



Report of External Peer Review Group for the Programmatic Review of:

Named Award:	Bachelor of Business Bachelor of Science
Programme Title(s):	BBS in Rural and Agri-Business (Level 7) HC in Agriculture & Environmental Management (Level 6) BSc in Agriculture & Environmental Management (Level 7) BSc (Hons) in Rural Enterprise & Environmental Management (Level 8) (add-on honours degree)
Exit Award(s):	Higher Certificate in Science in Agriculture & Environment Management Advanced Certificate in Agriculture (Level 6)
Award Type:	Honours Degree, Ordinary Degree, Higher Certificate
Award Class:	Major
NFQ Level:	Level 6, 7 and 8
ECTS / ACCS Credits:	120, 180, 240
Location:	Galway and Mountbellow
Minor Award(s):	Green Certificate (Advanced Certificate in Agriculture)

Panel Members

Name	Position	Organisation
Billy Bennett	Chairperson	LYIT
Mary Rogers	Secretary	GMIT
Damien Courtney	IOT Member	CIT
James Cunningham	University Member	NUIG
Edna Curley	University Member	NUIG
Liam Bluett	Professional Practitioner	Ballybane Enterprise Centre
Karina Dennigan	Institute Graduate	

Programme Board Team

Lorna Moynihan	Tom Burke
Evelyn Moylan	Deirdre Lusby
Ivan MacPhilip	Kevin Mc Donagh
Raymond Holly	Seamus Lennon
Heather Lally	
Rita Hughes	
Carmel Sweeney	

1 Introduction

The following report to Academic Council is a validation panel report from an expert panel of assessors on the Bachelor of Business Rural Enterprise and Agri-business and the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture & Environmental Management.

The report is divided into the following sections:

- Background to Proposed Programme
- General Findings of the Validation Panel
- Programme-Level Findings
- Module-Level Findings

2 Background to Proposed Programme

See Programme Self Evaluation Report (SER) for more detailed information.

3 General Findings of the External Peer Review Group

Both programmes have been approved for one year intake only, as current programmes are being phased out and new programmes being introduced in September 2015.

It was noted that there is a significant overlap between the two programmes with approximately 90% of subjects being done together, and also with a common first year.

The panel strongly recommends that bridging / transition arrangements are put in place to facilitate students commencing on the existing programmes in September 2014 transferring to the new programmes.

The importance of the Green Cert was also noted, as some students just sign up for that reason. In addition, it was viewed as important to note on the CAO form as this is a way of letting potential students know that it is available as a two year award.

Having considered the documentation provided and discussed it with the programme development team, the External Peer Review Group recommends the following:

Bachelor of Business Rural Enterprise and Agri-business, and the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture & Environmental Management.

Place an x in the correct box.

Accredited for the next five academic years or until the next programmatic review, whichever occurs sooner	
Accredited subject to conditions and/or recommendations. Note: Both programmes approved for one year intake only as they are being phased out with new programmes for September 2015.	x
Re-designed and re-submitted to the same External Peer Review Group after additional developmental work	
Not Accredited	

Note:

Approval is conditional on the submission of a revised programme document that takes account of the conditions and recommendations outlined below and a response document describing the actions of the Department to address the conditions and recommendations made by the External Peer Review Group (EPRG). In this report, the term Condition is used to indicate an action or amendment which in the view of the EPRG must be undertaken prior to the commencement of the programme. Conditions are mandatory if the programme is to be approved. The term Recommendation indicates an item to which the Programme Board should give serious consideration for implementation at an early stage and which should be the subject of on-going monitoring.

