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# Teagasc Advisory Regional Review 2021

## *Mayo* Report

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## Introduction

Teagasc, the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority, is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. Established in September 1988 under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988, Teagasc is funded by state grant-in-aid, fees for research advisory and training services, income from national and EU competitive research programmes and revenue from farming activities and commodity levies.

The overall goal of the Teagasc Advisory Programme is to support the on-going development of sustainable family farms in Ireland, through efficient and effective knowledge transfer (KT) activities. The programme currently supports almost 140,000 individual farmers with 44,000 farmers contracted to Teagasc for services annually.

Teagasc reviews each of its Advisory regions on an approximate six-year cycle. The face-to-face part of the review of the Mayo Advisory Region took place in the Westport and Ballinrobe offices on October 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 2021. Prior to that, the Peer Review Panel (PRP) had a virtual Briefing Session on September 30<sup>th</sup> and a virtual Pre-Assessment workshop on October 14<sup>th</sup>. The Peer Review Panel (PRP) (see **Appendix 1** for panel composition) prepared this report based on the information exchanged at the virtual meetings, in-person meetings with management, staff representatives, enterprise specialists, farmer stakeholders and analysis of documents. The latter included the Region's Programme Description and Self-Assessment document, business plans, Teagasc Strategic Pathways for the Teagasc Agricultural Advisory Service 2015-2020 document, the Mayo Advisory Region strategy and the Teagasc Statement of Strategy, 2017-2020.

The PRP met with a farmer stakeholder group that consisted of 4 farmers. One farmer was finishing beef and was a demonstration farmer for the education programme. Another was a hill sheep farmer producing mule replacements for the sale in Ballinrobe. One farmer who was finishing store lambs was a recent graduate of the education programme. The final participant was a mixed farmer with sucklers and lowland sheep who had engaged with all previous environment schemes as a Teagasc client.

The overall objectives of the review are: to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of the advisory service in the region; to gather evidence on the nature and scale of outcomes achieved to date and the extent to which these address the aims and objectives of the advisory service, and to learn what works (and why) so as to inform ongoing delivery and the design of the advisory service for the future.

Evaluation questions underpinning these objectives include:

- What activities have been delivered to date, compared to expectations?
- How effectively and efficiently is the programme being delivered, managed and governed?
- To what extent are changes implemented on farms?
- What outcomes and impacts have been achieved to date?
- What factors enable or hinder implementation and progress towards intended outcomes?
- What are the key lessons to inform ongoing delivery and design of future interventions?
- How is the programme performing overall?

The PRP is specifically asked to evaluate or comment on the following:

- Management and organisational capability
- Productivity and service delivery in relation to key performance indicators and outcomes
- Relevance and impact of services to the Region's clients and stakeholders

A more detailed description of each is outlined in **Appendix 2**.

## **The Mayo Advisory Region in Context**

The Mayo Advisory Region contains all of county Mayo, which is the third largest county in Ireland (5,398 km<sup>2</sup>). Within the region there is a marked difference between the north and west of the county where there are extensive hill areas covered by blanket bog, compared to the south which is largely a limestone landscape with more productive land. There is a high dependency on agriculture in the county, a large proportion of the population live in rural communities where farming is the major generator of economic activity.

There are 12,458 farms in the region which represents approximately 9 percent of all farms in the state. However, there are only 10,860 active farmers. Of these 4,127 are Teagasc clients, which equates to 38% of all farmers in the county. The participation varies by farming system with 43% of dairy producers, 38% of cattle and sheep producers and 32 % of sheep only producers being Teagasc clients.

Based on the 2010 Census of Agriculture average farm size in the county is 22.4 ha of Agricultural Area Used (AAU) as against 32.7 ha nationally. Compared to the nationally, in Mayo only 6% of farms are in excess of 50 ha as against 15% for the country as a whole. However when the distribution of farm size in Mayo is somewhat similar to that in the Border/Midlands/Western counties. In Mayo, a greater proportion of the larger farms have contact with Teagasc: almost all farms over 100 ha are clients. Similarly, of the 687 farms between 50 and 100 ha, 467 are clients.

Drystock production dominates farming in Mayo. Specialised cattle production accounts for 60% of farms, compared to 62% of farms in the Border/Midlands/Western counties and 56% in the country. Specialized sheep farming accounts for 18% of all farms in Mayo compared to 10% for the country. Tillage is virtually non-existent while specialized dairying accounts for 3% of farms compared to 11% for the country.

The Mayo Advisory Region has four offices located in Ballinrobe, Ballina, and Claremorris (leased) & Westport. In addition, there are clinics each Tuesday and Thursday in Belmullet and Swinford. Prior to 2009 and the Teagasc office rationalisation programme, there were nine offices in the region.

