by the Teagasc Education Quality and Results Committee. The Academic Council and its committees, apart from an oversight role in reviewing data outcomes, also have a role in proposing the adoption of additional data collection activities and performance indicators. Actions are implemented through business planning processes. Feedback from learners and staff are included in this process.

Teagasc Staff Intranet

Teagasc has a staff intranet (called T-Net) which is used to communicate with staff on current versions of documents such as:

- Course information and administration
- Current versions module specifications, course memoranda and supporting resources
- Policies and procedures
- Teaching and learning links and digital technology links
- Quality assurance documentation
- Learner support
- Recognition of prior learning and award equivalence
- User guides for topics such as Quercus and Moodle
- Newsletters.

8.5 Learner Outcomes

Learner performance outcomes, course completion and retention rates are monitored at college or centre level and at Teagasc Education Programme level.

At Education Programme level completion rates of learners are monitored by the Head of CDSU and the National Authentication and Standards Specialist and provided to the Teagasc Head of Education. The Teagasc Academic Council and its committees, Teagasc senior management and the Teagasc Authority and the Teagasc Education Forum are provided with composite learner outcome reports and inform business planning processes. Expected completion rates are based on historical data. Significant deviations from expected completion rates are investigated at the instigation of the Head of Education and/or at the behest of Teagasc education governance bodies.

8.6 Records Maintenance and Retention

Due to the nature of Teagasc's National remit, where qualifications impact on Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Schemes and initiatives of the Irish Revenue Commissioners, Teagasc retains the minimum data required indefinitely. Typically, these data are name, address, date of birth, PPSN, details of the course attended (location, date, modules taken), and exam results.

Hard copies of learner assessment materials (exam scripts, assignments and skills checklists) are retained until post certification.

8.7 Data Protection

Teagasc takes very seriously its responsibility to secure and protect as required data belonging to its learners, clients or partner institutions. Each Teagasc programme area is required to maintain a data protection management register.

Teagasc has a number of policies designed to support the protection of personal data. Teagasc's Data Privacy Notice summarises Teagasc's commitment to data protection personal rights under our policies. Teagasc data protection principles outline Teagasc commitment to ensure data are:

- Processed lawfully, fairly and transparently
- Collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed (scientific research exception)
- Adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary
- Accurate and kept up to date (erased/rectified without delay)
- Kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary
- Processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data.

More detail is available on <https://www.teagasc.ie/about/corporate-responsibility/data-protection/>

Teagasc data protection documents include a Data Privacy Notice, and staff policies including:

- Data Protection Policy
- Data Protection Impact Assessment Policy
- Data Breach Management Policy
- Data Subject Request Policy
- Record Management Policy (covering policy on personal data retention)
- ICT Data backup policy.

Data Protection Officer

Teagasc complies with GDPR requirements. The rights of an individual are set out in Teagasc's Data Privacy Policy. Requests for information must be made in writing to Data Protection Officer, Teagasc, Oak Park, Carlow, R93 XE12, or by e-mail to dpo@teagasc.ie.

Staff Training in GDPR

Existing Teagasc staff members have undertaken webinar-based training in General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which provides practical guidance on GDPR implementation. Staff also receive on-going GDPR updates from Teagasc's Data Protection Officer. GDPR compliance and management is central to digital and hard copy records.

Protection of Assessment Material

ICT systems have an integral role in the protection of the integrity of the assessment process. This (as mentioned above) takes place via secure storage and access and printing of assessment documents and results.

Teagasc uses Moodle as a blended learning platform. Moodle has the ability to manage assessment security, whether through secure access or through features such as the randomisation of multiple-choice questions.

Biometric Data

In some Teagasc colleges attendance is monitored through biometric data (fingerprinting). These data are kept in a secure manner, and only used for this designated purpose in line with the applicable data protection policy and data protection impact assessment.

8.8 Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act came into force on 14 October 2014. It provides for the commitments in relation to freedom of information contained in the Programme for Government by removing the main substantive restrictions in access to official information introduced in 2003, extending FOI to all public bodies unless specifically exempt in whole or in part and providing a framework for the extension of FOI to non-public bodies in receipt of significant funding from the Exchequer. Teagasc complies with the FOI Act and follows the FOI Code of Practice. <https://foi.gov.ie/code-of-practice/#>

As required by legislation, Teagasc pre-empts the need for FOI requests by preparing and furnishing publication schemes including details about Teagasc, its services, its decision-making processes for major policy proposals, financial information, procurement information and an FOI Disclosure Log.

The requirements of the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 also apply to Teagasc. The Data Protection Acts protect the privacy of individuals whose personal data are being processed. Personal data comprise information relating to a living individual who can be identified from that data, or in conjunction with other information held.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2014

The FOI Act 2014 provides that from the effective date, every person has the following legal rights:

- The right to access official records held by Government Departments and all public bodies that conform to the provisions of Section 6 of the Act;
- The right to have personal information held on them corrected or updated where such information is incomplete, incorrect or misleading; and
- The right to be given reasons for decisions taken by public bodies that affect them.

Regulations provide that parents, guardians and next-of-kin may apply to exercise these rights in certain circumstances.

The Act requires public bodies to respond to requests from the public for information they hold. In most cases, public bodies must give their decision on a request within 4 weeks of receiving it. A week is defined in the Act to mean 5 consecutive weekdays, excluding specified days. Requests may also be refused if they are deemed too voluminous, unclear or exempt from release where certain types of information in some circumstances are set out in the Act, but Teagasc is obliged to assist the requester in trying to overcome this. More detail is available on <https://www.teagasc.ie/about/corporate-responsibility/freedom-of-information/>

FOI Appeals

Appeals on any decision issued by Teagasc can be made by writing to the Freedom of Information Unit in Teagasc seeking an Internal Review of the matter. Appeals should be made within 4 weeks from the date of response. Appeals involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of staff of Teagasc and a decision will be communicated within 3 weeks. If a person wishes to further appeal any decision of the Internal Review by Teagasc an appeal can be lodged within 6 months by writing to the Office of the Information Commissioner:

The Information Commissioner,
18 Lower Leeson Street,
Dublin 2.

E-mail: info@oic.gov.ie

Further information on FOI is also available from www.foi.gov.ie and www.oic.gov.ie.

Chapter 9 Public Information and Communication

This chapter outlines Teagasc's approach to public information and communication.