4 Programme-Level Findings

This section of the report addresses the following programme level considerations:

- Evidence of reflection by the programme board to include, where relevant evidence of collaboration and engagement with other programmes from a similar discipline area within GMIT
- Demand
- Award
- Entry requirements
- Access, transfer and progression
- Retention
- Standards and Outcomes
- Programme structure
- Learning and Teaching Strategies
- Assessment Strategy
- Resource requirements
- Research Activity
- Quality Assurance
- Internationalisation
- Professional Practice (Work Experience / Internship etc)

4.1 Reflection, including internal and external engagement

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Is there evidence of reflection in the SER of how the programme performed since the last programmatic review.
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- The two departments and the Mountbellow Centre on the collaborate nature of the programmes, jointly delivered across two schools, with a common first year.
- Feedback from students on a supportive environment with approachable lecturers and pastoral support care.
- The diversity of intake and the achievement of a positive learner experience within the resources available.
- Importance of the programme for the region
- Success in winning enterprise related awards/competitions

Condition(s):

- Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and Environment Management Programme (Level 7, plus one year add-on Level 8) approved for one new intake only (September 2014)
- Bachelor of Business in Rural and Enterprise Agri-business approved for one year intake only (September 2014) on the condition that the department submits a supplementary proposal outlining the main proposed changes arising out of the SER process.

Recommendation(s):

- The panel noted that replacement programmes are being proposed from the Schools of Business and Science, with a view to commencing in September 2015. The Panel strongly recommends that bridging / transition arrangements be put in place to facilitate students commencing on the existing programmes in September 2014, transferring to the new programmes.
- Recommend that the management of the work placement is reviewed to ensure that students are placed in appropriate and approved work settings. This should involve an agreement between the students, employer and the institute. In addition, review the transition back into college as there is a big gap between the completion of the work placement and returning to college.
- Note that the revised programmes are being developed collaboratively and strongly recommend that the common first year remains in place. In addition the new level 8 programme could be provided in the CAO with generic entry and named award options.
- The programme team should review how blended / e-learning can enhance the learning experience of students, leveraging the experience of experienced users of Moodle.
- Ensure that career and postgraduate programme opportunities are presented to award year students.
- Consider opportunities for development of part-time programmes, Minor or Special Purpose Awards. An industry advisory board would be useful in this regard.
- Consider offering some larger modules within a semester, particularly in the award year and offer electives / choice to students.
- Review module titles to ensure they are current as well as recognisable and attractive to prospective students and to employers.
- Review the approach to assessment to ensure that assessments are spread out over the semester. Ensure learning schedules are given to students, and consider a cross-modular assessment.

Bachelor of Business Rural Enterprise and Agri-business programme

- In relation to the work placement it would be best placed within an agri-business environment, engaging in business activities. Student preferences for a farm-based placement should also be facilitated.
- Consider the introduction of an Agri-business module in year 4 of the proposed new programme.

Bachelor of Science in Agriculture & Environmental Management

- Ensure that science has an appropriate weighting especially in year 3.
- Further elements relating to technology (GIS, GPS) need to be included in the programme. IT and appropriate software packages also need to be more prevalent throughout the programme.

- Ensure that students are equipped with adequate research skills to enable graduates to pursue postgraduate studies or careers in research. This should include a formal research methodology module.
- Reconsider the proposal to drop the Sustainable Development module or integrate the important aspects of sustainable development in other relevant modules.
- Panel acknowledge that most of the issues raised by the panel are included in the proposed new programme.
- Note from panel: Not to drop the business and communication module, as it is seen as useful for science students in terms of gaining experience in presentation skills.

4.2 Demand

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Is there a need for the programme and has evidence been provided to support it?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

4.3 Award

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Is the level and type of the award appropriate?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- The panel noted that replacement programmes are being proposed from the Schools of Business and Science, with a view to commencing in September 2015. The Panel strongly recommends that bridging / transition arrangements be out in place to facilitate students commencing on the existing programmes in September 2014, transferring to the new programmes.

4.4 Entry Requirements

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Are the entry requirements for the proposed programme clear and appropriate? Is there a relationship with this programme and further education?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- Note that the revised programmes are being developed collaboratively and strongly recommend that the common first year remains in place, in addition the new level 8 programme could be provided in the CAO with generic entry and named award options.

Note: Research option with NUIG and some go to UCD to complete a Masters programme.