In 2021, the Advisory Programme was delivered through multiple KT channels including 717 farm visits, 7,300 consultations, 24 discussion groups and 55 discussion group meetings, 4,235 BPS applications, 75 €PMs, 25 derogations, 83 NMP's, 22 TAMS, 512 carbon navigators, 207 cross compliance supports and 1,133 media outputs. Farm walks, meetings, events were curtailed due to COVID 19. There were however 10 webinars and 11 short courses. There were 38 FETAC Level 5 students and 132 FETAC Level 6 students.

The advisory programme collaborates with Aurivo in the Joint Dairy Partnership. With South West Mayo Leader, Options course are provided with follow on 'Introduction to Business' courses for participants. It is also involved with 2 European Innovation Partnership (EIP) projects (Pearl Mussel and Wild Atlantic Nature) and National Parks and Wildlife projects (Corncrake and Bumble Bee schemes). The Cregduff Catchment area adjacent to Ballinrobe is one of six catchments in which Teagasc is establishing baseline information in relation to the Nitrates and Water Framework Directives.

The number of staff in the region increased by 3 to 31.8 FTE between 2017 in 2021. This includes 17.8 advisors, 4 education officers, 7 administrative staff, 2 ASSAP advisors and a regional manager. The average client to advisor ratio increased from 141:1 in 2010 to 245:1 in 2021. Expenditure in 2020 was €2.125 million of which 42.5% was recovered from advisory service charges.

## Observations on Evaluation Questions

- What activities have been delivered to date, compared to expectations?
  - *The advisory and education activities set out in the Strategic Plan (2015-20) have been largely delivered through the drystock, dairy, environment, rural development and education programmes while acknowledging the obstacles imposed by COVID-19 restrictions since March 2020.*
- How effectively and efficiently is the programme being delivered, managed and governed?
  - *The programme was delivered in an efficient and effective way that draws on the competencies and commitment of all staff (advisory, education and administration) in the region. There remains scope to improve this through a combination of greater delegation of responsibilities, clarity on workloads and nuancing of KPIs.*
- To what extent are changes implemented on farms?
  - *It is difficult to establish the extent and depth of change on Teagasc client farms in Mayo. The self-assessment report has indicated improved farm performance in the drystock and dairy sectors but due to the nature of the measurements used (primarily around activities) it is difficult to attribute on-farm performance to Teagasc advisory and education inputs.*
- What outcomes and impacts have been achieved to date?
  - *Key outcomes and impacts have been based on the engagement and support of farmer clients (over 4,000) in the adoption of good farm practices while concurrently availing of the schemes, programmes and entitlements available to them at the time. However due to the nature of the KPIs applied it is very difficult to assess actual outcomes and impacts that can be attributed to Teagasc activities in the region.*
- What factors enable or hinder implementation and progress towards intended outcomes?
  - *High numbers of Club clients to advisor limit the time that advisors allocate to farm development activities which look at the best use of existing farm assets and farmer/ farm household capabilities. In addition to this, the general air of gloom that surrounds the drystock sector over the past three years in Ireland and the associated public debate on herd reductions in light of an expanding dairy sector places substantial obstacles to the creation of an optimistic future for beef and sheep farming in the region.*
- What are the key lessons to inform ongoing delivery and design of future interventions?
  - *There is a need to consider a strategic direction for farmer clients in the new farming era of the 2020s which is more closely aligned with the resources and challenges of the Mayo Region than with national priorities. The Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) which guide the work and priorities of staff needs to reflect this strategic direction.*
- How is the programme performing overall?
  - *This is a busy and diverse programme, delivered through a committed team which connects effectively with a broad client base distributed over a large geographic area. It is performing to a good standard in delivering a combination of services in support of public policy measures and market opportunities.*

## Priority Recommendations

The PRP makes 22 recommendations. However, the following 12 recommendations are prioritised.

### 1. Management and Organisational Capability

- 1.1 Consider greater delegated responsibility to POR holders in working with the Regional Manager in managing and strengthening the delivery of advisory and education services
- 1.2 Clear guidance from management on what constitutes 'going beyond the call of duty with clients' – particularly in terms of the younger staff cohort.
- 1.3 The peak demands associated with deadlines for certain schemes and programmes needs to be carefully considered with high emphasis placed on conserving and strengthening Teagasc's reputation amongst clients and other farmers in the region. The need to augment existing services at times of peak demand will continue and is likely to increase under current trends. The preferred option identified through the After-Action Review exercise is to recruit and train contract staff to support the existing team. While this has clear benefits vis-à-vis reducing reputational risk to Teagasc, cognisance is required as to the cost-effectiveness of such an option taking due consideration of the employer-employee implications that would arise.
- 1.4 Generational renewal of farm businesses is a major challenge for many farm households in Mayo. Teagasc is well-placed to guide on this and so needs to build staff capacities accordingly.
- 1.5 Greater allocation of resources to the Options Programme and advisory supports to farm diversification is highly appropriate in a county such as Mayo with such an abundance of natural resources and with the anticipated increased supports that will emerge under the new CAP.