The statutory remit of Teagasc extends across, research, advisory and education. Under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act 1988 which established Teagasc, Teagasc is mandated "*To obtain and make available to the agricultural industry the scientific and practical information in relation to agriculture required by it*".

Dissemination of science-based information and knowledge transfer to the land and food sectors are core activities of Teagasc. Teagasc aims to publish clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and easily accessible information.

Teagasc publishes a monthly newsletter suite, *Teagasc Advisory Newsletters*; a bimonthly farming magazine, *Today's Farm*; a quarterly research publication, *T Research*; and a *Teagasc Annual Report*.

In addition, Teagasc publishes on an on-going basis: research reports, conference proceedings, farming press articles and other material. Teagasc press releases are produced on an almost daily basis, and farm management tips are published in many local newspapers.

Teagasc also organises a comprehensive of range of dissemination and knowledge events through conferences/seminars, research open days, workshops, farm walks and knowledge group/discussion group meetings.

Teagasc's website (www.teagasc.ie) and Teagasc's social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and weblogs and podcasts) are key tools in Teagasc information dissemination.

Teagasc national publications are overseen and controlled by Teagasc's Public Relations Department which also issues press releases, and manages public website content on Teagasc's social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and blogs).

9.1 Public Information

Teagasc Education Publication and Communication Channels

The information channels listed above are directed at the broader spectrum of stakeholders. Focussed Teagasc information and communication channels regarding Teagasc education programmes and course include:

- Teagasc Course Prospectus (annual)
- Teagasc website (www.teagasc.ie) education webpages and social media platforms
- Agriculture colleges' brochures
- Teagasc Careers booklets
- Teagasc college course and career day
- Teagasc events/non-Teagasc events
- Press releases/press articles/course and online career portals
- Host farmer meetings
- Quercus learner management system online application function

- Teagasc ConnectEd.

Teagasc Course Prospectus

Teagasc publishes a Course Prospectus annually. A copy of the Course Prospectus is provided to the majority of second level schools nationally. The Prospectus is made available to the public at Teagasc education events and other education events. The Prospectus provides detail on all Teagasc courses validated by QQI. Details include course title, education level, relevant QQI award; aims and content; access, transfer and progression; application process, delivery locations and Teagasc Education contact details. Information on potential career paths and graduate profiles are provided. The Prospectus also provides details of higher education courses in which Teagasc is involved. Summary details of Teagasc short-duration and continuous professional development courses for the land and food sectors are also provided.

Development and editing of the Teagasc Course Prospectus is conducted by a designated member(s) of the Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU) and a designated Teagasc education Administrative Officer in consultation with the Teagasc Public Relations Department and Teagasc education units. Final review and approval are conducted by the Head of Teagasc CDSU/Head of Teagasc Education Programme. The Prospectus is published through the Teagasc Public Relations Department.

Teagasc public website education pages

The Teagasc public website www.teagasc.ie has webpages devoted to education programmes.

The website provides details on:

- Teagasc education course details drawn from the Teagasc Course Prospectus
- Course charges information
- Link to course applications online (see Quercus system below)
- Teagasc student maintenance grant details/application form
- Agricultural colleges overview
- Links to Teagasc's education partners
- Contact person details.

Teagasc www.teagasc.ie education webpage content is developed/updated by designated Teagasc CDSU staff and designated Teagasc education administrative staff and approved by the Teagasc Head of CDSU/Teagasc Head of Education. Approved edits/updates to the Teagasc education webpages can only be uploaded by the designated Teagasc webmaster.

Agriculture colleges' brochures

Individual Teagasc colleges may prepare local course brochures. These brochures provide additional detail on college facilities, activities, farm enterprises and course details. These brochures are distributed at college events/Teagasc events and at non-Teagasc course and career events. College brochures are approved by the relevant College Principal.

Teagasc Careers Booklets

Teagasc publishes careers booklets for the land-based sector. These booklets provide guidance on potential role profiles and the indicative skillsets required for the roles and the recommended qualifications paths.

These publications are developed as necessary by internal Teagasc project working groups with final review and approval by the Teagasc Head of Education prior to publication by the Teagasc PR Dept.

Teagasc college course and career days / Teagasc events / non-Teagasc events

Each Teagasc college and Teagasc supported private college host *in situ* autumn and spring course and career days for second level school pupils, teachers, parents and other interested parties. These events provide information about course and career paths, entry requirements and progression opportunities, application processes and course charges, college facilities, learner placement and other details. A course and careers event brochure is developed in advance of each academic year and circulated to most second level schools and published on www.teagasc.ie

In any given year Teagasc organises major national high-profile public events for the agri-food and land sectors. Typically, these events also provide information on Teagasc education programmes. Teagasc Education additionally exhibits at Higher Options and a range of specialised non-Teagasc course and career option events. It also exhibits at major land sector events such as the National Ploughing Championships.

Internal college course and career days' organisation and quality control are managed by internal college working groups under the supervision of the College Principal. The Teagasc national course and career day brochure is prepared by a designated Teagasc education administrative officer in conjunction with College Principals and Teagasc's Public Relations Dept. This brochure is approved by the Teagasc Head of Education. Teagasc Education exhibits content for major national Teagasc events and national non-Teagasc events and is overseen by the Teagasc Curriculum Development and Standards Unit and approved the Head of the CDSU unit.

Press releases / Press articles / Course and career online portals

Press releases and press articles regarding Teagasc Education programme information and activities are released on an occasional basis.

Education-focussed press releases are issued and approved by the Teagasc PR Department in consultation with the Head of Education.

Teagasc also provides information to Qualifax and www.careerportals.ie and <https://careersnews.ie>

Teagasc host meetings

Teagasc organises annual information and communication meetings for hosts who provide Practical Learning Periods to learners on their farms/units. A standardised meeting programme is prepared by the Teagasc National Practical Learning Period (PLP) Specialist and approved in advance by the Head of CDSU.

Quercus learner management system online application

Quercus is a web-based education management system that facilitates and guides online application to Teagasc courses. This system facilitates online applications for full-time Teagasc Level 5 and 6 courses and learner access to results.

Course application information uploaded to Quercus is approved by a designated Teagasc administrative officer in consultation with the Head of CDSU/Head of Education.

Teagasc ConnectEd

Teagasc ConnectEd provides businesses and rural professionals working with the agri-food sector structured access to Teagasc research, education, knowledge resources and online tools. ConnectEd activities are promoted dedicated webpages on the Teagasc site and web content associated brochures are approved by the Teagasc ConnectEd officer and Teagasc PR Dept.

