

Teagasc Opening Statement on Teagasc Education and Training to the Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture Food and the Marine

Introduction

We very much welcome the invitation to speak to this Committee on Teagasc's role in agri-food education.

Overview

The Teagasc Establishment Act (1988) provides a statutory mandate for Teagasc to provide or procure the provision of agricultural education and training. Teagasc is the primary provider of accredited further (vocational) education and training (FET) for the agricultural sector. It also has a substantial role in supporting undergraduate higher education (HE) delivery for the land sector. Total annual participation levels for Teagasc further education and Teagasc linked higher education programmes have ranged from 5,000 to 6,000 in recent years. Cumulative annual enrolments for FE and HE programmes over the period 2010 to 2020 approach 30,000.

Teagasc also offers QQI accredited and non-accredited short-duration courses on specific topics subject to demand. The Teagasc ConnectEd platform provides short duration training opportunities for rural professionals and the wider agri-food sector. Teagasc's broader knowledge transfer (KT) activities also play a key role in enhancing the on-going learning and continuous professional development of farmers through events and farmer discussion group networks. Teagasc are currently developing the EVOLVE programme to coordinate the delivery of this life-long learning service for farmers.

Teagasc education delivery is organised around 7 Colleges (including 3 Private Colleges) and 12 Advisory Regions supported by a national network of host farms /units and Education Benchmark farms. Research centres and KT units participate in and/or support Teagasc Education delivery as necessary and play an important role in Teagasc education staff training.

The Teagasc Education Programme forms part of the Knowledge Transfer Directorate in Teagasc. Teagasc assign a significant amount of resources to the Education Programme. Approximately 175 staff are assigned to the Education programme, and the budget for 2021 is €18 million. Within this staff cohort, Teagasc are dependent on the ability to recruit temporary contract staff to meet the fluctuations that can arise in the demand for course enrolment places, particularly in Part-time and Distance Education delivery.

Teagasc makes a major contribution to agri-food postgraduate education and research in the training of PhD and Masters students in collaboration with Universities and Institutes of Technology in Ireland and with universities across the world through its Walsh Scholarship Programme.

Teagasc Education Forum

Teagasc has a long established Education Forum that acts as a consultative body for its education stakeholders. Farm organisations (e.g. Macra na Feirme, IFA, ICMSA, ICA), learners, student placement hosts, universities, institutes of technology, private agricultural colleges, DAFM and QQI are represented. The Forum provides feedback and guidance to Teagasc concerning the education and training needs of future

land sector entrants, the development and enhancement of Teagasc education programmes and the overall effectiveness of Teagasc education delivery.

Teagasc Education Vision

The *Teagasc Education Vision Report* was published in 2018 following a major consultation exercise with stakeholders. The Vision underpins the *Teagasc Statement of Strategy 2021 -2024* in relation to the organisation's education goals. The Vision Report underscored in particular the need for young trained farmer education qualifications to reflect future capability needs of the farming sector, the development of alternative pathways (e.g. land apprenticeships) provision of coherent lifelong learning and professional development opportunities for farmers and the need for innovative approaches to delivery and learner engagement.

Teagasc Education delivery during COVID

Teagasc has maintained delivery across all its education programmes since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic. Course commencements and completions in almost all cases have kept to schedule. The overriding priority has been to ensure the safety of learners and staff. Teagasc developed an Education COVID risk management template for its colleges and centres drawing on the national COVID roadmaps issued for the further and higher education sectors.

A hybrid delivery model was adopted embracing remote delivery and face-to-face delivery. Depending on the national COVID restrictions, the ratio of remote delivery to face-to-face delivery has varied. Since early January, delivery has been primarily online with face-to-face delivery occurring only for time critical practical skills instruction on a risk assessed basis. Student placements successfully proceeded on a voluntary basis for learners and hosts with COVID guidance protocols in place. While Teagasc sat outside of the Dept. Further and Higher Education COVID support measures introduced last autumn for further and higher education students, the organisation, with the sanction of DAFM, provided parallel supports for eligible Teagasc learners.

