

2022 Masters in Agricultural Innovation Support

Project Summary

1. Project Title and Associated Programme

KT Programme	Education
Project title	Identifying, supporting, and attracting a diversity of learners to Teagasc further education and training courses

2. Project background

This project will determine how to characterise, support, and attract a diversity of learners to Teagasc education courses. It builds directly upon a 2021 MAIS study on "Diversity and Inclusion in Agricultural Education: The experiences and perspectives of staff working in vocational agricultural education in Ireland"

Diversity refers to individual and cultural differences prevailing in a workplace, often deriving from differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, ability, and sexual orientation. Inclusiveness describes an attitude whereby the worth and dignity of all individuals are recognised and promoted. Since Autumn 2018, under the People Strategy, Teagasc has been working toward a diversity audit, rolled out in January 2022; developing a diversity and inclusion policy, launched on 16 July 2020; and scoping the delivery of diversity and inclusion workshops to managers and all staff.

Diversity and inclusiveness initiatives will help ensure that our graduates are prepared for the increasingly diverse world they will find when they return to their home farms. And it will help ensure that Teagasc education attracts a student body that is diverse in terms of gender, race, age, ability and sexual orientation and that we prepare the diversity of graduates that our industry requires.

3. Project aims and objectives

This project aims to determine how to characterise, support, and attract a diversity of learners to Teagasc education courses.

The project objectives are:

- Describe the lived experience of diversity among mainstream and non-mainstream learners in Teagasc full time and part time courses
- Define the diversity and inclusion concerns of prospective applicants to Teagasc courses who might be characterised as minorities in agricultural education
- Develop recommendations based on international best practice for nurturing diversity and inclusiveness within Teagasc education and training settings
- Develop and publish guidelines on the message content, format, and channels for promoting Teagasc diversity and inclusiveness among prospective applicants, career guidance professionals, parents and the general public

4. Suggestions for methodology

- Learner life-cycle data analysis: collate and analyse existing data from the newly deployed Learner Welcome Survey of new learners across all courses, end-of-course learner satisfaction surveys, and 5-year graduate surveys which all contain questions on equality, diversity, and inclusion
- Immersion / Ethnographic research: establish confidential, anonymous means of gathering experiences from potential and current students, such as a pop-up clinic at colleges, or wearing a "talk to me about anything" T-shirt at careers events and open days, or anonymised online "get in contact" forms
- Case study or unobtrusive field study: work in a college setting to document all personal experiences of diversity or lack of inclusion, invite learners to share their experiences as case studies, and prepare a reflective journal of the researchers own developing ideas
- Co-creation: work with learners to develop and test guidelines, infographics, translated or localised course information or student support materials
- Participatory Action Research: work with learners to use, evaluate, and iteratively customise different communication channels such as conventional and social media, online groups, or whatsapp groups to advertise Teagasc diversity and inclusion supports

5. Expected Project Impact

The research project accords with several Teagasc objectives:

- The year 2022 has been designated as Teagasc Year of Diversity and Inclusion.
- The Teagasc 2021 Statement of Strategy specifies an ongoing theme to "Implement the commitments to gender equality and the promotion of diversity and inclusion set out in the People Strategy."
- The 2018 "Teagasc Education Vision - meeting future needs" report specifies that Teagasc will improve support for a diversity of learners, broaden the diversity of the student body, and take actions for gender diversity.
- The 2018 Teagasc People Strategy has as one of its core principles "Diversity, equality and inclusiveness enhance our core purpose."

The research project will also address developing issues within Teagasc education.

Currently, our learner population is relatively uniform, particularly in agriculture courses. But the potential learner population is increasingly diverse, including a range of nationalities, abilities, and lived experiences. To sufficiently prepare our future farmers and to attract different kinds of people into agriculture, we need to understand diversity and tailor solutions to meet the needs of potential learners.