Teagasc Lifelong Learning

Teagasc is developing its offering to farmers for continuous professional development that will integrate and streamline courses for farmers, growers and others. For each course listed/to be listed information on: course aims, content, target audience, delivery method, duration and accreditation details (if applicable) are provided.

Process control summary for Teagasc education publications and communications

The publishing of Teagasc Education course information and dissemination materials on a national basis is overseen, reviewed and approved by the Head of Curriculum Development and Standards and the Head of Teagasc Education Programme.

Where course information is published for an individual centre/college, material to be published is reviewed and approved by the local manager or his/her nominee.

9.2 Learner Information

The information and communication channels indicated Section 9.1 are also relevant to Teagasc learners. In addition, the following information is also available to learners:

- Teagasc Course Prospectus
- Protection of the Enrolled Learner (PEL)
- Teagasc Learner Handbook
- Teagasc quality assurance manual and Teagasc education policies
- Practical Learning Period information leaflet
- Teagasc Education Learner Records
- Teagasc Moodle/shared computer drives
- College/centre operational communications
- Postgraduate programme.

Teagasc Course Prospectus

The Teagasc Course Prospectus (see Section 9.1) is the overarching document in terms of providing information award information, awarding body, NFQ level, award type, access transfer and progression.

Protection of the Enrolled Learner (PEL)

Under the *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012* {Part 6, section 65 (1, 2, 3, 4)} providers are required, in the event that they should cease operation, to put place transfer arrangements to a similar programme or to refund fees. Under the Act, {Part 6, section 65 (5)}, Protection of Enrolled Learners does not apply to Teagasc as a publicly funded body.

Teagasc Learner Handbook

All enrollees to Teagasc programmes validated by QQI are provided with a Teagasc Learner Handbook. This handbook outlines:

- Learner rights and responsibilities
- Teagasc data protection statement
- Learner code of conduct and disciplinary processes
- Learner welfare and equality guidelines
- Customer charter and complaint procedures
- Health and safety and bio-security requirements
- Assessment Regulations for Teagasc – Programmes Leading to QQI Awards
- Access, Transfer, Progression and Higher Education Link Scheme summary
- Teagasc Student Maintenance Grant Scheme details
- Services for learners.

Core aspects of the handbook content are highlighted during formal course induction. Learners (or their guardians if learners are under 18 years of age) are required to sign off that they have read and understand their rights and responsibilities.

The handbook is developed/updated by a designated Teagasc education programme administrative officer in conjunction with education staff, the Teagasc Data Protection Officer and Teagasc Human Resources and Teagasc legal advisers (if and where necessary). The handbook is reviewed by the Head of CDSU with ultimate sign off by the Head of Teagasc Education. Feedback from relevant staff, the Academic Council and its committees are also taken on board. The handbook is published as a national template for Teagasc courses with colleges/education centres required to locally customise information/arrangements for issues such as learner safety. Local edits are approved by the College Principal/manager or a designated nominee.

Teagasc Quality Assurance Manual/Teagasc Education Policies

Teagasc policies that impact on Teagasc education activity are available to learners, and are available on the Teagasc public website.

Updating of the Teagasc Quality Assurance Manual and Teagasc education policies is initiated by the Head of CDSU with input and oversight the Teagasc Academic council and supporting committees.

Information Leaflet for Learners and Hosts Regarding 'Practical Learning Periods'

A Teagasc information leaflet regarding the details and operation of Practical Learning Periods (PLPs) is available to learners and to host units.

This information leaflet is prepared by the Teagasc National PLP Specialist in consultation with college practical learning co-ordinators and reviewed though the formal CDSU and College Principal meetings with final approval by the Head of CDSU/Head of Education.

Teagasc Education Learner Records

Quercus is a web-based education management system used to manage the application process and to record learner assessments results. Learners create an account on Quercus as part of the course application process. Learners need a user account and password to access information on Quercus.

Teagasc produces a record of education on Quercus for learners who participate on its QQI accredited programmes. This record is available to the learner/graduate to view through their learner account. Quercus provides information regarding enrolment year, course location and credits achieved and grades achieved. Courses on Quercus are set up by a dedicated Teagasc administrative officer. Learners are required to generate a password-protected user account to access information on Quercus.

Teagasc Moodle/Shared Computer Drives

Individual Course Co-ordinators may utilise a Moodle platform as necessary. Course Co-ordinators are responsible for the content uploaded on Moodle. Individual colleges may also operate shared computer drives that allow staff to upload course resource materials, assignment guidance notes and other relevant information.

College/Centre Operational Communications

Teagasc colleges/centres may also utilise text messages, e-mail, information boards and college social media platforms to support operational communications.

Postgraduate Programme

Teagasc, through collaboration with higher education institutions, provides a substantial number of postgraduate research opportunities at Teagasc centres through its Walsh Scholarship Programme. Information regarding the Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme is accessible through dedicated Teagasc webpages including:

- Details of the Walsh Scholarship Programme
- Walsh Scholarships Terms and Conditions (PDF)
- Guidelines for Walsh Scholarships Applicants

Publication of information regarding the Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme and the management of the Scholarship Programme application process is overseen by a dedicated Walsh Scholarship administrator. More detail is available in Chapter 10, Section 10.2.

9.3 Publication of Quality Assurance Evaluation Reports

Teagasc is committed to open and transparent quality assurance procedures within the bounds of practicability and confidentiality. In this regard, Teagasc publishes reports which provide an overview of quality assurance procedures, findings and area of focus.

Whole College Evaluation Reports

Whole College Evaluation of Teagasc colleges/Teagasc supported colleges have been conducted by an evaluation panel led by the Department of Education and Skills inspectorate, incorporating an external peer evaluation and an independent Teagasc evaluator. Reports have been published on the Department of Education and Skills website and on Teagasc's public website:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Whole-College-Evaluations-in-colleges-offering-Teagasc-courses/>

Follow-through inspections commenced in late 2019, to determine the extent to which a college has made progress on implementing key recommendations in a previous inspection report. The follow-through inspection reports will be published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills (www.education.ie).

Independent Authentication Reports

Teagasc internal quality assurance and Independent Authenticator reports are prepared on an individual college/centre basis and are reported to the local manager and the Head of CDSU. Composite summaries of independent authentication reports are presented to the Quality and Results Committee and the Academic Council.

