

# *Programme Evaluation Report*

<b>Provider Name:</b>	Commercial Mushroom Producers Cooperative Society			
<b>Provider No.</b>				
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<b>Manager / Principal / Director Name</b>	Tom Kelleher			
<b>Report Date</b>	24/01/2012			
<b>Programme Title</b>	Level 4 Specific Purpose Certificate in Mushroom Harvesting			
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<b>Timeframe covered by Evaluation</b>	From (07/2008)		To (10/2011)	

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 Manager / Principal / Director

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 Date

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 External Evaluator

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 Date

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This evaluation of the FETAC Level 4 Certificate in Mushroom Harvesting is a FETAC quality assurance requirement. The purpose of the evaluation is twofold. Firstly, to evaluate efficiency in terms of programme design, content, delivery, assessment of learning, associated services and resources. Secondly, to evaluate the achievement to date of the aims and objectives set out in the programme specifications.

The programme is being delivered by the Commercial Mushroom Producers (CMP) Cooperative Society Limited, assisted by Tom Kellegher (Teagasc Horticultural Development Officer). He was heavily involved in the original development of the programme support materials, and tutor training, and is currently the programme training coordinator and internal verifier.

This evaluation follows the FETAC programme evaluation template, addressing the questions asked. Data was gathered from a number of sources, including programme documentation, self - evaluation checklist, student satisfaction surveys, and on - site interviews.

In summary, this evaluation found the programme to be well designed and meeting the needs of participants, with 97% of participants indicating that they would recommend the programme.

Programme delivery was also found to be of a high standard, with high levels of student satisfaction (average satisfaction rates of 3.67 out of 4 for practical instruction and 3.52 out of 4 for support materials). Assessment procedures and associated resources were up to the required standards in the grower units visited both as part of this evaluation, and through the external verification process.

There are opportunities for improvement in the area of programme review (student satisfaction survey in (particular), in addition to minor improvements listed in the recommendations section.

## **PROGRAMME AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Programme Aims**

- Develop skills and associated knowledge to harvest mushrooms to the standard required by the customers
- Develop the competence, in a work based setting, to achieve high performance quality output levels and high earnings levels
- Facilitate FETAC certification for agreed levels of performance

- Prepare learners for education and training at a higher level within the horticultural sector (e.g. Level 5 Certificate in Horticulture).

### **Programme Objectives**

On satisfactory completion of this programme, learners will be able to:

- Demonstrate hygiene and safety awareness
- Demonstrate personal and social skills needed for effective working and living
- Identify and control the spread of diseases and pests of mushrooms
- Describe mushroom crop management stages in the growing house
- Outline customer requirements
- Harvest mushrooms at a high level of performance with resulting high levels of earnings.

Table 1 shows the self - evaluation scores for the Level 4 Certificate in Mushroom Harvesting provided by Monaghan Mushrooms (CMP's largest member). The programme scored strongly in all the policy areas.

***Table 1 Self- Evaluation Checklist Scores- Monaghan Mushrooms, April 2009***

<b>Policy Area</b>	<b>Average Grade</b>
Communications	3
Equality	3
Staff Recruitment and Development	3
Access, Transfer and Progression	3
Programme Development, Delivery and Review	2.87
Fair and Consistent Assessment of Learners	3
Protection for Learners	3
Sub - Contracting / Procuring Programme Delivery	N/A

***\* 3= Strength; 2= acceptable; 1 = Improvement Required***

## **PROGRAMME STRENGTHS**

### **Programme Design and Content**

- The programme is very practical, and tailored to the participant's work situation
- Participants see a clear link between programme completion and improved income through higher pick rates
- High participant and instructor satisfaction levels with course content
- Wide range of support materials in participant's native language (Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, English, Slovakian and Russian).
- Strong demand for the programme over the next five years.

### **Programme Delivery**

- Delivery is in the workplace, with scope for ample on - the - job practice
- Tutors are multilingual, highly motivated, capable, professional and courteous to participants leading to average satisfaction rates of 3.67 out of 4 for practical instruction
- Support materials are multilingual, and relevant to learner needs and programme aims, leading to an average student satisfaction rating of 3.52 out of 4.

### **Assessment**

- Administration procedures are effective
- Assessment procedures are appropriate to learner needs and programme aims
- The programme is very focused on catering for the diverse needs of participants.

### **Associated Services and Resources**

- Modern work place facilities with up - to - date equipment for demonstration purposes
- Dedicated capable tutors.