### 2. Productivity & Quality of Service Delivery

- 2.1 Clear KPI's for adviser outputs should be developed and benchmarked across the region to maximise the impact of the staff resource for the benefit of the region.
- 2.2 A Quality Management Plan should be developed to track improvement and provide clear evidence of key quality indicators being met. This in turn would provide the basis for development of a quality improvement plan.
- 2.3 Delivery models and services for advisory and education functions should be reviewed in line with private sector provision in the area which would maximise the resource to deliver benefits for the region.

### 3. Relevance and Impact

- 3.1 Tailor services to the needs of the clients. In the absence of clarity, schemes should be considered against one another in terms of value returned (economically, time requirements of the farmer and farmer preference) to the client.
- 3.2 The Region should consider greater investment in technology to reduce workload and improve time efficiency which is important to service delivery.
- 3.3 More attention should be given to education course graduates. Suggestion to include them in discussion groups that run for one year post graduation. A post graduate mentoring programme could also be valuable in retaining relationships and encouraging students to become clients.
- 3.4 Support the development of new farmer discussion groups in the absence of Knowledge Transfer/Exchange (KT) Group funding, with those farmers who are interested and willing to engage.

## 1. Management & Organisational Capability

### Management

- The Self-Assessment Report supported by discussions with a broad range of people indicate management arrangements that encourage and support good performance and high levels of collegiality amongst staff.
- The management structure in the Region suggests a relatively high dependence on the Regional Manager (RM) to lead across many different areas of activity. The leadership roles associated with the Positions of Responsibility (POR) might be better utilised through greater delegation of management responsibilities, especially across this broad and busy programme.
- The Panel noted the high commitment of staff to meeting the needs of their clients and the willingness to go 'above and beyond' in providing services to clients. This was evidenced from the discussion with the farmer clients and also clearly reflected in the high score achieved in the Net promoter Score (NPS) exercise.
- The broad range of activities, busy schedules and substantial workloads of most staff allows little time for more long-term strategic thinking in response to client needs and opportunities which present themselves.
- Level 3 Business Plans are at the core of setting out targets and activities for the advisory and education staff. They represent the annual workplan for staff and attempt to accommodate national level programmes within these workplans. Understandably, these workplans roll over from year to year maintaining the on-going relationships between clients and advisors and so present a key challenge at regional level in connecting individual Business Plans to the evolving national programme plans and ultimately to the wider Teagasc Strategy.
- Mentoring of staff, particularly of the younger staff in the Region is evident and this further contributes to the aforementioned collegiality and complements Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities.
- The Panel noted that CPD pathways for staff are both available to and understood by staff in support of professional development and progression.

### Technical Leadership

- The regular and frequent opportunities for advisory staff to exchange technical knowledge with Specialists was noted by the Panel and discussion with both Specialists and Advisors suggested that this was an effective process that provided advisors with up-to-date information and confidence to provide clients with timely and relevant information on farming practices and technologies.
- The advisors identified the valuable peer learning and support that happens through the Technology Action Groups (TAGs) which augment the training provided by Specialists
- There are good opportunities for staff to engage on a one-to-one basis with the Regional Manager including through the formal processes of the PMDS and through the RM being based at different advisory offices each week.

### Resources

- The advisory team in the Region comprises mostly BT Drystock advisors which reflects the core farming business of the Region in which 80% of farmers operate drystock enterprises. Advisors tend to have high numbers of clients, with an average of 280 clients/ drystock advisor and some having more than 350 clients. On-site discussions suggested an '*ideal workload*' being approx. 220 clients for drystock advisors.
- In meeting the peak demands and deadlines associated with completion of certain schemes the outsourcing of staff through the Farm Relief Services has been tried with

varying degrees of success. The After-Action Review identified useful lessons from the experience of outsourcing support at key times while on-site discussions suggested that Teagasc's reputation can be damaged through such outsourcing with a preferential solution put forward by staff being the recruitment of contract staff to meet the anticipated high levels of need from 2023 onwards.

- Generational renewal of farm businesses was identified as a major issue for many Teagasc clients and it was acknowledged that advisors are well placed to provide guidance and support to farm families in addressing issues of succession and transfer.
- Mayo is rich in natural and cultural resources, many of which are managed by farm families and have potential to be developed under the broad heading of diversification. The Options Programme provides an important starting point for farm families to re-assess and perhaps reconfigure their resources to new on-farm enterprises. However, there are limited resources allocated to this important pathway for farmers in Mayo.
- Private sector farm advisors (agri-consultants) have a substantial farmer client base in Mayo (includes 13 registered Agri Consultants Association members in Mayo) and much of their work is engaged in supporting clients on schemes. These private consultants offer opportunities for synergies with Teagasc services, particularly in the areas of agri-environmental management and natural resource management programmes such as the ASSAP.