Teagasc Education Performance Report

Teagasc Education prepares an annual *Education Performance Report* prepared for Teagasc senior management and the Teagasc Authority and the Teagasc Education Forum. This report covers:

- Full-time learner equivalents by college.
- Learner-to-staff ratio (LSR)
- Teacher contact hours
- Cost per learner
- Learner end of course satisfaction surveys
- Level 6 graduate – ‘5 years on’ survey
- Learner outcomes.

The Teagasc Academic Council also review key academic performance outcomes and has a role in advising Teagasc Education in regard to enhancing/benchmarking its performance measurement indicators.

Summary performance data from the above report are typically highlighted in the Teagasc Annual Report.

Teagasc Annual Report

The Teagasc Authority publishes an annual report on Teagasc’s activities and performance. Summary performance highlights are provided for education programmes.

<https://www.teagasc.ie/about/our-organisation/annual-reports/>

Chapter 10 Other Parties Involved in Education and Training

This chapter addresses Teagasc's relationship as an education provider with the broader education community.

10.1 Peer Relationships with the Broader Education and Training Community

Teagasc's primary education function is to provide accredited education and training to entrants to the land sector. This is delivered through Teagasc further education programmes, validated by QQI and leading to QQI awards at Levels 5 and 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Teagasc also provides short-duration accredited and non-accredited courses to the land sector.

In addition, Teagasc inputs into the delivery of higher education land sector undergraduate programmes of Irish Institutes of Technology having delegated authority to make QQI awards and Irish universities who are awarding bodies in their own right.

The higher education undergraduate programmes referred to are validated by the partner higher education institutions under the relevant QQI validation processes. The relevant higher education institution is responsible for quality assurance implementation and external authentication requirements applicable under the relevant QQI quality assurance guidelines and validation requirements.

Teagasc lists its partner higher education providers on www.teagasc.ie. The webpages provide summary information such as the higher education provider/awarding body, CAO course code and a web link to the courses section of the relevant higher education provider website. These details are also listed in the annual Teagasc Course Prospectus.

Teagasc's Research Directorate also operates a postgraduate education programme ('Walsh Scholarships') in conjunction with participating higher education institutions nationally and internationally at NFQ Levels 9 and 10. Comprehensive information is provided on www.teagasc.ie regarding the operational details of the programme and the education partners involved for given postgraduate projects. Again, the higher education institution is responsible to overseeing the quality assurance processes in line with their own policies and procedures. Teagasc would typically be involved in the design, funding application, project management, dissemination, and scientific publication of research projects. All partners work together to achieve the required objectives of all parties.

Teagasc has Memoranda of Understanding with a range of agri-food research, knowledge transfer and higher education institutions. Such Memoranda of Understanding assist the process of developing a shared understanding of what each party expects from any joint initiatives entered into. Such collaborations are also useful when it comes to recruiting external subject matter experts for programme review.

10.2 External Partnerships and Second Providers

Further Education

Teagasc-supported private colleges

The Teagasc further education delivery network is structured around seven colleges and 12 advisory regions. Of the seven colleges, three are Teagasc-supported private colleges.

Teagasc subvents the salary costs of college management, teachers and technicians and other designated staff and provides an operational grant to the private colleges. The three private colleges are not QQI accredited providers in their own right, but are incorporated within the QQI validation arrangements for Teagasc Level 5 and 6 programmes. In respect of Teagasc Level 5 and 6 education programme delivery, private colleges adhere to the same Teagasc programme implementation guidelines, QA management and external authentication procedures. Private college management and staff attend Teagasc education programme operational meetings and participate in Teagasc programme standardisation days, technical and pedagogic training events. Teagasc's operational arrangement with the three private agricultural colleges is governed by a formal service level agreement which details both operational aspects and quality assurance requirements. The incorporation of private agricultural colleges under the umbrella of publicly funded agricultural education by Teagasc, its predecessor ACOT and the Department of Agriculture is longstanding.

Farm Relief Services (FRS)

Teagasc offers a best practice in milking skills short-duration course leading to a Level 6 QQI component award in Milking Process Techniques (6N0723). This short-duration course is administered and delivered by Farm Relief Service staff with input from Teagasc staff and results verification and approval through Teagasc external authentication procedures. Currently in the region of 50 learners undertake this short-duration course annually. Teagasc quality assurance procedures are followed under the agreement in place between both parties in relation to this component award.

Private education contractors

Teagasc policy is to retain a sufficient full-time staff complement to deliver its education programme. Where staffing deficits occur, contractors may be used to deliver modules. The quality assurance procedures around contracting are expanded on in Chapter 2, Section 2.1. The procurement and operation of contracted services are subject to scrutiny and audit by the Teagasc Internal Auditor and the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General.

The Education Contractor Framework involves a public tender. The terms of the framework approved are by Teagasc Corporate Services and Teagasc Education with input from Teagasc Human Resources and Teagasc legal advisors. A contract management plan governs the operation of education contracting, which is overseen by a contract engagement risk management committee independent of Teagasc Education. Framework competitions and contractor approval are conducted at Teagasc National Education level. Colleges/centres are required to review/submit contracted hour requirements for their location annually, these requests are formally reviewed by the Head of Education and approved or modified as necessary. Local managers are provided with a contractor engagement manual/checklist. Centres and colleges are required to submit to the Head of Education a formal Contractor Performance report annually.

Other collaborations

Teagasc engages with a wide range of other parties in delivering its education and training programmes, with the intention of promoting recognition and confidence in Teagasc training (Table 10.1). These parties include among others:

Table 10.1 Indicating Collaboration Between Teagasc and Other Organisations in its Education and Training Provision

Organisation	Collaborative engagement/liaison
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	Quality assurance, programme validation and award accreditation across Teagasc Level 5 and 6 programmes
Department of Agriculture Food & Marine (DAFM)	Maintaining relevance of courses to land-based sector
Department of Education and Skills (DES)	Whole College Evaluation and best practice in teaching
Education and Training Boards (ETBI)	Liaison
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) network	Best practice process and support of recognition of prior learning in Teagasc education programmes
College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise in Northern Ireland (CAFRE)	Liaison with recognised land-based education and training organisations and providers internationally
Scottish Rural University College (SRUC)	
European Association of Vocational Education (EUROPEA)	
Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas (CECRA)	
Health and Safety Authority (HSA)	Joint initiatives (e.g.):
Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF)	
ESB	
Animal Health Ireland (AHI)	
Agri-Aware	
Macra na Feirme	
Irish Co-operative Society (ICOS),	

Other Parties Involved in Education and Training

Organisation	Collaborative engagement/liaison
meat/dairy/food industry	
Garda Síochána	
DAFM	
University College Galway (UCG)	
Financial/agri-services services sector/other	
Local Enterprise Office (LEO)	Liaison and promotion of Teagasc education and training programmes and short-duration courses to local organisations
Inland Fisheries Ireland	
SEAI, Leader companies	
Involvement in EU Research Projects	Involvement in Horizon 2020 EU research projects that have relevance to Education or Knowledge Transfer. Participation depends on the topic, and is usually part of a wider Teagasc team. Examples include AgriSpin and FairSHARE

The Teagasc ConnectED programme engages with rural professionals, financial institutions and others. The Teagasc Evolve programme is Teagasc's lifelong learning provision for farmers and others in the land sector.