## **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Programme Design and Content**

- Identify training or career progression routes for award holders and existing tutors
- Increase participant awareness of their rights under the appeals process
- Put measures in place to facilitate sharing amongst instructors of multilingual training support material and delivery methods developed, in addition to the original support material.

### **Programme Delivery**

- Provide translations in native languages in learner satisfaction survey
- Explore the practicality of using online student satisfaction surveys
- Ratings used in satisfaction surveys should be updated to  
1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied
- Include individual modules in the student satisfaction survey.

### **Assessment**

- Participants currently have to demonstrate competence in a particular skill on two consecutive occasions in order to be awarded that assessment. This contributes to upholding standards, but should be discussed as part of the process of migration to the FETAC Common Awards System.

### **Associated Services and Resources**

- The benefit of having a formal mentor system (staff, fellow learner or graduate) in place should be examined
- As part of programme validation, ensure all units have adequate resources to complete the programme before commencement.

## ABBREVIATIONS & DEFINITIONS

SPCMH	-	Specific Purpose Certificate in Mushroom Harvesting
CDS	-	Curriculum Development and Standards Department
CMP	-	Commercial Mushroom Producers Cooperative Society Limited
EMS	-	Education Management System
FETAC	-	Further Education & Training Awards Council
Programme	-	The terms Programme and Course are interchangeable
QA	-	Quality Assurance
SEC	-	Self-Evaluation Checklist (FETAC)
Unit	-	Mushroom growth, harvesting and packaging site

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## **1. Introduction**

The terms of reference for this evaluation of the FETAC Level 4 Certificate in Mushroom Harvesting are:

1. Determine programme efficiency in terms of programme design and content, programme delivery, assessment of learning, and the services and resources associated with the programme.
2. Determine the effectiveness of the programme in terms of the achievement of the aims and objectives set out in the programme specifications.
3. Highlight ways in which efficiency and effectiveness of the programme could be improved.

## **2. Background and Context**

The Commercial Mushroom Producers (CMP) Cooperative Society Limited was established in 1999 under Council Regulation (EC) No 2200/96. CMP replaced a former grower organisation, North Eastern Producers (NEP).

CMP has approximately 50 member companies (owning 55 sites) who currently produce 70 million kgs of fresh mushrooms each year. This level of production has the capacity to supply the needs of 40 million consumers each year. Mushrooms are a perishable product with a relatively short shelf life. The 'best before' date is around five days after harvesting. As a result, Irish mushroom producers are heavily dependant on exporting to UK markets (currently CMP exports 85% of mushroom production to the UK).

Despite strong competition from Europe, and volatile exchange rates the farm gate value of mushroom output has been maintained by CMP members at approximately €100 m.

The formation of producer organisations such as CMP brought stability to the market place, with planned production to regulate supply and minimise or reduce surpluses and shortages. This also provided growers with a steady market for the volume produced and price stability.



## **Development of the FETAC Level 4 SPCMH Programme**

CMP member producers have been continually identifying and implementing scale, efficiency and process improvements in areas such as facilities, equipment, and production. This programme is primarily aimed at the development of harvester knowledge, skills, and competencies. From interviews with mushroom producers and course participants, the main benefits to mushroom producers are improvements in efficiency of pick rate and mushroom quality. Harvesters who complete the Programme could benefit financially from improved pick rates, as well as knowledge and skills picked up from programme participation. The first pilot programme was delivered in 2007, and programme participant rates are steadily increasing. To date 267 participants have completed the programme and gained FETAC accreditation. The main CMP company delivering the programme to date has been Monaghan Mushrooms, but the programme has been delivered on 10 different mushroom units. There are currently approximately 400 participating on the programme.

### **3. Programme Summary**

**Title:** *Level 4 Specific Purpose Award in Mushroom Harvesting (SPCMH)*

**Training aims:**

The aims of this Mushroom Harvester Training Programme are to:

- Develop skills and associated knowledge to harvest mushrooms to the standard required by the customers
- Develop the competence, in a work-based setting, to achieve high performance, quality output levels and high earnings levels
- Facilitate FETAC certification for agreed levels of performance
- Prepare learners for education and training at a higher level within the horticultural sector (e.g. Level 5 Certificate in Horticulture).

**Programme Objectives:**

On completion of this programme learners will be able to:

- Demonstrate hygiene and safety awareness
- Demonstrate personal and social skills needed for effective working and living
- Identify and control the spread of diseases and pests of mushrooms

- Describe mushroom crop management stages in the growing house
- Outline customer requirements
- Harvest mushrooms at a high level of performance with resulting high levels of earnings.