### **Robustness & sustainability**

- A cornerstone of Teagasc's work in Mayo is the long-standing good reputation of its staff as borne out by discussion with farmers and the NPS results which indicated high satisfaction with services provided.
- There is clearly a high staff commitment to continue working with clients in the opportunities that will arise from the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023. However, there is a strong concern amongst the staff that their numbers are not adequate to meet new and increasing client demands.
- Priorities in the new Teagasc Strategy (2021-2024) see a substantial shift from the goals of the previous 10 years to the new challenges of the 2020's. In order to remain relevant, it will require advisory, education and administrative staff to widen their range of competencies in order to meet these new priorities e.g., in securing farmer health, safety and well-being; as well as supporting rural development.
- There are substantial opportunities to respond to under-utilised and under-recognised farm resources through the Options Programme and supporting on-farm rural development activities. These opportunities are set to increase under the new CAP.

### **SWOT Analysis**

- The analysis presented in the Self-Assessment Report suggests a core strength of the service is the excellent reputation underpinned by long standing good relationships with clients. This is further supported by the high NPS achieved by the Region.
- A key acknowledged strength of the service in the Region is its skills and experience in a broad range of media (radio, press & social media) and this has potential to be used more in meeting some of the threats and opportunities faced by the services in the Region.
- The concerns expressed by staff in terms of being 'stretched' in an effort to meet the increasing demands from schemes and programmes was put forward as a weakness of the current team in terms of their ability to meet the anticipated new and increasing demands that will emerge from the future CAP and associated climate actions.
- The future demands and role of agricultural education in the county was acknowledged as an important opportunity and this can be realised through the strong education team in the county. It was also noted by the Review Panel that 'competition' to Teagasc exists within the county and that this might be addressed by media campaigns to promote the high quality and relevance of the Teagasc-delivered programmes.

- Concerns are expressed in the SWOT analysis in relation to the cohort of soon-to- retire staff and the need to maintain continuity of services with clients.

### **Recommendations**

- 1.1 Consider greater delegated responsibility to POR holders in working with the Regional Manager in managing and strengthening the delivery of advisory and education services.
- 1.2 Clear guidance from management on what constitutes 'going beyond the call of duty with clients' – particularly in terms of the younger staff cohort.
- 1.3 The peak demands associated with deadlines for certain schemes and programmes needs to be carefully considered with high emphasis placed on conserving and strengthening Teagasc's reputation amongst clients and other farmers in the region. The need to augment existing services at times of peak demand will continue and is likely to increase under current trends. The preferred option identified through the After-Action Review exercise is to recruit and train contract staff to support the existing team. While this has clear benefits vis-à-vis reducing reputational risk to Teagasc, cognisance is required as to the cost-effectiveness of such an option taking due consideration of the employer-employee implications that would arise.
- 1.4 Generational renewal of farm businesses is a major challenge for many farm households in Mayo. Teagasc is well-placed to guide on this and so needs to build staff capacities accordingly.
- 1.5 Greater allocation of resources to the Options Programme and advisory supports to farm diversification is highly appropriate in a county such as Mayo with such an abundance of natural resources and with the anticipated increased supports that will emerge under the new CAP.
- 1.6 The presence of private sector agri-consultants should be viewed as an opportunity for synergies, particularly where their farmer clients participate in public policy agri-environmental measures. Discussions towards such synergies could be instigated by Teagasc.
- 1.7 The strong experience and competencies in a range of media by Teagasc Mayo should be exploited more across the advisory programmes and in particular in supporting the education programmes which are facing increasing pressures from competition in the region.
- 1.8 Examine closely the extent to which the business plans of advisors reflect the Level 1 Plans and the overall Teagasc strategy with a view to striking the best balance between locally nuanced client-oriented needs and the public policy goals reflected in Teagasc's national plans and strategy.
- 1.9 Given the age profile of staff in the Region, continued and increased mentoring of young staff by their more experienced colleagues to enable them to both settle into their roles and deliver quality services merits ongoing and high attention.