Teagasc's role in education and training can be classified as follows:

- 1) Further Education
- 2) Linked Higher Education with the Institutes of Technology
- 3) Collaboration with the universities on undergraduate Degree programmes
- 4) Apprenticeships
- 5) Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme
- 6) Education for Rural Professionals (ConnectEd)
- 7) Continuous Professional Development (Teagasc Evolve)
- 8) Technical training for Irish Food Companies

1) Teagasc Further Education delivery

Teagasc provides further education programmes at Levels 5 and 6 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the awarding body for these programmes. Graduates of Teagasc Level 6 Advanced Certificate programmes and the Level 6 Specific Purpose Certificate

in Farming programme meet the ‘Young Trained Farmer’ educational requirements (Green Cert) for schemes and measures directed at young farmers.

Apart from agriculture, Teagasc offers Level 5 and 6 programmes in Horticulture (College of Amenity Horticulture, National Botanic Gardens and Kildalton College); Equine (Kildalton College) and Forestry (Ballyhaise College). However, in excess of 90% of further education delivery is directed towards Level 5 and 6 agricultural programmes.

The Level 5 and 6 agricultural programmes are delivered through the following options:

- Full-time (Colleges)
- Part-time (Colleges and Advisory Regions)
- Distance (Colleges and Advisory Regions).

Full-time Level 5 and 6 programmes

Full-time courses are in the main directed at school-leavers. Enrolments for full-time agricultural programmes recovered very strongly from a very substantial dip in the early 2000s but were fully recovered by 2010. Exceptional demand led to peak full-time enrolments in 2014/2015 (Figure 1). In recent years annual enrolments have been in the region of 1,000 which has matched the demand arising. Applications for the 2021/2022 academic year are strong at this point but the actual acceptance levels will not be clear until late August.