### Learner Profile

The majority of people working as mushroom harvesters in the mushroom industry are foreign nationals (Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, etc), typically females in their 30's who spend 2 - 4 years working as harvesters before returning to their native country.

This Level 4 SPCMH Training Programme is suitable for persons over 18 years of age who are physically able for the demands of mushroom harvesting and the standards set down for the programme.

Qualities considered to be important include:

- Reliability and positive attitude to learning
- Ability to work consistently on a repetitive task for reasonable time periods
- Potential to learn safety, hygiene, quality and mushroom harvesting skills and within reasonable time frames
- An interest in earning a living from mushroom harvesting.

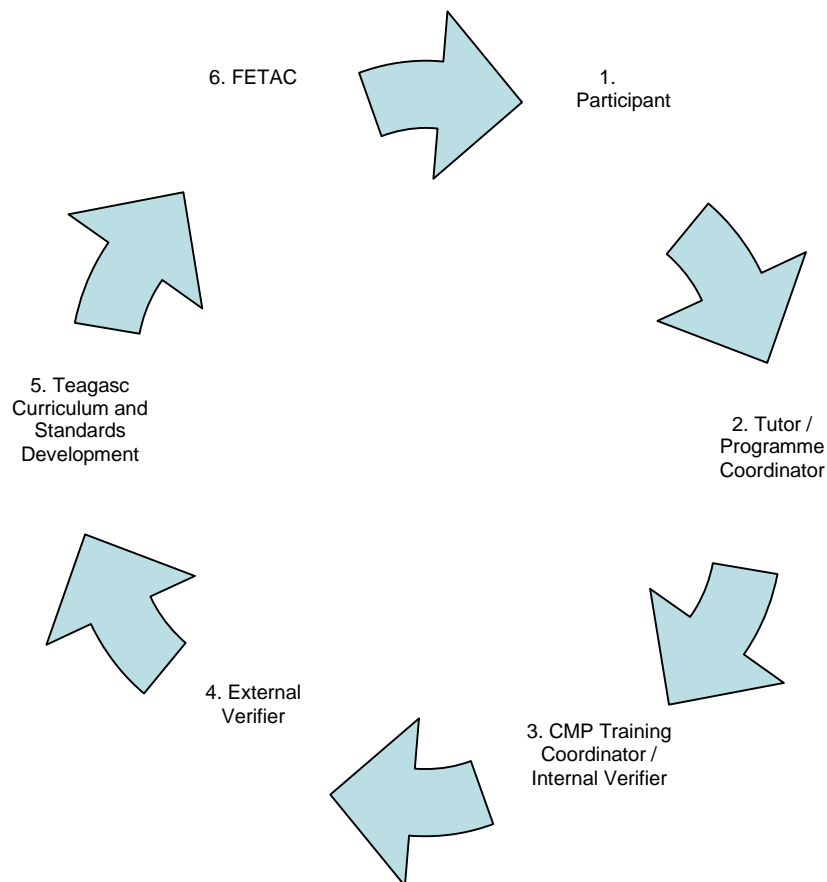
All applicants who are employed as harvesters in the mushroom industry are eligible to participate. Learners are placed on a structured rate of basic pay for the duration of the programme.

### Component Modules

Programme components (Table 3.1) are practical in nature, with instruction and practice taking place in the work environment. Programme duration is approximately six months, but this can vary depending on participant prior knowledge and experience.

**Table 3.1 Level 4 SPCMH Programme content.**

Code	Module	Credits
MH01	Induction to Mushroom Harvesting	4
MH02	Hygiene for Mushroom Harvesters	6
MH03	Safety, Health & Welfare for Mushroom Harvesters	8
MH04	Diseases and Pests in Mushrooms	2
MH05	Mushroom Growing	2
MH06	Mushroom Customer Requirements	8
MH07	Mushroom Harvesting	20