## 2. Productivity and Quality of Service Delivery in the Region

### Productivity

- The Mayo Advisory Region Business Plan sets out the level of outputs of the region with over 4,000 clients engaged by 17.8 advisers availing of a wide range of products/services. This amounts to a client:advisor average ration of almost 250:1 (ranges from 200:1 to 430:1). According to the Regional Manager the 'ideal ratio' is 220:1. If this is qualified as face, current ratios are unsustainable even in the short term and provide limited scope to deliver improved economic or environmental performance on farm.
- The services offered range from support to farmers wishing to participate in EU schemes and completion of BPS forms to those farmers completing € profit monitors and Carbon Navigators. However, the dominant delivery model for the region is through one:one support mainly around completion of applications and support for farmers within EU schemes.
- There has been a sharp drop in the number of farmers participating in Discussion Groups driven by the removal of the support payment for those attending. During the last 3 years the number of Discussion Groups has decreased from 57 to 26 and there is wide variation from 5% - 35% of client participation across advisers.
- There is limited evidence of technical business planning support and impact on drystock and dairy sectors with Discussion Group participation being less than 20% of the client base across the region.
- There is limited evidence to demonstrate benchmarking of advisers productivity and how their targets/achievements are set and assessed. The over-riding performance indicator seems to be client:advisor ratio which limits evidence of farm/sector impact.
- There are undoubtedly delivery pressures with the high number of clients and this is particularly apparent at key times of the year e.g. spring when the work load around BPS application is at its highest.

### Quality of Service Delivery

- The NPS of 49.6 is extremely high and this provides evidence of high farmer satisfaction with the Mayo Advisory Region service delivery. The main areas highlighted were that: staff were helpful and provided good advice; and were professional in their dealings with farmers.
- The Mayo Region was viewed very strongly by the farmers interviewed (4) as part of the review and they displayed strong loyalty to Teagasc staff and provided good examples where they had delivered impact, however they also indicated they used private advisers for some of the more detailed planning/technical input required.
- The presentations provided strong evidence of involvement and collaboration with some excellent programmes including the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP), work with the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF), the Wild Atlantic Nature (WAN) group and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). However, this could have been enhanced by impact measurements being integrated clearly at the outset of programme development.
- The education programmes in the region have seen a sharp decline although they are highly valued by participants as evidenced in the farmer session. There are real concerns around private sector competition and the region should consider how they work in partnership rather than investing in a campaign of competition.

**Recommendations**

- 2.1: Clear KPIs for adviser outputs should be developed and benchmarked across the region to maximise the impact of the staff resource for the benefit of the region.
- 2.2: A Quality Management Plan should be developed to track improvement and provide clear evidence of key quality indicators being met. This in turn would provide the basis for development of a quality improvement plan.
- 2.3: Delivery models and services for advisory and education functions should be reviewed in line with private sector provision in the area which would maximise the resource to deliver benefits for the region.
- 2.4: The benefits of complementing or working in partnership with the private sector in the delivery of education programmes should be considered.
- 2.5: Clear priorities in the short to medium term should be set out to effectively manage resources and minimise the apprehension building around supporting new EU programmes (CAP) in 2023.

### 3. Relevance and Impact in the Region

#### Programme relevance

- Farmers are very positively disposed to the advisory service particularly in the area of scheme delivery. Considering the value and importance of the payments being delivered through schemes this is a vital service, but prioritization of supporting schemes could be to the detriment of wider Teagasc objectives.
- Farm management decisions in the region are heavily influenced by schemes. Accessing these schemes and servicing them remains a core function of the advisory service. In many cases, farmers are dependent on Teagasc to inform them of new and upcoming schemes.
- It is unlikely that farming practices in the region will change demonstrably over the short to medium term. Therefore, as clients are receptive to schemes, the programmes as currently delivered will continue to be relevant.
- Schemes themselves will be key drivers of change in the Region with programmes such as ASSAP and forestry engaging farmers' interests.
- Communications through print, radio and online media is particularly strong in this region.
- The measurement of client needs in terms of technical information will be highly dependent on additional requirements due to new policy measures in the areas of environment, welfare, health and water as opposed to farm development and expansion.
- Measurement of impact can be viewed differently by different people i.e., clients, advisors, specialists and Teagasc management. For example, not all impact is easily quantifiable in its measurement e.g. mental health of a farmer whose advisor might be their only visitor and not all progress measurements are monetary e.g. building a positive net promoter score (NPS).
- There is lack of clarity over where social impact and public good fit in for the advisory and education services. It is not noted as a day-to-day area for the advisors but some specialists see this as a key facet of the work of Teagasc.
- With scheme management the predominant endeavor, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that behavioural change will be encouraged as envisaged.

#### Knowledge Transfer

- Farmers in the region are confident that any technical information they require can be provided by Teagasc. However the review discussions suggested that:
  - Teagasc advisory messages are not tailored enough to the region (hill farming)
  - Most farmers are not pushing or expanding their farming operations and so technical farm development advice is not a priority requirement for many clients.
  - The true worth of discussion groups was not embedded and therefore once the monetary payment ended, they disbanded, despite interest from a small cohort to continue.
- There is an expectation by many farmers in the region that Teagasc inform them of new schemes and new legislation as opposed to informing themselves and subsequently seeking advice from Teagasc. This may be a reflection of the part time nature of farming in the Region.
- Certain advisory staff have a narrower, singular focus in their work brief. For example, the ASSAP which is potentially delivering more tangible environmental impact than an advisor trying to cover multiple areas of expertise. This approach provides the advisor(s) more time to focus on the job at hand without the range of demands associated with scheme applications and administration).
- There is a high uptake of in-service training which supports and strengthens the knowledge transfer activities undertaken by staff in the region.

