



# MAgrSc Innovation Support Programme 2015-17



**Study title:** Best Practice Experience in Farmer Discussion Groups – Development of an Advisors Handbook.

**Student:** Conor Holohan

**Supervisors:** Dr Jim Kinsella and George Ramsbottom

**Office location:** Tullamore, Co. Offaly



# Study Objectives

1. To identify the challenges advisors face in running groups.
2. To assess training & support requirements of advisors running DGs.
3. To study international lessons on DGs.
4. To identify good practice in DG facilitation.
5. To determine advisors preferences for contents and design of the handbook.

# Methodology

## **1. Lit Review:**

- Ag extension, discussion groups, facilitation, learning, training & development.

## **2. Immersion Period:**

- Attended groups and kept observational diary

## **3. Advisor Focus Group & Interview:**

- Dairy and Drystock
- Kilkenny and Tullamore

## **4. National Advisor Survey:**

- Sample size n =398. 111 responses (28%)

## **5. International Study:**

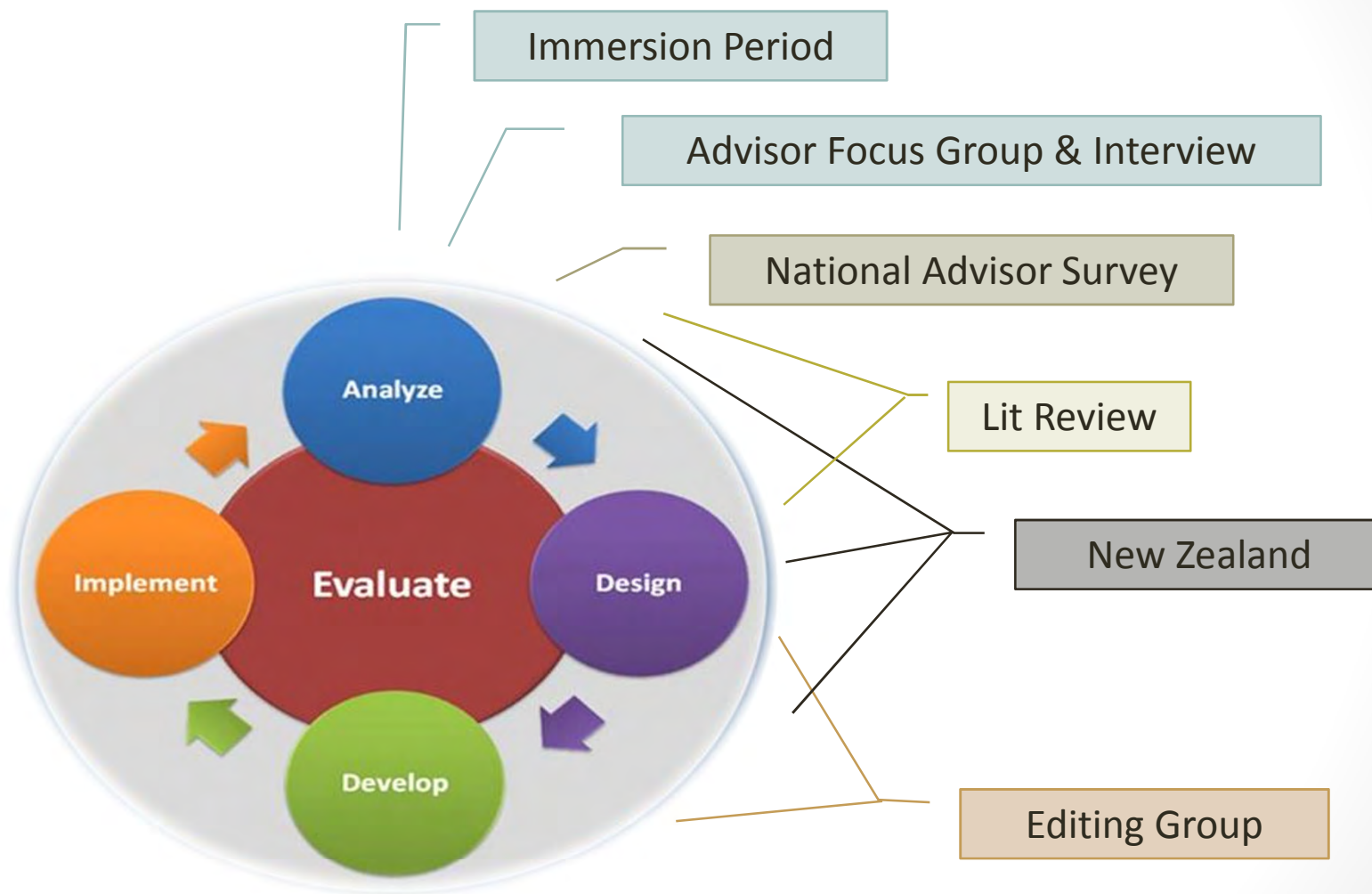
- New Zealand

## **6. Editing Group:**

- Experienced Drystock and Dairy Advisors



# Methodology



ADDIE Model

# New Zealand

- 2 month study trip
- Sept -Nov 2016
- Funded by the Teagasc Overseas Training Award

11,289 mi

Distance from Dublin to  
Auckland



# Why New Zealand?

1. First to introduce farmer DGs – 1950s
2. To get experience with NZ extension and DG system
3. To draw comparisons with Ireland.
4. To gain perspectives on good-practice in DG facilitation.
5. To explore support services/materials available to facilitators.



# Impact of the Trip

1. Experience with extension agencies overseas.
2. Immersion in a different farming culture.
3. Invaluable materials and expert input for the project
4. Number of contacts and some great friendships





# Key Findings of Study

Objective 1: *To Identify the Challenges Advisors face in running groups*

- Low engagement from farmers
- Groups going 'stale'
- Non adoption of recommendations
- Lack of KPI's & differing motivations in Drystock groups
- KT Scheme – Financial incentive and extra admin.

Objective 2: *To assess training & support requirements of advisors.*

1. 80% of advisors feel need for on-going training and support in this area.
2. 64% rate efficacy of a dedicated handbook as 7/10 or higher.
3. 97% of advisors feel there is a need to further develop the Teagasc T-Net DG webpage.