**CMP FETAC Level 4 Mushroom Training, Programme Delivery, Evaluation, and Certification: Process and Roles**


<b>1.</b>	<b>Course Participant</b> <b>Role Includes:</b> Completion of training and assessment as required. Active participation.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Tutor / Programme Coordinator in each Grower Unit</b> <b>Role Includes:</b> Delivery and Coordination of Skills Training and Assessment. Course Administration at local level
<b>3.</b>	<b>CMP Training Coordinator / Internal Verifier: Tom Kelleher (Teagasc)</b> <b>Role includes:</b> Support to course coordinators on programme content, support materials, and programme policies and procedures. Internal verification. Student survey collation. Maintenance of Education records for submission to FETAC through Teagasc CDS.
<b>4.</b>	<b>External Verifier</b> <b>Role Includes:</b> Evaluate programme delivery and assessment and recommend learners who have achieved the standard to certification. Support to Internal Verifier.
<b>5.</b>	<b>Curriculum and Standards Development Unit (Teagasc)</b> <b>Role includes:</b> Programme design, development of support materials support materials. Support to Internal Verifier in relation to programme delivery and FETAC policies and procedures. Submission of certification details to FETAC.
<b>6.</b>	<b>FETAC (Further Education and training Awards Council)</b> <b>Role Includes:</b> Development of policies and procedures for the design, delivery and evaluation of learner centred education. Issue of Award Certificates.

## **4. Evaluation Methodology**

This evaluation follows the FETAC programme evaluation template, addressing the questions asked. Data was gathered from a number of sources including:

- Self- evaluation Checklist
- Student satisfaction surveys
- On- site interviews with:
  - Participants (Harvesters from Monaghan Mushrooms – Carbury Unit)
  - CMP Training Coordinator / Internal Verifier (Tom Kellegher, Teagasc),
  - Monaghan Mushrooms Group Training Manager (Liudmila Khokha),
  - Programme tutor / coordinator (Kitija Keirisa).
- Participant productivity reports

### **Student Satisfaction Surveys**

In student satisfaction surveys participants rate their satisfaction using a four point Likert scale. This makes it difficult to compare results. For the purpose of this evaluation, the evaluator used Kirkpatrick's method of weighting the responses to create a single rating for each question. This facilitates comparisons and can be used to set baselines and standards for future measurement. Weighting applies very satisfied a score of 4, satisfied is 3, moderately satisfied is 2 and dissatisfied is 1. In the case of the student surveys, the maximum rating possible is 4.

### **Reporting Procedure**

This completed evaluation report will be presented to the Head of Education, CDS, and Teagasc Senior Management for approval, before submission to FETAC. On the basis of this report a programme improvement plan addressing any recommendations or issues will be submitted to FETAC by the Teagasc Curriculum and Standards Development Unit.

## 5. Programme Design and Content

### Meeting the Needs of Learners

This programme was developed especially for mushroom harvesters. It covers work, living, and social skills, including induction, hygiene, health and safety, diseases and pests, mushroom growing and harvesting.

Programme participants interviewed see this programme as an avenue to increased income resulting from higher pick rates. Programme modules are demonstrated and practised in the work environment, which enhances relevance.

### Content

Table 5.1 outlines the modules in the Level 4 Certificate in Mushroom Harvesting. There are seven work-based training modules covering induction, hygiene, health and safety, mushroom diseases and pests, growing market requirements, and harvesting.

**Table 5.1      Modules in Level 4 Certificate in Mushroom Harvesting      Credit Value**

MH01	Induction to Mushroom Harvesting	4
MH02	Hygiene for Mushroom Harvesters	6
MH03	Safety, Health & Welfare for Mushroom Harvesters	8
MH04	Diseases and Pests in Mushrooms	2
MH05	Mushroom Growing	2
MH06	Mushroom Customer Requirements	8
MH07	Mushroom Harvesting	20

CMP contracted Teagasc to assist in the development of programme content, support materials and instructor skills and assessment training.

Participants and instructors have expressed high satisfaction levels with the course content through on-site interviews and student satisfaction surveys.

This award is due to undergo migration in the FETAC awards system, which provides an opportunity for making minor improvements to programme content.

## **Access, Transfer and Progression**

In terms of access transfer and progression, all mushroom harvesting employees in the CMP group are encouraged and entitled to participate in the programme.

Recognition of prior learning is not carried out through a formal process, but harvesters with considerable prior experience do not have to undergo the same amount of practice before assessment as inexperienced harvesters.

In terms of progression, some graduates to date have moved on to the supervisor or tutor role. Potential tutors are required to complete a Level 6 Specific Purpose Certificate in Skills Training and Assessment.

From interviews held on the Carbury Mushroom Unit on the 13 July 2011, participants and programme coordinators were of the opinion that graduates would not want to move on to a FETAC Level 5 or Level 6 Horticultural Programme. Instead, their main motivation would be to earn money to send home, and to return home after a period of time, as to date this has been the case for workers in this industry.