## Reputation

- Concern in relation to how the increased workload due to future new schemes (arising from the CAP 2023) will be serviced is evident amongst Teagasc management in the region. If clients' needs are not met on scheme support, there is a risk of reputational damage.
- Staff are the biggest resource, perception is that the future workloads due to CAP 2023, will seriously limit Teagasc Mayo's ability to impact in both farm development advisory work and education.
- Information on student progression and on farm succession is limited in the region. Therefore, the value of the Teagasc education programme in retaining relationships with students as Teagasc clients is unclear.
- The value of agricultural research seemed "distant" to farmers in the Region. They are disconnected from many of the Teagasc research centres while the BIA Innovator Campus seems to be a source of pride and excitement as a development for the west.
- The number of clients/ advisor is almost seen a 'badge of honour' but metrics in relation to the level and quality of service per client is unclear.
- There is no apparent succession planning for relationship management between farmer and advisor upon retirement of advisors.

## Recommendations

- 3.1 Tailor services to the needs of the clients. In the absence of clarity, schemes should be benchmarked against one another in terms of value returned to the client in terms of economics, the time requirements of the farmer and farmer preference).
- 3.2 The benefits of technology are not currently being fully utilized in the region and a focus on technology to reduce workload and improve time efficiency could be important to service delivery.
- 3.3 Consideration should be given to focusing on Teagasc education course graduates to include them in discussion groups to run for one year post graduation. A post-graduation mentoring programme could also be valuable in retaining relationships and converting students to clients.
- 3.4 Support the development of new farmer discussion groups in the absence of Knowledge Transfer/Exchange (KT) Group funding, with those farmers who are interested and willing to engage.
- 3.5 A holistic measurement of the impact of the service, using metrics that are customised to each area, may be more appropriate than a country wide set of KPI's.
- 3.6 There is scope for greater capacity building of farm households in relation to on farm technical developments or alternatives through the Options Programme (farm-based diversification) where the advisory service could grow in relevance.
- 3.7 There needs to be greater clarity on what constitutes acceptable "impact" for clients. On what basis are decisions on numbers serviced and demand for schemes made?
- 3.8 Clarity is required in relation to what staff resources are needed and what will be made available in advance of new CAP 2023. If the staff resource is to remain the same or be modified, then this must be communicated to the regional manager so that a strategy can be drawn up and approved that is workable in advance of the pinch points becoming problematic or a reputational risk.

**Appendix 1 Advisory Regional Review Panel**

Function / Role	Name
Chair	Jim Kinsella is the Professor of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development in the School of Agriculture and Food Science, UCD. His teaching and research work over the years has focused on agricultural innovation and extension systems both in Ireland and abroad. He lives on a drystock farm in Kilkenny.
KT Professional with Advisory and/or Education background	Martin McKendry qualified with a BSc in Agriculture Engineering from Cranfield University and is currently the Director of CAFRE in NI. The college delivers education programmes to those entering the agri-food industry from Level 2 to MSc and also provides KT and Innovation programmes for those working within the industry.
Farmer stakeholder	John Curley is a sheep farmer from Co. Roscommon. He was a participant in the Better farm programme from 2008-2018. John was also a stakeholder on the SheepNet programme for five years and he is currently a stakeholder on the Euro Sheep Programme.
Industry stakeholder	Amii McKeever is editor of Irish Country Living, the Irish Farmers Journal magazine. Amii holds BAgrSc and MAgrSc degrees as well as a Diploma in Strategic Growth from UCD and is currently studying for an MBA from Trinity Business School. Amii is a past president of the Agricultural Science Association, a Nuffield Scholar and treasurer of Agri Aware.
Independent Teagasc Representative & Secretariat	Dr Kevin Heanue Teagasc's Evaluation Officer, leads the development of an evaluation culture in Teagasc through the cyclical evaluation of its research programmes, extension activities and once-off evaluations of organisational activities and functions. He provides a secretariat to the Peer Review Panel.

## **Appendix 2    Advisory Regional Review High Level Assessment Criteria**

### **1.        Management and Organisational Capability**

Management and Organisational Capability refers to the coordination and administration of activities in the Region. The focus in this area includes how the organisation structure in place supports programme delivery, communication between staff and management (including staff in a coordinating role), the extent to which staff feel that their role is well defined, the scope for them to develop professionally and personally while contributing to programme objectives. How well regional objectives, resources, activities, and outputs are communicated internally and externally.