Teagasc remit embraces education, research and knowledge transfer. Consequently, there is on-going interaction between Teagasc education, research and knowledge transfer (KT). There are significant Teagasc research projects located at a number of Teagasc colleges. Such research may be EU or industry funded. Teagasc KT specialists have significant interaction with Teagasc College and private agricultural college farms to ensure that the latest technologies and practices are used.

Higher Education Undergraduate Collaboration

Currently Teagasc has formal agreements for undergraduate delivery with the following:

- Institute of Technology Carlow (Teagasc have a very limited delivery involvement)
- Cork Institute of Technology
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Galway-Mayo Institutes of Technology
- Institute of Technology Tralee
- Limerick Institute of Technology
- Waterford Institute of Technology

Letterkenny Institute of Technology has an articulation agreement with Teagasc for the purposes of facilitating Teagasc learner progression. A formal collaborative agreement also exists with University College Dublin (UCD) in regards to Teagasc input to a Level 8 agricultural science programme in Dairy Business. Teagasc also delivers a Level 7 Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management that is awarded by UCD. Teagasc Moorepark and Teagasc Clonakilty Agricultural College partner with UCC in delivering a Level 8 agricultural science programme.

Higher education postgraduate collaboration

Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme

Teagasc funds a substantial postgraduate programme in conjunction with higher education institutions. The primary objective of this programme known as the 'Walsh Scholarships' is to enhance the scientific and technical capacity of the Irish agri-food sector and to increase the overall research and knowledge transfer capacity of Teagasc.

The programme is governed by the *Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Terms and Conditions* document which outlines the responsibilities of the Teagasc and partner education institution. The participating postgraduates are co-supervised by the HE provider and Teagasc.

Postgraduates are registered as learners of the academic partner institution. Their studies are governed by the quality assurance processes and procedures set by the academic institution for the award in question.

In addition to the supports and procedures of the academic institution, Teagasc has dedicated Walsh Scholarship Programme administration staff to oversee operational aspects of the programme. This is also a point of call for queries/issues/difficulties that may be raised by postgraduates.

Teagasc has also established a Walsh Scholarship Committee to review and act on issues common to postgraduates across Teagasc such as the provision of mental health awareness workshops. Teagasc also offers a student assistance programme to postgraduates at Teagasc centres.

While the majority of Scholarships relate to research projects, Teagasc in collaboration with University College Dublin offer a knowledge transfer strand to the Scholarship Programme that provides Masters (in the main) and PhD opportunities relating to Teagasc extension and education activities.

- Masters (MAgrSc) in Agricultural Innovation Support (MAIS)
- Masters (M.Agrs.) in Agricultural Extension (MEIS)

The aim of these programmes is to equip participants with the skills and knowledge to be effective in building their capacity for future roles in land sector advisory services, technical consultancy and education delivery. The participating postgraduates are registered by UCD who as the awarding body has responsibility for overall academic management and quality assurance implementation and adherence. Education-focused Walsh Scholarships have researched or are researching topics such as:

- Developing staff capacity
- Learner engagement, facilitation and teaching techniques
- The role of practical learning periods (placement) for Teagasc learners
- Continuous Professional Development needs in the land sector
- The use of digital technology to support delivery and assessment.

More detail is available via <https://www.teagasc.ie/about/research--innovation/postgraduate-scholarships/scholarship-vacancies/>

Teagasc/Fulbright Award

The Fulbright Commission's annual Awards Programme enables learners and scholars to undertake study, research or lecturing at a recognised college or institution in the United States. The Fulbright Programme has been widely recognised, since its inception in 1957, as the premier USA/world scientific and educational exchange programme.

Teagasc and the Fulbright Commission award on an annual basis two Walsh Scholarships with joint Fulbright–Teagasc scholarships for postgraduate study/research in the United States in respect of study or research in the fields of agriculture, food, forestry and environment.

Consultation with employers and industry

Teagasc through the nature of its research, knowledge transfer, farm advisory and education activities is in everyday contact with agri-food sector stakeholders including *circa* 40,000 farmer clients. Teagasc participates in many agri-food sector stakeholder fora that provide feedback and guidance on key issues facing the agri-food sector including human capital and future skill and competency needs.

Teagasc itself has established in the region of 16 formal stakeholder consultation groups covering almost all land sector enterprises that meet typically twice or more per year with a view to providing guidance to Teagasc on the needs of the land sector. The Teagasc Education and Training Forum is a key stakeholder consultation group and its membership (currently 16) comprises representatives from farm organisations (IFA, ICMSA, ICA, Macra na Feirme – one nominee each), practical learning host units (one nominee), DAFM (one nominee), QQI (one nominee), higher education sector nominees (IoTs and Universities, one nominee each), private agricultural college (one nominee), learner representative (one nominee), Teagasc regional advisory manager (one nominee) and Teagasc senior management (Head of Curriculum Development & Standards, Head of Education, Head of Knowledge Transfer). The Forum is chaired by an independent non-Teagasc chairperson, typically drawn from the wider education community. The Director of Teagasc attends Forum meetings at his/her discretion.

The role of the Teagasc Education and Training Forum (as outlined in the terms of reference) includes:

- The education and training needs of future farmers (including horticulturists) and adult farmers
- The further development of the full range of programmes required to meet future needs
- The delivery of the Education and Training programme
- The practical training requirements of learners including the selection and training of host/master farmers
- Linkages with appropriate Institutions in the development and delivery of programmes
- The on-going review of Teagasc's Education and Training programme.

Teagasc actively participates in Standards Review Groups (SRGs) for the review of QQI awards and led the most recent SRG for the review of QQI's Level 5 and 6 agricultural suites of awards. Teagasc conducts an annual series of consultation/briefing meetings for its practical learning host units.