However, it would be of benefit to tutors, participants and the company to identify potential follow-on training and employment opportunities.

## **Programme Completion and Continued Demand for the Programme**

There will be strong demand for the programme over the next five years. It is CMP member policy to encourage harvesters in member companies to complete the award. CMP indicates that they have 1500 harvesting staff employed in total and hopes to train between 70 to 80% of these over the next five years.

The number of dropouts from this programme is extremely low. New employees are given a short settling in period in the unit they join before they decide to enter the programme.

As groups from each mushroom producer unit providing the programme graduate, measures will need to be put in place to ensure that new entrants have access to the programme, either on-site or on a regional basis.

## **Requirements of the Programme being Met**

External verifier reports from programmes delivered on mushroom producer units in Fethard, Tipperary town, Monaghan, and Ballyjamesduff, concluded satisfaction that all course specifications, procedures and requirements were being met.

There are potentially 30 to 40 separate mushroom producer units of the 55 CMP producers units who will deliver this programme. Some units will do so on a more frequent basis than others. The challenge will be to ensure programme provision is up to the required standard over such a larger number of units. Regular contact between the internal verifier and programme coordinators will be key to maintaining programme standards over such a large number of units.

Since the development of the original multilingual support materials tutors have used their own knowledge and experience to add to them. Measures should be taken to share these additional developments with other tutors on the programme.

## **Information Given to Participants**

As outlined in the satisfaction surveys, participants were happy with the level of initial information given to them on the course. However, when interviewed, participants stated that they were unsure as to what to expect at the beginning of the course and unaware of how the appeals process worked.

While the number of appeals is low in work-based training situation such as this, each participant should be aware of their right to appeal, and how to exercise this right.

## **Learner Diversity**

This programme is an excellent example of what can be achieved in multilingual work-based training situations. The availability of course specifications, manuals and assessment materials in Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, English, Slovakian and Russian has been an important aid to learners.

One participant expressed considerable anxiety in trying to remember English common names for the pest and disease oral assessment. While this may not be representative of all participants, the need to use English common names should be examined, and if required, teaching aids should be developed to assist with problem words.

**Strengths**

- Programme is very practical, and tailored to the participants works situation
- Participants see a clear link between programme completion and improved income through higher pick rates
- High participant and instructor satisfaction levels with course content
- Wide range of support materials in participant native language (Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, English, Slovakian and Russian).
- Strong demand for the programme over the next five years.

**Areas for Improvement**

- Identify progression routes for award holders and tutors
- Increase participant awareness of their rights under the appeals process
- Share multilingual training support material and delivery methods developed by programme tutors in addition to the original support material

**Recommendations**

- Identify training or career progression routes for award holders and existing tutors
- Increase participants awareness of their rights under the appeals process
- Put measures in place to facilitate sharing amongst instructors of multilingual training support material and delivery methods developed, in addition to the original support material.



## **6. Programme Delivery**

### **Delivery Methods, Teaching and Learning Materials**

Delivery methods used in this programme are in tune with the practical needs of participants. Delivery is through a combination of skills instruction, workbook experiential learning, mentoring, and class room group discussion, using visual aids and mushroom samples where appropriate.

Due to the diversity of nationality, there can be significant language barriers to overcome. In an effort to address this, programme support materials have been published in six languages to date: English, Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian and Slovakian. These support materials include a module book, course specifications, and assessment checklists.

As part of the visit to the Carbury Mushrooms unit (owned by Monaghan Mushrooms) on 13th July 2011, I attended a presentation by the course tutor (Kitija Keirisa). The module concerned was MH04 (Diseases and Pests in Mushrooms), and the presentation was delivered in Russian to a group of 11 participants (consisting of at least four nationalities). Russian is a second language of the majority of programme participants.

The tutor is multilingual, and responded to participant questions where possible in their native tongue.

The objective of the session was clearly defined to the group, the delivery was clear, the information relevant, and participants were encouraged to share opinions and experiences.

Teaching aids including pictures of mushroom pest and diseases and mushroom samples help to ensure participation in what could be a potentially challenging training environment.

As an observer, it was not easy to interpret the dialogue, but it was obvious, based on participation, that learner motivation was high.

Participants are expressing high levels of satisfaction with instruction, training materials, and support from instructors, as table 6.1 shows.