4.5 Access, Transfer and Progression

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme incorporate the procedures for access, transfer and progression that have been established by the HEA and as contained in the Institute's Quality assurance Framework (QAF) COP No.4?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

4.6 Retention

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme comply with the Institute norms for retention, both in first year and subsequent years? Are both elements of the First Year Experience {(i) Learning to Learn (now Learning and Skills Innovation) and (ii) PASS} embedded in this programme? Evidence of other retention initiatives?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Note:

- Some students leave after year 2 and 3, this is mainly due to the Green Cert. It was also noted that Mountbellow has a great sense of community which contributes to the high retention rate.
- The Learning to learn was seen to be more essential for mature students.

4.7 Standards and Outcomes

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme meet the required award standards for programmes at the proposed NFQ level (i.e. conform to QQI Award Standards)? For parent award? For exit award (if applicable)? For Minor Award (if applicable)? For Special Purpose Award (if applicable)?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

The awards standards requirements for programmes on the NFQ Framework can be found at http://www.hetac.ie/publications_pol01.htm

Note:

- The panel noted that replacement programmes are being proposed from the Schools of Business and Science, with a view to commencing in September 2015.
- Consider opportunities for development of part-time programmes, Minor or Special Purpose Awards. An industry advisory board would be useful in this regard.

- That the revised programmes are being developed collaboratively and strongly recommend that the common first year remains in place, in addition the new level 8 programme could be provided in the CAO with generic entry and named award options.

4.8 Programme Structure

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Is the programme structure logical and well designed and can the stated programme intended learning outcomes in terms of employment skills and career opportunities be met by this programme?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

4.9 Learning and Teaching Strategies

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Have appropriate learning and teaching strategies been provided for the proposed programme that support Student Centred Learning (SCL)? Evidence of consideration of flexible delivery methods including eLearning?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- The programme team should review how blended / e-learning can enhance the learning experience of students, leveraging the experience of experienced user's of Moodle.

4.10 Assessment Strategies

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Have appropriate programme assessment strategies been provided for the proposed programme (as outlined in the QQI/HETAC Assessment and Guidelines, 2009)?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Assessment strategies are required in line with HETAC's Assessment and Standards and should be considered by the programme EPRG. See (HETAC (2009) Assessment and Standards, Section 4.6.1, page 33). Accordingly the assessment strategy should address the following (See (HETAC (2009) Assessment and Standards, Section 2.2.5, page 13) :

- Description and Rationale for the choice of assessment tasks, criteria and procedures. This should address fairness and consistency, specifically their validity, reliability and authenticity;
- Describe any special regulations;

- Regulate, build upon and integrate the module assessment strategies;
- Provide contingent strategy for cases where learners claim exemption from modules, including recognition of prior learning;
- Ensure the programme's continuous assessment workload is appropriately balanced;
- Relate to the learning and teaching strategy;
- Demonstrate how grading criteria will be developed to relate to the Institutional grading system.

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- Review the approach to assessment to ensure that assessments are spread out over the semester. Ensure learning schedules are given to students, and consider a cross-modular assessment.

4.11 Resource Requirements

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the Institute possess the resources and facilities necessary to deliver the proposed programme?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- Further elements relating to technology (GIS, GPS) need to be included in the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture & Environmental Management. IT and appropriate software packages also need to be more prevalent throughout the programme.

Note: It was noted that Bord Bia and Teagasc are helpful in terms of teaching technology resources.

4.12 Research Activity

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Evidence that Learning & Teaching is informed by research? Number of staff engaged in institutional/pedagogical research?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- Ensure that students are equipped with adequate research skills to enable graduates to pursue postgraduate studies or careers in research. This should include a formal research methodology module.

Note: Research option with NUIG and some go to UCD to complete Masters programme.

