

## 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 education and up skilling in the agriculture sector.

### 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.

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 assign a significant amount of resources to the Education Programme. Approximately 169 staff are assigned to the Education programme, and the budget cost for 2023 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 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, Technological Universities, 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 and Training – Key Roles

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

- 1) Further Education
- 2) Linked Higher Education with the Technological Universities
- 3) Collaboration with the universities on undergraduate Degree programmes
- 4) Apprenticeships
- 5) Teagasc Walsh Scholarship Programme
- 6) Education for Rural Professionals (ConnectEd)

### 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 Gurteen) 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 delivered via 7 Colleges (including 3 Private Colleges)
- Part-time (Colleges and across our 12 Advisory Regions)
- Distance (Colleges and across our 12 Advisory Regions)

#### *a. Full-time Level 5 and 6 programmes*

Full-time courses are in the main directed at school-leavers. In recent years annual enrolments have been stable in the region of 1,000 which has matched the demand arising.

#### *b. 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.

Since 2014, DAFM sanctioned Teagasc recruitment of temporary (two year) contract education posts has been important to facilitate the levels of enrolments indicated above.

## **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 South East Technological University (SETU). Teagasc has collaborative arrangements primarily with the following five Institutes of Technology:

- Munster Technological University
- South East Technological University
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Atlantic Technological University
- Technological University of the Shannon

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 500 over recent years. 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). A significant portion of both programmes is delivered by Teagasc at Moorepark, Kildalton and Clonakilty.

## **4) Apprenticeships**

National education policy advocates the expansion of apprenticeship enrolments and creation of new apprenticeship pathways. The *Teagasc Education Vision* recommended the development of land sector apprenticeship pathways. 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 Level 6 horticulture apprenticeship welcomed 10 new apprentices last month while the Level 6 and Level 7 agriculture will welcome their first apprentices over the coming weeks.

## **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 undertaking research PhDs or Masters are mainly located at the Teagasc Research Centres, or Advisory offices in the case of specific Masters programmes related to Agricultural Extension and Innovation.

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.

### **An evolving curriculum**

In 2023, a new climate specialist was appointed to Teagasc Education to enhance and further develop the curriculum and incorporate the Climate Action practices from colleagues in Teagasc Research and Advisory. This appointment endorses and strengthens the increasing focus on curriculum and its pivotal role in agricultural knowledge transfer and skills development. Each college farm is a Teagasc Signpost farm and demonstrates best practice in Climate Action.

### **Digital Transformation**

Teagasc is delighted to work with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and to take ownership in late 2022 of 18 agricultural machinery simulators and three equine simulators. These state of the art machines are located across the college network and all learners avail of the digital learning technology. The critical focus on farm health and safety is embodied in these learning technologies. We look forward to the acquisition of new cow and calf and injecting simulators for all learners in 2024 and thank DAFM for their valued support.