**Table 6.1      Learner satisfaction for Instruction, Training Materials, and Support**

Key: 1=Dissatisfied, 2 = Satisfied, 3 = Moderately Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied

	<b>Belcarra</b>	<b>Pleroma</b>	<b>Silver Fast</b>	<b>Unit 631</b>	<b>Kildorough</b>	<b>Weighted totals</b>
	<b>23</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>123</b>
Standard of practical instruction	3.70	3.80	3	3.88	3.59	3.67
Workbooks/handouts/overheads	3.43	3.66	3	3.63	3.48	3.52
Opportunity for discussions	3.78	3.57	3	3.38	3.59	3.59
Encouragement to express your views and experiences	3.61	3.63	3	3.63	3.50	3.55
Opportunity to ask questions	3.70	3.69	3	3.75	3.48	3.59
Help from instructors	3.91	3.69	3	3.50	3.56	3.64

**Timetables**

Participants interviewed on the visit expressed satisfaction that timetables were followed, and that they receive enough supervised time for practice.

**Learner Responsibility**

This programme is skills based, and instruction and assessment are clearly structured. The main responsibility on the learner is to take ownership developing their own harvesting skills and knowledge of practices and procedures. Participants appear very motivated to do this.

**Staff Development**

This is a relatively new programme and tutors have been given pedagogic training in the form of a FETAC Specific Purpose Award in Skills Training and Assessment.

This, however, is a relatively short course and as mentioned in the previous section, follow up training or contact would be beneficial to allow tutors to benefit from each others' experiences.

## **Programme Review**

While the programme providers have made very good progress in other areas, such as design and delivery, there are a number of improvements that could be made in terms of programme review process.

At the end of each programme, participants complete a satisfaction survey, of which the results to date are outlined in this report.

While the survey results are very positive, a number of improvements could be made to the process.

Satisfaction surveys are currently in English, and quite brief, which is an advantage given the language barrier. The process would benefit by providing a translation in the relevant languages for each question.

Ratings using in satisfaction surveys are currently:

Key: 1 = Dissatisfied, 2 = Moderately satisfied, 3 = Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied.

In line with changes to similar Teagasc student satisfaction surveys, a change to the following should be considered:

Key: 1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied.

This would give a more balanced choice between satisfied and dissatisfied.

Currently individual modules are not rated in the satisfaction survey. These should be included.

The use of online surveys should be explored as feedback is available soon after the survey is completed compared to the paper system which can suffer delays in collation of results.

This programme is being migrated to the FETAC Common Awards system, and the module specifications will need to be redrafted in a new format, which in itself will provide an opportunity for review.

**Strengths**

- Delivery is in the workplace with scope for ample on-the-job practice
- Tutors in general seem to be multilingual, highly motivated, capable, professional and courteous to participants, leading to average satisfaction rates of 3.67 out of 4 for practical instruction.
- Support materials are multilingual, and relevant to the learner needs and programme aims, leading to an average student satisfaction rating of 3.52 out of 4.

**Areas for Improvement**

- Student Satisfaction Surveys are currently in English. Translations for questions should be provided to participants
- Student satisfaction surveys are currently carried out as a paper process, and it may not be possible to change this. It usually means a delay in collation of results.
- Ratings used in satisfaction surveys need to be updated
- Currently individual modules are not rated in the satisfaction survey.

**Recommendations**

- Provide translations in native languages in learner satisfaction survey
- Explore the practicality of using online student satisfaction surveys
- Ratings used in satisfaction surveys should be updated to:  
Key 1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied
- Include individual modules in the student satisfaction survey.

## **7. Assessment of Learning**

### **Administration of Assessment and Learner Registration**

Programme coordinators are operating an efficient administration system, where each participant has a separate folder containing their application form, and other relevant personal details, plus their assessment documentation.

Assessment results are stored in each participant's folder. While this ensures that the results are not misplaced, each participant should be encouraged to keep their own learner record.

Programme coordinators have expressed concern at the amount of administration required for the course. Ways of improving administration procedures which do not negatively impact on learner protection and quality standards should be discussed with the Internal Verifier.

### **Assessment Strategies**

Assessment strategies are appropriate to learner needs and programme design. The course coordinator did voice some concerns over the resources required to assess participants.

Participants are required to show competence in a particular skill on two consecutive occasions in order to be awarded that assessment.

The internal verifier felt that this system contributes to upholding programme standards and ultimately the skill level of graduates. The migration of this award to the FETAC Common Awards System will provide an opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Table 7.1 indicates general satisfaction from learners with course assessment content and procedures. Assessment ratings typically tend to be less favourable than ratings for instruction.

