

2022 Masters in Agricultural Innovation Support

Project Summary

1. Project Title and Associated Programme

KT Programme	Agricultural Education
Project title	Evaluation of Online Learning Strategies to optimise the delivery of the new Horticulture apprenticeships in Sportsturf and Applied Horticulture.

2. Project background

Apprenticeship Training in Ireland was reviewed in 2013 and concluded that “Apprenticeships and other work-based training play a critical role in boosting skill levels across the economy, and in supporting people into sustainable careers” (Department of Education and Skills, 2013). The development of apprenticeships is a national policy and is linked to targets and goals set out in the National Skills Strategy, Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019, Apprentice Action Plan 2016 – 2020, Food Wise 2025 and Teagasc Education Vision 2018.

As part of the National plan to expand apprenticeships in Ireland, 26 new apprenticeships were approved which included 5 Teagasc proposals for the land based sector. Currently Teagasc is validating the programmes for these land based apprenticeships in conjunction with industry led consortia as per QQI and SOLAS guidelines. It is proposed that apprentices will spend 80% “on the job” with an employer and 20% “off the job” with a Teagasc College.

The apprenticeship programmes will be designed to support blended learning strategies to facilitate the apprentices learning within the programme both on and off the job. This mantra is strongly supported by Teagasc policy.

Teagasc strategic blended learning objectives align with the educational goals of the Teagasc Education Vision Report 2018 :

Goal 8: Adopt innovative teaching and learning methodologies, delivery approaches and learner supports that will enhance the capabilities of Teagasc learners in a holistic way.

This goal aims to use digital technologies to aid education delivery and learning.

Teagasc ICT strategy

The Teagasc statement of strategic direction 2020-2023 further sets out that blended learning would encompass a standardised VLE Model, remote lecture delivery, classroom technologies and assisted technologies.

Teagasc has secured a new version of Moodle in the last year. This has a host of learning tools and plug in functionalities that can be levered for improved delivery and learner supports that will enhance the capabilities of Teagasc.

3. Project aims and objectives

Aim:

The project will specifically look at the new Virtual Learning Environment in Teagasc and how it can be optimised to deliver the blended learning experience for Horticulture apprentices.

Objective 1:

To identify specific digital plug in solutions for blended learning that will allow Horticulture apprentices to become proficient in the VLE using the new Teagasc Moodle platform.

Objective 2:

To trial a number of these VLE online solutions with the learners across the Teagasc horticulture apprenticeship in 2023.

Objective 3:

To develop a specific online module “Introduction to Blended Learning” that will instruct apprentices in Horticulture on the functionality and use of the VLE online platform.

4. Suggestions for methodology (max 150 words)

- Desk research and literature review to examine Teagasc context and appraise approaches adopted by other providers of apprenticeship programmes both nationally and internationally
- Mixed methods approach:
 - Quantitative approach that will include a survey of students (graduates and or current students) undertaking work-based programmes in land based sector.
 - Quantitative approach that will look at industry stakeholders and their capability to support the learner around blended learning
 - Specific trial of Teagasc plug in technology on the new Moodle platform and evaluation of this across the Horticulture apprenticeship groups.
 - Qualitative approach with focus groups with students and staff to validate findings and resources
 - Qualitative approach that will include Interviews with external providers of apprenticeship programmes

5. Expected Impact of the Project

This project will support the following goals of the Teagasc Education Vision Report (Teagasc, 2018, pp. 61-65):

- Goal 4 – Develop learners’ knowledge, skills and competence to meet the changing requirements of the 21st century land sector occupations.
- Goal 8 – Adopt innovative teaching and learning methodologies, delivery approaches and learner supports that will enhance the capabilities of Teagasc learners in a holistic way.
- Goal 10 – Support the development and maintenance of land sector awards standards