Teagasc conducts a 'look back' survey of its Level 6 graduates 5 years on from their graduation. The look back survey explores how well the Teagasc programme equipped graduates for their career.

Teagasc Education Vision exercise

In 2018, Teagasc published its Teagasc Education Vision report. The Vision report was led by a steering group comprising land sector stakeholders with international participation from peer education institutions from Scotland, Denmark and the Netherlands. This Vision exercise involved a very substantial and wide-ranging stakeholder consultation exercise involving stakeholder submissions and the establishment of 11 dedicated working groups, meetings with individuals and organisations and consultation with practical learning host units. In the region of 500 people were consulted through various channels and consultation formats. The Vision exercise focussed on the education pathway, qualification requirements and capability need for those entering the land sector in the future.

10.3 External Panellists and Authenticators

The Teagasc Curriculum Development and Standards Unit (CDSU) manages independent authentication procedures and processes for Teagasc programmes accredited by QQI. Independent authentication of QQI accredited courses is led by the National Authentication and Standards Specialist who is dedicated to independent authentication, attached to the CDSU, and is independent of education delivery at colleges and centres.

The National Authentication and Standards Specialist post is filled through an internal Teagasc competitive process based on relevant knowledge of and experience in education delivery and quality assurance implementation appropriate to the formal job specification. The post is at a grade equivalent to college and regional advisory manager levels. Additionally, experienced frontline staff support the independent authentication process under supervision at selected centres/colleges other than their own location. A level of external authentication is also included in the annual Teagasc authentication plan thereby bringing an outside perspective.

Reporting directly to the Head of CDSU, the National Authentication and Standards Specialist monitors the start-up of courses nationally through internal validation processes. Course Co-ordinators flag key dates to the National Authentication and Standards Specialist, such as practical assessment days and the approaching end of a course. The National Authentication and Standards Specialist co-ordinates verification and monitoring activity focussing on perceived high-risk areas.

For processes such as programme validation, Teagasc engages with external industry and Education subject matter experts in the programme and component development process. This helps Teagasc to confirm the standard of level and achievement.

Chapter 11 Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Teagasc takes its responsibilities in terms of the quality of programme provision seriously, supporting these processes with regular internal and external programme evaluation, monitoring and review at both internal programme level and a cyclical (typically 5-year) basis through an independent Teagasc Programme Evaluation Unit. The purpose of monitoring in Teagasc is to ensure:

- QA processes continue to be fit for purpose
- Learner and public confidence in the Teagasc QA processes
- QA processes provide public assurance and accountability
- QA processes provide opportunities for reflection and improvement.

11.1 Provider-Owned Internal Review, Self-Evaluation and Monitoring

The Head of Teagasc Education, supported by the Head of CDSU and CDSU is charged with the internal review, self-evaluation and monitoring of Education programme, design, delivery and quality assurance processes. Teagasc Academic Council and committees, supported by the CDSU, provide an academic oversight function in regard to the internal review, self-evaluation and monitoring of Education programme design, delivery and quality assurance processes. Teagasc senior management and the Teagasc authority have an overarching oversight function in these areas. There are a number of internal processes that assist in regular evaluation, review and monitoring of programme delivery and the operation of quality assurance such as:

- The Teagasc business planning and risk management processes
- Consultation at organisation and programme level including:
 - College Principal meetings
 - College or centre local meetings
 - Teagasc Curriculum Development and Standards Unit meetings
 - Education Stakeholder meetings
 - Teagasc Authority Education and Advisory Committee meetings
 - Teagasc Education Forum
- Learner satisfaction surveys
 - A summary of results from satisfaction surveys plus other key performance indicators is presented to the Teagasc Authority on an annual basis
- Independent authentication reports from the National Authentication and Standards Specialist
- Monitoring activity by the Teagasc Evaluation Unit.

Any items that pose a risk to quality of programme design and delivery are addressed through processes such as the ones listed above.

Quality Assurance processes and procedures are updated on an on-going basis. The Head of CDSU, supported by relevant Academic Council committees monitor course delivery and

assessment. The Teagasc Evaluation Unit identify and target particular evaluation issues. The Evaluation Unit's activities are guided by the Evaluation Unit Steering Committee which typically meets on a quarterly basis.

Teagasc Evaluation Unit

The Teagasc Evaluation Unit was established in 2003 in response to recommendations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in a 1999 report on Performance Measurement in Teagasc.

The key role of the Evaluation Unit is to lead the development of an evaluation culture in Teagasc by preparing and implementing a schedule for the evaluation of programmes.

This typically involves undertaking or commissioning evaluation expert panel reviews or studies on the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the organisation's programmes and operations and by helping build evaluation capability within the organisation.

Reports carried out by the Evaluation Unit are published via <https://www.teagasc.ie/about/our-organisation/evaluation-reports/>.

The Evaluation Unit has three key objectives:

- *Assess economic benefits and achievement of targets* by undertaking high-quality, objective evaluation of the full range of services and functions provided by Teagasc to its customers, to establish the economic benefit of these services and functions.
- *Improve service delivery and design* by assisting managers to identify and implement improvements in the design and delivery of the services they are responsible for.
- *Improve organisational governance* by helping to bring about improved performance at all levels in the organisation in line with clear definitions of responsibility, authority and accountability.

Reporting to the Head of Strategy & International Relations, The Evaluation Officer is supported in his/her evaluation programme activities by the Teagasc Evaluation Steering Committee. It is Teagasc policy that all evaluations panels for Teagasc programmes have external peer and or/sector-based panellists and be chaired by an independent experienced chairperson and that evaluation panels include international representatives.

The Teagasc Evaluation Unit schedules the Whole College Evaluation process in conjunction with the Head of Education, and the Department of Education and Skills lead evaluation team.

Findings of Whole College Evaluations are presented to the Teagasc Academic Council and its committees, to Teagasc senior management, the Authority Advisory and Education Committee and the Teagasc Education Forum. Follow-up actions are detailed in the local business plan and nationally applicable actions in the CDSU business plan and their implementation are subject to follow-through evaluations.

Whole College Evaluation (WCE)

In recent years (since 2013) Teagasc Education evaluation activities have focussed on Teagasc Whole College Evaluations based on the evaluation model operated by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES). These evaluations focus on the quality of management and leadership, the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of self-evaluation processes. This evaluation programme is governed by a Memorandum of Agreement between Teagasc and DES. The agreement provides for an evaluation panel comprising one or two (as necessary) DES inspectors with suitable experience, an external agricultural education peer (preferably international) and a Teagasc manager independent of Teagasc education. The evaluation panel is chaired by DES.

