



Teagasc Advisory Regional Review Sligo-Leitrim-Donnegal

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Introduction

Teagasc is the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority. It is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. It was established in September 1988 under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988. The organisation 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 activities. The programme currently supports almost 140,000 individual farmers with 44,000 farmers contracted to Teagasc for services annually.

This review of the Sligo-Leitrim-Donegal (S-L-D) Advisory Region was undertaken in Teagasc, Letterkenny on November 7th to 8th 2016. The panel (see Appendix 2 for panel composition) has prepared this report based on meetings with management, staff representatives, enterprise specialists, farmer stakeholders, and analysis of documents such as the Region's Self-Assessment document, business plan, staff questionnaires, and Teagasc Advisory programme documents. The farmer client panel consisted of 2 dairy farmers, 1 sheep farmer; 1 sheep and cattle farmer and 1 tillage and beef farmer chosen at random based on the average enterprise size for the region.

The overall objective of this review is to identify current strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of quality services and value to the customers of the services provided. This evaluation had four main criteria (a more in - depth description of each is outlined in Appendix 3):

1. Quality of management and leadership in the Region
2. Relevance and impact of services to the Region's customers
3. Productivity of staff in relation to key performance indicators and outcomes
4. Positioning of the Region to meet current and future service delivery challenges.

The Sligo-Leitrim-Donegal Advisory Region in Context

The Sligo-Leitrim-Donegal (S-L-D) Advisory Region is a relatively new entity which was established in 2011 when county Donegal was joined with Sligo and Leitrim, these latter two counties having previously been brought together under single management in 2007. It is a large region with heterogeneous soil and farm types.

The on-going trend for farmers and farms in the region is the consolidation of small farms into larger farms, specialisation of enterprises and overall more intensification on farms. The total number of farms is 17,308 and the average farm size is 81% of the national average.

The region has 3,259 drystock clients, 210 dairy clients and 124 tillage clients. The regional advisory programme is made available to farmers from each of the six advisory offices. Five offices are owned and the office in Carndonagh is leased from the Local Authority. The offices in Letterkenny, Manorhamilton, Ballymote and Mohill also have education centres.

The regional advisory programme is delivered through mass communications, office and phone consultations, farm visits, discussion group activity, farm walks, seminars and other public events. This translates into 538 farm visits, 5,069 consultations, 60 discussion groups with 783 members holding 273 meetings, 3,621 SPS/BPS, 70 derogations, 25 farm walks, 5 major events, 58 meetings/seminars and 168 e-profit monitors being completed.

The programme is integrated with stakeholders such as Aurivo Co-op, Lakelands Co-op, Agricultural Merchants, marts, farming organisations (IFA and Macra na Ferime), Animal Health Ireland, Local Action Groups, Institutes of Technology in Letterkenny and Sligo and the BETTER farm programme, itself a joint effort between Teagasc, Irish Farmers Journal, FBD Insurance, Kepak, ABP and Dawn Meats.

Staff resources have remained relatively static over the period 2013-2016, if 10 Education Officers and one Administration person who are on 2 year contracts are excluded.

The provision of agricultural education within S/L/D is of particular importance given the large geographical area and absence of Agricultural Colleges. The majority of prospective students come from relatively small farms with a high dependency on direct payments of off farm income.

Demand for formal agricultural education has always been strong in the region and over the years every effort has been made to provide sufficient courses to satisfy demand. Typically two courses are started each year one in Donegal and one in Sligo with approximately 60 students graduating in most years. In recent years demand has risen sharply, driven mainly by the introduction of attractive schemes for young qualified entrants to farming. As a result, in September 2016, there is a total of 457 students with an additional 300 potential students on a waiting list.

Main report recommendations

1. Management and Leadership

- 1.1 Use the urgency and importance of the short term education officers' case as a lever to get a practical flexible solution for this kind of work.
- 1.2 Expand and update cross-enterprise POR's, not only to get the work done, but also to motivate advisors and staff. Examples might include environment, young farmers, ICT & innovation.
- 1.3 Consider outsourcing of scheme-related administrative duties so as to redirect time to developmental advisory support. It is important for Teagasc to still "own" and manage their client relationships, despite the outsourcing of administration in order to ensure client contact and relationship longevity is maintained.

2. Productivity and Service Delivery

- 2.1 Ensure that regionally-specific data is easily accessible to clients through various media.
- 2.2 Present data in comprehensible, easily digestible formats (e.g. info graphics) to accommodate different client absorptive capacity.
- 2.3 Explore the utilisation of experienced discussion group members as mentors to new Teagasc-facilitated young farmer discussion groups.

3. Relevance and Impact

- 3.1 Organise structural client feedback at a regional level to ensure that existing services are meeting client expectations and needs.
- 3.2 Pilot a regionally-based task team to explore approaches to engaging with young farmers.
- 3.3 Ensure appropriate Quality Control systems are in place to maintain Teagasc's reputation and the best interests of clients, in respect of external service providers.