The Region's capacity to plan for and respond to present and future challenges. Included in this are resources, expertise, and strategy in place. The strengths, opportunities, threats and weaknesses of the Region are taken into account.

### **2.        Productivity and Service Delivery**

Productivity reflects the relationship between input and output. Output should always be judged in relation to the mission and resources of Teagasc and the Region and the needs of the customer. When looking at productivity, a verdict is usually quantitative in nature. In this case the list will include metrics such as client numbers, visits, discussion groups, meetings held, Teagasc €Profit Monitors, derogations, farm plans and so on. The panel are asked to include other forms of (qualitative) information in their assessment. The suitability of service delivery methods to customer needs and regional resources should also be assessed.

### **3.        Relevance and impact**

Relevance and Impact refer to how well the services delivered by the regional staff are aligned to national Advisory and Education Programme priorities, and the needs of the region's customers. The extent to which staff from the Region collaborate with community actors is also relevant in this context. The extent to which customers have improved their economic activities resulting from interaction with Teagasc is relevant, if this information is available. Feedback from customers and stakeholders gives an insight to the Region's reputation with stakeholders and customers.

**Appendix 3: Action Plan for the Implementation of Recommendations**

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**Review of Mayo Advisory Region 2021**

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**Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations**

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Date: April 12<sup>th</sup> 2022

Submit to: Dr. Stan Lalor, Director of Knowledge Transfer; Dermot McCarthy, Head of Advisory Service.

This action plan outlines the priority and ordinary recommendations from the report on the *Mayo Advisory Region 2021 Peer Review*. To complete this action plan please specify the actions to be taken, if any, to implement the recommendations outlined, allocate responsibility for these actions and set a target date by which the recommendation is to be implemented.

### 1. Recommendations for Management & Organisational Capacity

No.	Priority or ordinary	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
1.1	<b>P</b>	Consider greater delegated responsibility to POR holders in working with the Regional Manager in managing and strengthening the delivery of advisory and education services	POR group to meet every ¼ with measurable targets and performance indicators for them to be agreed.	Vivian Silke Dermot McCarthy/Stan Lalor	Dec 2023
1.2	<b>P</b>	Clear guidance from management on what constitutes 'going beyond the call of duty with clients' – particularly in terms of the younger staff cohort.	Re-evaluate the services that are provided under the minimum client fee (€170).	Vivian Silke Dermot McCarthy/Stan Lalor	Dec 2023
1.3	<b>P</b>	The peak demands associated with deadlines for certain schemes and programmes needs to be carefully considered with high emphasis placed on conserving and strengthening Teagasc's reputation amongst clients and other farmers in the region. The need to augment existing services at times of peak demand will continue and is likely to increase under current trends. The preferred option identified through the After-Action Review exercise is to recruit and train contract staff to support the existing team. While this has clear benefits vis-à-vis reducing reputational risk to Teagasc, cognisance is required as to the cost-effectiveness of such an option taking due consideration of the employer-employee implications that would arise.	All advisory workloads to be examined and a more even balance of clients amongst individual staff should be aimed for and then the correct numbers of contract staff can be recruited.	Vivian Silke	Dec 2023
1.4	<b>P</b>	Generational renewal of farm businesses is a major challenge for many farm households in Mayo. Teagasc is well-placed to guide on this and so needs to build staff capacities accordingly.	Each advisor to receive training on this discipline	Rural Development Specialists	Dec 2023
1.5	<b>P</b>	Greater allocation of resources to the Options Programme and advisory supports to farm diversification is highly appropriate in a county such as Mayo with such an abundance of natural resources and with the anticipated increased supports that will emerge under the new CAP	One dedicated options advisor at present and this resource needs to be at least doubled. These resources will be work closely with advisory leaders of	Rural Development Specialists	Dec 2023

			the Teagasc climate change strategy.		
1.6	○	The presence of private sector agri-consultants should be viewed as an opportunity for synergies, particularly where their farmer clients participate in public policy agri-environmental measures. Discussions towards such synergies could be instigated by Teagasc	Stronger relationships to be built up through ConnectEd with private agricultural consultants.	Mark Gibson Vivian Silke	Dec 2023
1.7	○	The strong experience and competencies in a range of media by Teagasc Mayo should be exploited more across the advisory programmes and in particular in supporting the education programmes which are facing increasing pressures from competition in the region.	All advisory staff to get proper training in the use of social media that will help connect better to the general and farming public in the region	Mark Gibson PR Department	Dec 2023
1.8	○	Examine closely the extent to which the business plans of advisors reflect the Level 1 Plans and the overall Teagasc strategy with a view to striking the best balance between locally nuanced client-oriented needs and the public policy goals reflected in Teagasc's national plans and strategy.	All professional staff to be exposed to the planning and workings of the business plan so they can shape their own plans more aligned to that of Teagasc	Vivian Silke Justin Kidd Specialist Teams Stan Lalor	Dec 2023
1.9	○	Given the age profile of staff in the Region, continued and increased mentoring of young staff by their more experienced colleagues to enable them to both settle into their roles and deliver quality services merits ongoing and high attention.	POR holders to develop proper mentoring roles within their discipline	POR holders Vivian Silke	Dec 2023