**Table 7.1      Learner satisfaction ratings for Assessment**

Key: 1=Dissatisfied, 2 = Satisfied, 3 = Moderately Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied

<b>Mushroom Unit</b>	<b>Belcarra</b>	<b>Pleroma</b>	<b>Silver Fast</b>	<b>Unit 631</b>	<b>Kildorough</b>	<b>Weighted totals</b>
<b>Topic</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>123</b>
Amount of assessment	3.04	3.69	3	3.63	2.98	3.24
Notice of assessments	3.57	3.63	3	3.50	2.98	3.31
Instructions for assessments easy to understand	3.74	3.74	3	3.38	3.09	3.41
Assessment fairly marked	4.00	3.69	3	3.63	3.19	3.50
Feedback on performance in tests	4.00	3.66	3	3.75	3.07	3.46
Assessment appeals procedure	3.70	3.69	3	3.63	3.19	3.45

**Reports of external verifiers**

External examiner reports to date have been favourable, with no major programme improvement recommendations to date.

**Learners with disabilities**

The most common disability to date within this group of learners is in terms of language, and social or ethnic background, and these are well catered for.

**Are exemptions from assessment given where a learner has evidence of prior achievement?**

As the skills in this programme are quite unique, candidates are required to complete assessments regardless of prior knowledge. Allowances are given, however, for skilled experienced harvesters on the length of practice time they are required to undergo before assessment.

**Are records of assessment maintained securely?**

Records are securely managed in paper and electronic form. Each participants record is currently loaded onto the Teagasc Education Management System (EMS) soon after commencing the programme. Relevant information in written format is gathered and stored in a secure locked cabinet until external verification. After being recommended for certification, participant results are posted on the EMS and the participant is put forward for FETAC Certification.

**Strengths**

- Administration procedures are effective
- Assessment procedures are appropriate to learner needs and programme aims
- The programme is very focused on catering for the diverse needs of participants.

**Areas for Improvement**

- Currently no areas identified for improvement.

**Recommendations**

- Participants currently have to demonstrate competence in a particular skill on two consecutive occasions in order to be awarded that assessment. This contributes to upholding standards, but should be discussed as part of the process of migration to the FETAC Common Awards System.

## **8. Associated Services and Resourcing**

### **Resources to deliver the programme effectively**

The mushroom grower unit visited (Carbury Mushrooms) had access to modern equipment, a training room for class-based sessions, ample training support materials, and a very capable tutor. This is typical of large mushroom grower units.

The Internal Verifier and Programme Coordinator, as part of the validation process, should ensure that adequate resources are in place before the programme is allowed to commence.

### **Safety of Facilities**

Each unit had rigorous health and safety processes prior to the delivery of this programme; this has been an advantage.

### **Access to Services for All Learner Groups**

As more participant groups complete the programme and demand for new entrants decreases, measures will need to be put in place to ensure that new entrants have access to the programme on-site or on a regional basis.

In other work-based situations, where learners were having difficulty, formal mentoring has been shown to decrease anxiety and increase learner performance.

The merits of having a formal mentoring system (a staff member, fellow learner or programme graduate, depending on which was most suitable) should be explored for this programme given the diversity of learner involved.



### **Strengths**

- Modern work place facilities with-up-to date equipment for demonstration purposes
- Dedicated capable tutors.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- No formal mentoring system.

### **Recommendations**

- The benefit of having a formal mentor system (staff, fellow learner or graduate) in place should be examined
- As part of programme validation ensure all units have adequate resources to complete the programme before commencement.

## **9. Attainment of Programme Objectives**

When questioned participants felt that the programme improved their knowledge, skills and competencies as outlined in section 3. Particular mention was given to improved hygiene awareness and disease identification and control.

In particular, in the case of mushroom harvesting performance, the Monaghan Mushrooms Group Training Manager has recorded an average improvement in pre and post programme participant picking rates of 3 kg per hour. In addition to this there are benefits of improved harvesting technique and disease management.

Monaghan Mushrooms are carrying out a return on investment study on the programme as part of their own review process, which gives an indication of their interest in demonstrating the value of programme participation to the senior management of that company.

Mushroom unit owners see the programme as a means of increasing unit efficiency as well as developing workers themselves. The cost of training is borne by mushroom unit owners, either directly through devotion of staff time, or indirectly through support materials and other overheads administered by CMP.

### **Programme Objectives**

The programme objectives are clearly linked to participant needs, with a logical follow on from programme objectives to support materials and assessment.

### **Completion of Programme**

Very few learners to date have left the programme. Course coordinators usually give potential participants a settling-in period before starting the programme, which has helped to keep drop outs extremely low.