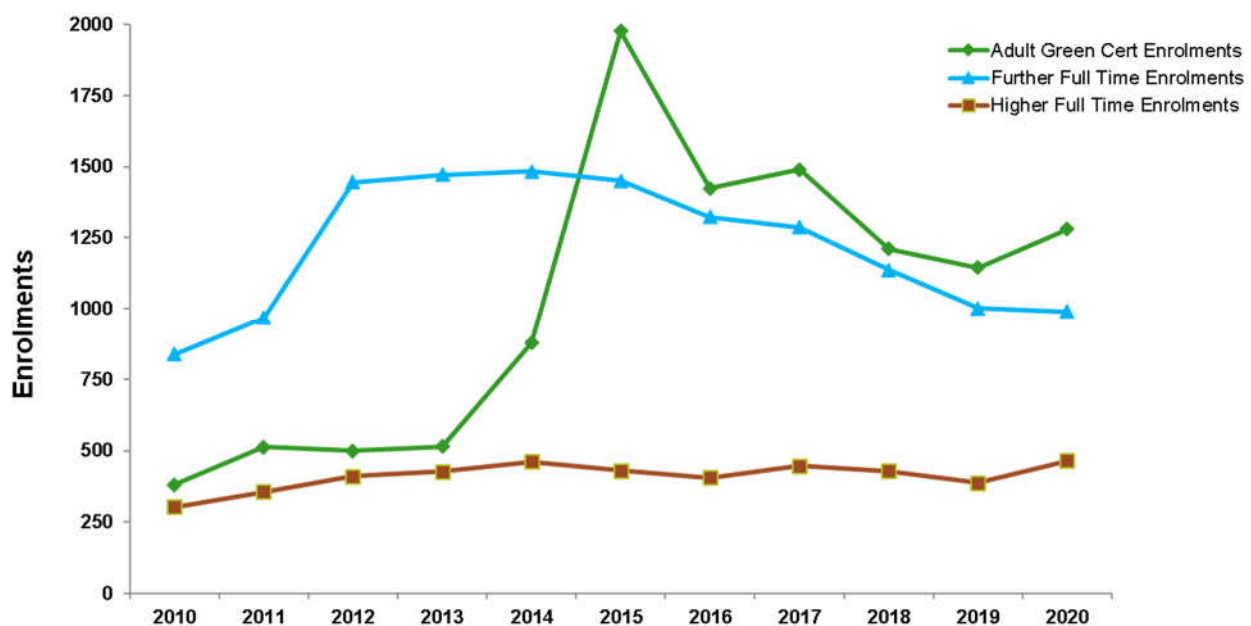


Figure 1. Teagasc Education Annual Enrolment Trends 2010-2020 in Full-time Level 5 and 6 programmes (blue), Part-time and Distance Education Green Cert programmes (green), and Teagasc linked Higher Education programmes (brown).

Part-time and Distance Education Green Cert programmes

These courses cater for those who did not pursue full-time agricultural education routes on leaving school but subsequently wish to attain a Green Cert education. Courses are delivered on a national basis at up to 30

locations subject to demand. In the years prior to 2014 overall annual enrolments for these programmes were typically around 400 - 500. Demand rapidly increased from 2014 onwards with exceptional enrolment spikes occurring in the period 2015 to 2017. Annual enrolments continue to be very robust for part-time/distance Green Cert courses and were in the range 1,100 to 1,300 over recent years (Figure 1). Enrolments for 2021 are projected to be in the range 1,500 to 1,600. If realised this will be highest intake over the past decade other than 2015.

Over the period 2014 to 2019, DAFM sanctioned Teagasc recruitment of 97 temporary (two year) contract education posts to facilitate the levels of enrolments indicated above. In spring 2021, DAFM sanctioned a further 20 contract posts of which 15 have been allocated to the Northwest/Northeast to meet on-going high levels of demand in those areas. Staff will be recruited for the majority of these temporary posts during 2021 with the remainder by early 2022.

2) Teagasc Linked Higher Education

Teagasc has a longstanding involvement with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with the first linkage arising over forty years ago with what is now Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). Teagasc has collaborative arrangements primarily with the following six Institutes of Technology:

- Cork and Tralee (now Munster Technological University)
- Dundalk
- Galway-Mayo
- Limerick
- Waterford

Students enrolled in undergraduate land sector programmes of the above HEIs attend a partner Teagasc college for delivery of the farm management, farm husbandry and sustainable farming aspects of their HEI programmes.

Annual enrolments to Teagasc linked Higher Education programmes stood at around 300 in 2010 but have typically exceeded 400 over recent years (Figure 1). Graduates of these Teagasc linked higher education programmes are deemed to meet the educational qualifications pertaining to schemes and measures for young farmers.

3) Collaboration with the universities on undergraduate Degree programmes

Teagasc also has collaborative delivery arrangements on two Level 8 Degree programmes with University College Dublin (UCD) (B.Agr.Sc - Dairy Business) and University College Cork (UCC) (Agricultural Science Degree). Both have a student intake of 25 students annually.

Students in the Dairy Business Degree programme in UCD attend Teagasc Moorepark for a full semester during the third year of the programme. Students also undertake a practical work placement within the programme, often involving international travel. Students attend the Teagasc College at Kildalton in preparation for the work placement.

The UCC Agricultural Science Degree course is more recently established. The student intake in 2021 will be the third cohort to enter the course. The course delivery is divided approximately 50:50 between Teagasc and UCC, with Teagasc providing the agricultural and practical content, delivered primarily at Teagasc Moorepark and Clonakilty Agricultural College. On-farm and industry work placements, organised by Teagasc, also form a key part of this course.

Teagasc are also in discussions to collaborate of a new undergraduate degree programme that's being established at NUIG.

4) Apprenticeships

National education policy advocates the expansion of apprenticeship enrolments and creation of new apprenticeship pathways. The recently launched *Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2021-2025* sets out ambitious targets in this regard. The *Teagasc Education Vision* recommended the development of land sector apprenticeship pathways including a Level 7 apprenticeship in farm management. Teagasc on behalf of the land sector proposed the development of five apprenticeships (two in horticulture at Level 6, two in farming – one at Level 6 and one at Level 7, and one in equine at Level 7). The outline occupational profiles for these apprenticeships have been approved by the Apprenticeship Council.