4. Positioning for the Future

- 4.1 Initiatives to source, acquire and retain a pool of young farmers to future proof and maintain client numbers in a consolidating sector are needed
- 4.2 Teagasc to lead a stakeholder-driven response to the pent-up demand for agricultural education in the region.
- 4.3 Given the geographical scope of the region, devise a social media training and delivery plan to Teagasc staff to ensure better client engagement and education delivery.

1. Quality of Management and Leadership in the Region

Management and Leadership

- The S-L-D management team produced a comprehensive Self-Assessment document that provided a good overview of the region, advisory activities and their impacts.
- The review panel met highly effective and flexible management working in a challenging geographic region supported by dedicated staff. It was clear that the focus on delivery to farmer clients is inspiring the advisory region staff to reach high standards. As the interviewed farmers reported to the panel; 'you can contact them always and they deliver good service'. Management remarked how the advisors' heavy workload is not seen by farmers, but the panel heard from the interviewed farmers that they were aware of the heavy workload. The farmers suggested advisors should focus as much as possible on advisory work. Strategies such as outsourcing are acceptable to farmers, when it helps Teagasc advisors to maintain their focus on advisory work.
- The panel heard how advisory and administrative staff numbers were at best static in the recent past and tasks had changed with the administration of outsourced tasks and introduction of new schemes, e.g. GLAS. The panel notes that in spite of these changes, the staff perform their roles with dedication.
- In this region, staff are spread over several sites, which is challenging for the management but on the positive side helps provides a service as near as possible to clients. It was clear to the panel that advisors are part of their local society and are very engaged in supporting their region as opinion-leaders. The panel were left with the impression that nothing is too much for the region's staff in their quest to better serve their clients.
- Good systems are in place for internal communication, staff meetings, stakeholder engagement and cross Teagasc interaction. Management has 'hands-on' communication with staff and advisors. Nationwide developments in farming and policy are exchanged on a regular basis in physical meetings (notwithstanding the dispersed nature of the regional structure). Knowledge development of advisors is very intense. Post of Responsibility (POR) tasks are executed very practically, because the POR's are engaged in practice they also get the opportunity to take decisions.
- Problems reported with external ICT systems are not impacting advisory work. The ICT tools for national translation of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) are primarily for communication between the Department and the individual farmer, as opposed to tools to facilitate KT.
- There are a significant number of high profile joint venture initiatives in place, e.g. Aurivo Co-op and Lakeland Co-op, BETTER farms etc. demonstrating good stakeholder management and engagement, to help leverage other industry expertise and initiatives across the region.
- Staff surveyed indicated that they are proud to work in the region and they feel supported by management. Some staff were less definite (either positively or negatively) about communication within the region and clarity about their roles. Staff in general indicated they are given opportunities to lead initiatives and are supported in their roles. Some staff were less definite about the existence of an efficient formal structure for the coordination, delivery and assessment of education programmes.
- From text cloud analysis of suggestions about improvements at local level the words support, administrative staff, staff members, summer months, FRS, advisors and farmers were reported most frequently. Similar analysis of suggestions at regional level identified the words training, staff, regional, advisors and clients. Text cloud analysis of regional challenges highlighted staff, farm, distance, students and clients as the most frequent words. Possible solutions to the region's challenges identified staff, region and Sligo.
- Comments in the staff survey should be discussed at regional level, acted upon and staff informed about progress with these actions. This includes feeding back what will not be addressed and why.

Technical Leadership

- The panel noted the high level of support and technical training provided via specialists to advisers on an on-going basis. This included dual client engagement, teleconference calls and advanced training events all of which are critical in the up-skilling and transferring of relevant scientific research to local advisers.
- It was clear that through intensive education and exchange with research, Teagasc Advisory Services deliver best practice advice. The panel heard from interviewed farmers that the advice was trusted because Teagasc is considered an independent provider of advice, not trying to sell anything.
- Teagasc technical leadership is high in the region and the panel noted the importance of this role given the limited presences of private/commercial advisers, particularly in the North West.

Resources

- The panel heard that administrative staff are under-resourced and are provided with limited in-service training opportunities.
- The panel were concerned about the impact of 10 Education Officers coming to the end of their contracts, given the pent up demand for agricultural education in the region.
- A member of the farmer panel commented that his Discussion Group had to exercise significant pressure to ensure the replacement of their retired dairy group facilitator. While it was encouraging to see that he had been replaced, it is the panel's view that the organisations involved should endeavour to proactively provide these staff replacements without the need for client/farmer lobbying.
- The panel consider that an important reason for working at Teagasc is connection to the region and that translates into a very stable core team.
- At the same time the region's dispersed nature and poor infrastructure are major challenges for KT work. Part of this disadvantage is counteracted by more intensive use of communications technology and social media. Partly reflecting the nature of the region, the targets for S-L-D farm advisors are lower (e.g. 100 clients) than in less challenging regions (e.g. 130).