4.13 Quality Assurance

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme demonstrate how the Institute's quality assurance procedures (QAF) have been applied and that satisfactory procedures exist for the on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and Environment Management Programme (Level 7, plus one year add-on Level 8) approved for one new intake only (September 2014)
- Bachelor of Business in Rural and Enterprise Agri-business approved for one year intake only (September 2014) on the condition that the department submits a supplementary proposal outlining the main proposed changes arising out of the SER process.

Recommendation(s):

- None.

4.14 Internationalisation

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme demonstrate how the syllabi represent an international dimension? Is there evidence of approaches to induct international students?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Note: There are currently a couple of foreign students but mainly Irish nationals from a farming background. The programme team have not actively targeted this market, space is an issue, and Teagasc not very supportive due to lack of funding for teaching. They have run programmes separately to cater for international interest. Recommend to consider for the future.

4.15 Professional Practice (Work Experience / Internships etc)

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme incorporate professional practice as per the Institute's policy on professional practice (PP)? If not, is there evidence that PP is under consideration by the programme board?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- Recommend that the management of the work placement is reviewed to ensure that students are placed in appropriate and approved work settings. This should involve an agreement between the students / employer and the institute. In addition, review the transition back into college as there is a big gap between the completion of the work placement and returning to college.

Note: The work placement is for 3 months, generally done on an individual basis and the team do their best to accommodate all students. Ultimately it is the student's choice, and the work placement can be spilt half farm / half business

5.0 Module-Level Findings: General

Panel Note: Not to drop the business and communication module, as it is seen as useful for science students in terms of gaining experience in presentation skills.

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- Consider offering some larger modules within a semester, particularly in the award year and offer electives / choice to students.
- Review module titles to ensure they are current as well as recognisable and attractive to prospective students and to employers.
- Consider the introduction of an Agri-business module in year 4 of the proposed new programme.
- Reconsider the proposal to drop the Sustainable Development module or integrate the important aspects of sustainable development in other relevant modules

5.1 Module Assessment Strategies

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Have appropriate module assessment strategies been included in each Module Descriptor?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- None

Condition(s):

- None.

Recommendation(s):

- Review the approach to assessment to ensure that assessments are spread out over the semester. Ensure learning schedules are given to students, and consider a cross-modular assessment.

6.0 Student Findings

Four students gave their feedback from a mix of the two programmes and years. They commented on a supportive environment with approachable lecturers and pastoral support care.

In relation to the work placement they felt that they didn't get the business experience, and a lot of the time felt that they were just helping out; they would have liked if the expectations were agreed in advance. They also felt that there was a big gap between completion of the work placement and returning to college, and as a result that the transition back was difficult. Lecturers visited twice during the work placement.

They felt that more crop and soil science would have been good, as many of the students have an interest in going to UCD to complete their Masters.

More science weighing in third year would also be better. The third year workload is very high with too many assessments.

They would have preferred more of an engagement with other courses earlier on as there is no real mix until 4th year. In addition, there was exposure to industry and guest speakers in fourth year.

The felt that there was a good mix of group and individual work, and good use of moodle. They were given talks on research.

More exposure to GIS mapping tool was needed. More focus was also needed on legislation, only one module at the moment.

They also felt that there was limited access to the library after normal hours, and limited career planning.

The overall student experience was positive.

7.0 Stakeholder Engagement

It was evident that stakeholder feedback was taken into account with the proposed changes. Furthermore there is constant engagement with Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture, with most of the feedback being taken on board in particular in the new proposed programme.

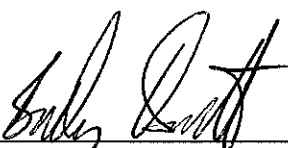
8.0 Future Plans

Following discussions with students, graduates and industry representatives it has been decided to revise the programmes significantly. The proposed new programmes will commence in September 2015, following an assessment by the Institute in accordance with the Quality Procedures for new programme development.

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Evidence that the programme board considered and identified opportunities and signalled proposals for related new programme and award development.
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Validation Panel Report Approved By:

Signed:



Billy Bennett,
Chairperson.

Date:

24 April 2015