Currently Teagasc is developing an overall quality assurance framework for these higher education apprenticeship programmes for submission to and approval by QQI in the coming months. It is then intended that the first apprenticeship programme will be submitted to QQI for validation in autumn 2021 and the remainder in the first half of 2022. Current restrictions within the *1967 Industrial Training Act* excludes apprenticeships in areas of primary production (agriculture, horticulture and fishing) and in professional occupations. The *Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2021-2025* states this restriction will be removed where there is a clear rationale for an apprenticeship in these areas.

5) Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme

The Walsh Scholarships Programme is Teagasc's postgraduate development programme. The programme primarily includes students pursuing research PhD programmes and also includes a cohort of students pursuing both research and taught programmes for Masters Degrees. The numbers of enrolled students has been between 250 and 300 in recent years. In recent years Teagasc has linked with Irish Aid and the Department of Foreign Affairs to provide a number of scholarships for students in developing countries.

The objective of the Walsh Scholarships Programme is to support the training and professional development of Scholars in association with Irish and international universities. Walsh Scholars are mainly located at the Teagasc Research Centres across the four programme areas. Approximately 30 Walsh Scholars undertake specific Masters programmes related to Agricultural Extension and Innovation. Students are afforded the opportunity as part of their education to undertake placements in various Teagasc advisory offices across the country.

The graduates of these programmes go on to find employment in a wide variety of organisations in both the public and private sectors that are connected to Ireland's agriculture and food industry.

6) Education for Rural Professionals (ConnectEd)

Professionals working with the agri-food sector have a significant role to play in influencing and supporting best practice at farm and food business level. In recognition of this, in 2015 Teagasc established the ConnectEd Programme, which is designed to provide training, knowledge supports and networking opportunities to professionals working with farmers and food producers. To date the programme has delivered over 6,500 training places to professionals working across the agri-food sector in Ireland including the financial services sector, input suppliers, agricultural consultants, agricultural contractors, food industry and other state agencies.

The programme delivers online and in-field training in areas such as farm finance, crop nutrition management, land drainage design, grassland management, ruminant nutrition and food innovation. In addition, the programme streams a number of popular webinars and podcasts as well as providing online updates to members. Industry professionals can access the Teagasc Online Nutrient Management Planning System and Profit Monitor via the Teagasc ConnectEd Programme.

7) Continuous Professional Development (Teagasc Evolve)

The Teagasc Education Vision Report (2018) identified the need for life-long learning and continuous professional development (CPD) programmes across all land based sectors. The development of CPD programmes are important for recent graduates and established farmers to meet the future needs of the land based sector and to up skill in areas such as technical, financial and labour management. The report identified the need for more clearly defined and accessible CPD routes for the land based sector; primary education courses alone are not sufficient for future occupations in agriculture.

In response to this requirement, Teagasc are developing the EVOLVE programme to provide a platform for farmers to engage with CPD opportunities, and to have participation in training and development activities recorded. The programme will incorporate activities such as specific accredited courses as well as including more general engagement in information and training events such as discussion group participation as well as information and demonstration event attendance. Participants will receive Teagasc-approved CPD points for successfully completing these courses and activities.

8) Technical training for Irish Food Companies

Teagasc also provide training programmes to Irish Food companies from Teagasc centres and other locations around the country, including in-company training options. There are core training programmes in New Product Development, Processing Technologies, Legislation, Food Assurance Standards, Marketing and Business Planning. Training programmes address specific industry needs and skills gaps identified in national studies and in consultation with industry.

The training programme operates to best quality assurance standards and many courses are QQI (Quality & Qualifications Ireland) certified. Depending on the nature of the course, they can be tailored to the requirements of the company in individual cases. In some cases, these courses are delivered via the Teagasc ConnectEd platform.