### **Programme Demand**

Demand is still evident with 267 having completed the programme, and gained certification. According to the programme internal verifier, there are 1500 harvesting staff working for CMP, and the company wants to train 70 to 80% of these.

## **10. Conclusions**

The FETAC Level 4 SPCMH programme is successfully achieving its objectives. The findings of this evaluation show that the Programme is well designed meeting the needs of participants and the industry, and that delivery to date has been carried out to a high standard by capable tutors to a high standard. Satisfaction surveys show that 97% of students would recommend this programme to a friend. Given that this is quite an early stage in the roll out of the programme, progress to date has been impressive.

There is room for minor improvement in programme review, which would give additional feedback to the process of programme design and delivery.

This programme has potential for learners to develop the knowledge and skills required to improve their pick rates and, as a result, their income, and the efficiency of their company.

This model of programme development and delivery is a good example of how to overcome learner diversity to achieve common objectives.

## 11. Evaluation Recommendations

This evaluation recommends that the following should be carried out:

- Identify training or career progression routes for award holders and existing tutors
- Increase participants awareness of their rights under the appeals process
- Put measures in place to facilitate sharing amongst instructors of multilingual training support material and delivery methods developed in addition to the original support material
- Provide translations in native languages in learner satisfaction survey
- Explore the practicality of using online student satisfaction surveys
- Update ratings used in satisfaction surveys to:  
1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Satisfied, 4 = Very Satisfied
- Include individual modules in the student satisfaction survey
- Participants currently have to demonstrate competence in a particular skill on two consecutive occasions in order to be awarded that assessment. This contributes to upholding standards, but should be discussed as part of the process of migration to the FETAC Common Awards System.
- Examine the benefit of having a formal mentor system (staff, fellow learner or graduate) in place
- Ensure as part of programme validation that before commencement all units have adequate resources to complete the programme.

## Appendix 1 Documents Reviewed

The following documents were reviewed for the purpose of this Evaluation:

1. Commercial Mushroom Producers Quality Assurance Handbook “*Policies and Procedures Leading to FETAC Awards*”, April 2007
2. Teagasc Quality Assurance Handbook, “*Policies and Procedures Leading to FETAC Awards*”, September 2005
3. Review of Teagasc’s Education and Training Provision and Report of the Education and Training Forum. Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2005.
4. Sectoral Road Map for Horticulture for 2018, Teagasc, 2009
5. Learner Manual for Level 4 SPCMH, Teagasc CDS, 2007
6. Programme Specifications for FETAC Level 4 Specific Purpose Certificate in Mushroom Harvesting, Teagasc CDS
7. Tutor implementation Plans
8. Teagasc Education System Exams Results Listings (EMS)
9. External Verifier Reports
10. Student Satisfaction Surveys
11. Commercial Mushroom Producers website [www.mushrooms.ie](http://www.mushrooms.ie)
12. An Evaluation of the Teagasc Equine Programme. Teagasc Business Performance Unit, 2009.
13. Teagasc Quality Assurance Handbook, 2007
14. FETAC Quality Assurance in Further Education and Training, Policies and Guidelines for Providers, Version 1.3  
[http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/Policy\\_and\\_Guidelines\\_on\\_Provider\\_QA\\_v1.3.pdf](http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/Policy_and_Guidelines_on_Provider_QA_v1.3.pdf)

## Appendix 2 Existing Level 4 SPCMH Student Satisfaction Survey

Q1 In relation to the course, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects:

Dissatisfied = 1    moderately Satisfied = 2    Satisfied = 3    Very satisfied = 4

	<i>Rating</i>
Standard of practical instruction	
Workbooks/handouts/overheads	
Opportunity for discussions	
Encouragement to express your views and experiences	
Opportunity to ask questions	
Help from instructors	

Q2 In relation to assessments, please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects:

Dissatisfied = 1    Satisfied = 2    moderately Satisfied = 3    Very satisfied = 4

	<i>Rating</i>
Amount of assessment	
Notice of assessments	
Instructions for assessments easy to understand	
Assessment fairly marked	
Feedback on performance in tests	
Assessment appeals procedure	

Q3 Would you recommend this course to a friend or family member with similar needs to you?

Yes = 1

No= 2

Q4 Do you feel that Teagasc is committed to delivering a quality service to you?

Yes = 1

No= 2

Q5 State one improvement that could be made to the course

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Q6 Register one comment you have about the course

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