

Abstract

Innovative Teaching Methods for the Delivery of the Teagasc Distance Education Programme

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The overall aim of this study was to complete an analysis of the delivery of the Teagasc Distance Education Programme and review innovative teaching methods that could be applicable for the programme. The first phase of this research was completed by surveying all education officers involved in delivering the Distance Education Programme. In addition, key members of staff within the Curriculum Development and Standards Unit within Teagasc were then interviewed. The initial phase of the research was designed to help understand how the Teagasc Distance Education Programme is currently being delivered and the future plans for the programme within Teagasc. A number of international options were reviewed, and two colleges were chosen as case studies for this research. Firstly, Scotland's Rural College was selected as they have won awards for innovative delivery methods and Northern Ireland's College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise as they are currently transitioning from face to face learning to increased online and distance learning.

The key findings from the study were that Teagasc have a strong programme that is suitable for distance learning. The staff are keen and willing to learn to deliver more through distance learning but require more training and encouragement from management. There are several key steps Teagasc need to take in order to keep growing distance learning in the organisation. The first steps in this would be the development of a distance learning team. By identifying a particular staff member or members who will lead the growth of distance learning within the organisation. Increasing staff training to help them understand how students learn and the elements involved in creating online learning content would be another vital step for Teagasc. As MOODLE is the current Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used by Teagasc, all staff must be equipped with the necessary skills to use all elements of the VLE.

These recommendations are only starter options for Teagasc in order to fully reach their potential Teagasc must conduct ongoing research into new and innovative technologies being created.