Whole College Evaluations (carried out since 2013 by the Department of Education and Skills inspection team) have helped to provide independent external feedback to Teagasc on topics including quality assurance. The first cycle of evaluations has been carried out in each college, and a return follow-through visit is planned.

All WCE evaluation reports are submitted to Teagasc senior management, the Teagasc Authority Advisory and Education Committee, Teagasc Authority, the Teagasc Education and Training Forum and the Teagasc Academic Council for their consideration.

Findings, once approved by the Head of Education, are implemented at college or centre level, or if required by the Head of Education or CDSU with the support of the Academic Council Committees. The process culminates with re-evaluation to ensure effective response has resulted from the original monitoring activity.

The focus of these Whole College Evaluations has been on assessing the following within each college or centre:

Area 1 Management and Leadership

- How effective are leadership and management within the college?
- How effective is college self-evaluation and how well is it being used to improve learning, teaching, leadership and management?
- How well have recommendations made in previous reports been implemented?
- How well does course provision address the learning and training needs of learners and the needs of industry?

Area 2 Teaching, Training and Learning

- How good is the teaching and training?
- How well are learners cared for and supported?
- How well do learners develop and achieve?

Area 3 The college's self-evaluation process and capacity for improvement

- How effective are self-evaluative processes in the college in raising achievement and supporting learners?

The initial WCE Panel on-site WCE visit takes place over approximately 3 to 4 days, combining interviews of management, staff and learner representatives with classroom

observations. The process is based on the above criteria. Feedback is given verbally to college staff and in the form of a formal written evaluation report.

- Follow-through reviews for each college (carried out by the Department of Education and Skills) will focus on the progress a college has made in implementing main recommendations made in the previous WCE, as well as advising the college on strategies for further improvement. A follow-through report will be provided following this visit.

These WCE reports are available on the DES web site <https://www.education.ie/en/>. Following each evaluation or review an action plan is developed to address any concerns raised.

Overall, QQI policies and procedures have a very strong influence on the criteria used in Teagasc reviews. Terms of reference for the reviewer(s) are scoped in all reviews. Findings and recommendations from previous reviews are integral to, and are included in, the terms of reference.

Local Self-Evaluation and Monitoring

Evaluation and monitoring procedures at colleges and education centres are being further strengthened by:

- Early in-course and during course surveys in addition to the end of course survey
- The introduction of an updated 'end of programme' self-evaluation checklist
- Linking the corrective actions and continuous improvements needs identified in the local end of programme self-evaluation process to local annual business plans
- Renewing learner consultation processes and identifying learner consultation fora in local annual business plans
- Linking end of programme staff survey findings to local self-evaluation/monitoring processes
- Linking whole evaluation recommendation implementation to local self-evaluation/monitoring.

Other Evaluations in Teagasc

Teagasc undertakes peer reviews of its Research and Knowledge Transfer programmes on an approximate 5-year cycle; the purpose of each review is to:

- Assess if an effective and balanced scientific programme is being delivered which fulfils the mission of the Programme and meets the needs of its stakeholders
- Determine the quality, relevance and impact of the Knowledge Transfer Programme
- Identify how the Research and Knowledge Transfer Programme could be improved to make best use of resources
- Provide accountability for public funds expended.

In 2014, The Teagasc Evaluation Unit commissioned Teagasc Rural Economy & Development researchers to assess the *Economic Returns to Formal Agricultural Education*. A report by Dr Kevin Heanue and Professor Cathal O'Donoghue found a high private rate of

return (over 8%) and a high social rate of return (over 13.5%) on investment. The report is available on https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2014/Teagasc_Impact_of_Education_Report.pdf

Teagasc Education Vision – Meeting Future Needs

As mentioned in Chapter 10, the 2017 Teagasc Education Vision strategic review of Teagasc education provision was an extensive review of Teagasc education. Teagasc' Education Vision found that “*future Teagasc education pathways and curricula content will have to evolve to meet the substantial transformation facing the land sector*”. The full document is available on Teagasc public website (<https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2018/Teagasc-Education-Vision-Report.pdf>).

Core recommendations include:

- Learner entrepreneurial and transversal skills need to be cultivated
- Teagasc education pathways including apprenticeships need to be developed that will enable learners to gain requisite capabilities for the future
- Joint initiatives by industry stakeholders and Teagasc are required to address specific skills training and workforce deficits that are emerging
- An alumni support programme should be developed
- Innovative teaching and learning approaches such as problem-based learning (PBL) should be adopted by Teagasc
- Online learning platforms and digital technologies need to be further developed by Teagasc
- Supports and resources for learners with diverse learning needs and disabilities must continue to be developed
- Training and continuing professional development in teaching and learning must be prioritised for Teagasc education staff.

The *Teagasc Education Vision meeting future needs* report is central to and provides an overarching quality improvement road map for Teagasc Education.

Teagasc Foresight

Teagasc carries out Foresight exercises led by the Teagasc Head of Strategy and International Relations. These are extremely useful exercises that facilitate both internal Teagasc and external sector strategic planning. One such example is the Teagasc Technology Foresight 2035.



<https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2016/Teagasc-Technology-Foresight-Report-2035.pdf>

Programme Reviews

Scheduled programme reviews are conducted on a rolling basis across Teagasc programmes. The Programme Development and Review Committee and associated working groups with CDSU engage in programme reviews. Examples of working groups include Education Resource Leadership Teams (ERLTs) formed to review module specifications and supporting resource material. These teams include a CDSU team leader, advisory, research and education staff. Content and assessments scheduled internal review includes review of module and programme content. QQI validation criteria and requirements from the basis of criteria used in review. Terms of reference for the reviewer(s) are scoped in all such reviews.

Integration Between Education and Other Teagasc Quality Management Processes

Education policies and procedures are approved by Teagasc Academic Council before being presented and given effect with by the Head of Education under the overall oversight of Teagasc senior management and the Teagasc Authority Advisory and Education committee. Whenever there is cross-programme involvement needed in the development and implementation of certain policies and procedures (e.g. Child Safeguarding or Customer Service) then consultation takes place through existing line management channels or through a specific working group for that topic.

This ensures that adequate consultation takes place giving all involved a sense of organisation level ownership and responsibility for implementation. Senior management and the Teagasc Authority monitor key performance indicators for all Teagasc Programmes.