## 2. Recommendations for Productivity and Quality of Service Delivery

No.	Priority or ordinary	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
2.1	<b>P</b>	Clear KPI's for adviser outputs should be developed and benchmarked across the region to maximise the impact of the staff resource for the benefit of the region.	Regional Manager and regional specialists to finalise KPI's.	Vivian Silke Regional Specialists	Dec 2023
2.2	<b>P</b>	A Quality Management Plan should be developed to track improvement and provide clear evidence of key quality indicators being met. This in turn would provide the basis for development of a quality improvement plan.	Regional Management plan to be developed pointing staff in the right direction across each discipline.	Vivian Silke Regional Specialists	Dec 2023
2.3	<b>P</b>	Delivery models and services for advisory and education functions should be reviewed in line with private sector provision in the area which would maximise the resource to deliver benefits for the region.	Widely consult both clients and students in what they need Teagasc to do for them	All Advisory Staff Rural economy researchers	March 2023
2.4	<b>O</b>	The benefits of complementing or working in partnership with the private sector in the delivery of education programmes should be considered.	Liaise with Westport ETB	Anne Marie Butler	Dec 2023
2.5	<b>O</b>	Clear priorities in the short to medium term should be set out to effectively manage resources and minimise the apprehension building around supporting new EU programmes (CAP) in 2023.	Consult with all advisory staff to identify gaps in resources in advance of new AECM scheme	Vivian Silke Stan Lalor	Sept 2023

### 3. Recommendations for Relevance and Impact

No.	Priority or ordinary	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person Responsible	Date for Completion
3.1	<b>P</b>	Tailor services to the needs of the clients. In the absence of clarity, schemes should be considered against one another in terms of value returned (economically, time requirements of the farmer and farmer preference) to the client.	Advisory staff to consult with all clients mainly through AETS courses to establish priority areas for each farm business for the next five years	All Advisory staff with input from the RED programme	Sept 2023
3.2	<b>P</b>	The Region should consider greater investment in technology to reduce workload and improve time efficiency which is important to service delivery.	Explore and develop digital solutions to improve efficiency within scheme management. Extending and utilising scheme registers available in CRM may offer benefits	Ronan Cody Stan Lalor	Sept 2023
3.3	<b>P</b>	More attention should be given to education course graduates. Suggestion to include them in discussion groups that run for one year post graduation. A post graduate mentoring programme could also be valuable in retaining relationships and encouraging students to become clients.	Education officers to run discussion groups for recent graduates liaising with advisory staff for support	All Education staff	Dec 2023
3.4	<b>P</b>	Support the development of new farmer discussion groups in the absence of Knowledge Transfer/Exchange (KT) Group funding, with those farmers who are interested and willing to engage.	All advisory staff to facilitate at least one discussion group and invite interested clients to meetings FOC	All advisory staff	Dec 2023
3.5	<b>O</b>	A holistic measurement of the impact of the service, using metrics that are customised to each area, may be more appropriate than a country wide set of KPI's.	All advisory staff to survey clients on metrics developed by the researchers which reflect core activities of the region.	All advisory staff with input from the RED programme	Dec 2023

No.	Priority or ordinary	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person Responsible	Date for Completion
3.6	○	There is scope for greater capacity building of farm households in relation to on farm technical developments or alternatives through the Options Programme (farm-based diversification) where the advisory service could grow in relevance.	Create an options type advisor in each office to deal with general public and individual client queries	Rural economy specialists Vivian Silke	Dec 2023
3.7	○	There needs to be greater clarity on what constitutes acceptable “impact” for clients. On what basis are decisions on numbers serviced and demand for schemes made?	Define measurable regional impacts of advisory involvement to each client and overall regional impact through the annual regional review	Vivian Silke All advisory staff	March 2023
3.8	○	Clarity is required in relation to what staff resources are needed and what will be made available in advance of new CAP 2023. If the staff resource is to remain the same or be modified, then this must be communicated to the regional manager so that a strategy can be drawn up and approved that is workable in advance of the pinch points becoming problematic or a reputational risk.	Ongoing with the regional manager group. Senior Management need to approach the DAFM for staff resources to deliver on different aspects of CAP 2023	Stan Lalor Frank O'Mara	Sept 2023

END