# Key Findings of Study

## Objective 3: *To study International Lessons on DGs*

1. Similar challenges facing CO's as advisors in Ireland.
2. DairyNZ Discussion Group Guide: - Valued by new advisors.
3. Team Coach plays key role in facilitator training & support i.e. Simon Sankey.
4. Self-Awareness key in facilitator training
5. NZ CO's desire an online DG facilitators support site similar to the one proposed in this study.
6. Number of differences in IRE vs NZ



# Key Findings of Study

## Objective 4: *To Identify Good Practice in DG Facilitation*

1. As well as Facilitation skills, advisors see Technical knowledge as key part of DG facilitation.
2. Other key elements include: Confidence, Good Preparation, Empathy, Group Rapport/Trust, and Enthusiasm.
3. Collaboration & Co-Facilitation. (66% rarely/never attend other groups)

\*Work on-going with Editing Group

## Objective 5: *To determine Advisor preferences for contents and design of handbook*

1. Work on-going with Editing Group
2. Main Chapters: Intro, Group Establishment, Preparation for the meeting, The Group Session, From Good Facilitator to Great Facilitator, appendices.

# Conclusions to Date

1. Challenges faced by facilitators similar in both NZ and Ireland.
2. Requirement for handbook – particularly for inexperienced advisors.
3. Distinction between advisors view on facilitation of farmer DG's and typical adult learning groups – Technical knowledge seen as key component.
4. Advisors require more support along with the handbook (i.e. further development of the Teagasc T-Net)



# Thesis Structure

## Chapter 1

- Background and rationale, methodologies, research objectives, sample size, utility.

## Chapter 2

- Lit review – Ag extension, discussion groups, facilitation, learning, training & development.

## Chapter 3

- Research Findings & Analysis

## Chapter 4

- Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations.

# Steps to Completion

## February

Draft II of sections 3,4, & 5 to editing group

Draft I of chapters 1 & 2

## March

Finish Survey Analysis

Amendments to handbook

Thesis results section

## April

Finalise Handbook contents

Consultation on handbook design

Finish lit review

## May – Mid June

Complete Handbook

Thesis Conclusions & Recommendations

Thesis Write up and submission

Handbook Development





**Thank You**