The Teagasc Head of Education has a role to play in communicating on-going developments in Teagasc Education, and policies and procedures to other Programme Managers, senior management, Teagasc Authority and the Teagasc Education Forum.

11.2 Internal Self-Monitoring

On-going internal reviews have a relatively narrow focus. Overseen by the Quality and Review committee, self-monitoring concentrates on various aspects of Teagasc education provision and includes learner surveys, standardisation days with staff, discussion groups internally and consultation with other providers externally within communities of practice, internal verification, independent authentication, informed feedback from staff involved in delivery and audits conducted by Teagasc's internal auditor. See Section 3.3 for more detail regarding regular self-monitoring.

The Teagasc head of Education is required to report on progress with agreed initiatives and targets on a biannual basis through the business planning process as well as having to present an annual academic performance report to the Teagasc Academic Council, Teagasc senior management, the Authority Advisory and Education Committee and the Teagasc Education Forum. CDSU co-supports this process. Findings result in actions, directed,

implemented and monitored by Teagasc Head of Education in conjunction with the Head of CDSU.

Table 11.2 outlines some examples of self-evaluation, review and monitoring. From time to time additional processes are monitored depending on needs and circumstances. When identified, suitable evidence criteria are determined and monitored by Teagasc Head of Education with input from the Teagasc Academic Council.

Table 11.2 Sample of Typical Objective-Based Monitoring

Objective	Evidence	Monitoring and reporting
Staff induction/in-service training (IST) are provided including QA policies and procedures	Part of CDSU business plan	Schedule of IST developed and monitored for delivery by Head of CDSU, and approved by the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Academic Council
College facilities and enterprises meet minimum standards	Whole College Evaluation independently carried out by the Department of Education and Skills	Reported to Teagasc Head of Education, Teagasc Director, Teagasc Academic Council, Teagasc Authority Advisory and Education Committee and the Teagasc Education Forum
Best practice in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • course organisation • course management 	Staff discussion groups	Facilitated by CDSU, staff discussion focuses on technical production in college enterprises, and their application to training
	Enterprise benchmarking	Carried out across all colleges, managed by Head of Education ensuring enterprise meets minimum key performance indicators

Objective	Evidence	Monitoring and reporting
Learner satisfaction is satisfactory	CDSU develop and analyse online surveys	<p>Monitored by CDSU, and the Academic Council/Committees, Head of Education, local management</p> <p>Reported to Academic Council, Teagasc SMG, Authority Advisory and Education Committee, Education Forum</p>
Best practice in teaching and training	Standardisation days organised by CDS and included on CDS business plan	Standardisation day schedule is developed and monitored by Head of CDSU and the Teaching and Learning Committee
	IST for staff on Teaching and Learning	Delivered by external providers specialising in training in Teaching and Learning
	Planned key timetabled course events occur within a reasonable envisaged timeframe	Monitored by NASS, unexplained delays are reported to Head of CDSU

Objective	Evidence	Monitoring and reporting
Annual enrolments and completion rates	The numbers of learners who apply for, register at the start of a programme and those that complete, provide an accurate indication of education provision of Teagasc programmes	Trends outside of the expected norm are investigated by Teagasc's Head of Education. The Academic Council and the Authority provide oversight
Peer review of assessment ensuring learning outcomes are assessed and accurately recorded	Internal verification	Findings are recorded by the Course Co-ordinator and presented as part of independent authentication
Independent review of assessments	Independent authentication	Findings are reported to Head of CDSU and Quality and Results Committee
Effectiveness of programmes	Graduate surveys rate the programme 5 years after graduation for its impact on their career	Head of CDSU and Head of Education, and Academic Council. Report to Teagasc SMG, Authority advisory and Education Committee
	Teagasc Education Forum comprises representatives from the land-based sector and provides direct feedback on emerging industry requirements and current training provision	Minutes of meetings Summary report to Teagasc SMG
	Host meetings provide direct feedback on immediate training requirements, and perception of training programmes by industry practitioners	Meeting reports
Ensure inclusivity of learners and effectiveness of Teagasc's learner support policy and procedures	Learner surveys responses meet an acceptable level of satisfaction, in line with other responses. Numbers of learners both seeking and receiving assistance is balanced with differences accounted for	Monitored by the Head of CDSU, and reported to the Head of Education, and the Academic Council via the Teaching and Learning Committee Low satisfaction ratings or unbalanced numbers are

Objective	Evidence	Monitoring and reporting
		investigated and result in actions to address the issues
Expression of interest lodged for programmes to assist in resource/demand planning	Statistics on expressions of interest, applications started, applications completed and registered learners	Monitored by the Head of CDSU, and reported to the Head of Education, demand outside expected targets results in investigation and resource management

11.3 Self-Evaluation, Improvement and Enhancement

The outcomes of reviews and feedback from stakeholders are key to developing improvement and enhancement plans in Teagasc. Sources of improvement and enhancement plans are presented in different formats outlined in Table 11.3.

Table 11.3 Programme Improvement Planning Sources and Types

Source	Type of planning
Teagasc Education Vision	Provides a long term (20-year) strategic road map on Teagasc education provision
Business plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Business plans • CDSU business plans • College business plans • Regional business plans 	Short- to medium-term (1–5 years) plan on education enhancement
Independent authentication plans and reports	Developed by the Teagasc National Authentication and Standards Specialist, the Independent Authentication plan externally verifies every education programme in Teagasc and incorporates risk-based inspection strategy Reports prompt direct actions for improvement and enhancement
Education Resource Leadership Teams (Working groups of the Programme Development and Review Committee) Teagasc Specialists Researchers Education Staff	Co-ordinated by CDSU, all actors in Teagasc education directly inform continuous improvement and enhancement in programme content
Whole College Evaluation	Conducted by independent experienced educational experts, recommendations are actioned locally and overseen by Teagasc Head of Education

11.4 Provider-Owned Quality Assurance Engagements with External Quality Assurance

Preceded by ACOT, the Teagasc quality assurance system has evolved and developed with the organisation, initially as an independent training provider, then in conjunction with FETAC. In that time the quality assurance system has been based on fundamental principles of excellence in training and education.

Teagasc's quality assurance system is integral to all of its training provision, is subject to external review and aims to continually align with best practice.

Teagasc's quality assurance system is aligned to QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, is published and strives to ensure its programmes meet the standards set out for accredited programmes, and to maintain the same standards and procedures for non-accredited training programmes.