Recommendations

- 1.1 Use the urgency and importance of the short term education officers' case as a lever to get a practical flexible solution for this kind of work.
- 1.2 Expand and update cross-enterprise POR's, not only to get the work done, but also to motivate advisors and staff. Examples might include environment, young farmers, ICT & innovation.
- 1.3 Consider outsourcing of scheme-related administrative duties so as to redirect time to developmental advisory support. It is important for Teagasc to still "own" and manage their client relationships, despite the outsourcing of administration in order, to ensure client contact and relationship longevity is maintained.

2. Productivity and Service Delivery in the Region

Productivity

- The panel were presented with clear evidence of achievement of positive differential in terms of Teagasc client KPI's compared to non-clients. Technical performance indicators, based on cross-enterprise representation of average performing farms in the region, demonstrated improvement year-on-year in comparison with non-Teagasc clients. These increased outputs highlight the superior technical knowledge and expertise of local advisers who influenced these results.
- The demand for agricultural education has risen sharply over the years in this region, driven mainly by the introduction of attractive schemes and grants for young qualified farmers. In the S-L-D advisory region student numbers for 2016 were 457 with a further 300 students on a waiting list. It is necessary to have a very well organised and efficient system in place to accommodate such high student volumes in the region, and the successful operation and implementation of same is a credit to the region.
- The management of the S-L-D advisory region have identified Discussion Groups as the most attractive option in terms of delivering on key Business Plan Objectives, as they allow access to a larger number of clients across a wide geographical area. Staff are involved in the process to establish the annual Business Plan Objectives and they subsequently make a big effort to achieve them.
- From discussions with farmers and advisors, the panel are of the view that communication about on-farm management practices and technologies should be made as appropriate as possible to the target group. For example, visualisation and infographics are powerful methods to use to communicate messages.

Quality of Service Delivery

- Innovative extension methods such as 'Grass Pods' introduce a wider pool of farmers to key management practices, where they have access to the necessary support and technical guidance to become proficient at measuring and completing grass budgets.
- Farmers the panel met with were satisfied with Teagasc advice and service. They agree with the idea of outsourcing work to, for example, Farm Relief Services as it frees up advisors to do advisory work.
- It is important to treat the "root cause" of deficient soil and not just the symptoms, to allow for greater long-term soil productivity. Farmers recommend more research on poorer quality soils (e.g. benchmark for their region) to allow them to maximise grass / crop outputs.
- Farmers also identified the need to present research results, information and the ensuing advice in a manner appropriate to the target audience e.g. high level overview page with more supporting content for those with greater knowledge requirement and absorptive capacity.
- The joint industry initiatives with the Co-Op's, Animal Health Ireland and other external agencies provide useful benchmark data for discussion group members to use as Key Performance Indicators for their own farms.
- Some programme schemes, for examples those requiring the use of e-profit monitors, are targeted to clients with high levels of analytical skills. This excludes some potential clients as the product offered does not correspond to the needs of customers with different analytical skill levels.
- The panel are of the view that the services provided not only have to cover technical objectives (improvement of the economic results) but should also serve as a contribution to maintain and support more rural farm households, further from population centres and those households with low income (see also under sustainability below).
- Farmers interviewed identified a clear impact from Teagasc information on their on-farm growth; one quote was that "50% of the growth comes from Teagasc, the other 50% from the discussion group (seeing what other farmers are doing).

Recommendations

- 2.1 Ensure that regionally-specific data is easily accessible to clients through various media
- 2.2 Present data in comprehensible, easily digestible formats (e.g. info graphics) to accommodate different client absorptive capacity.
- 2.3 Explore the utilisation of experienced discussion group members as mentors to new Teagasc –facilitated young farmer discussion groups.

3. Relevance and Impact in the Region

Programme relevance

- The panel acknowledge the evidence presented of the high relevance and impact of programmes and services provided in the S-L-D Advisory Region and they recognise the need for continual acknowledgement and support to maintain this relevance and impact into the future.
- Regional objectives are well aligned with national objectives and this synergy should be maintained with improved regional support.
- The panel note the request from interviewed farmers of the need for local benchmarking and regionally focused information.
- The feedback from the five farmers interviewed was very positive and supportive of the discussion group format. They did raise a query in relation to the name of the “BETTER Farm” programme which suggested that this was a group of “elite” farmers rather than the actual - a representative sample of farmers that were adopting Teagasc best advice and management practices to improve their overall farm profitability.
- There was also some discussion whether the BETTER farm title could be re-examined to something that is more inclusive of farmers at all levels.
- Ensuring the relevance of programmes to young farmers and their integration with such programmes was raised several times. How should young farmers be integrated? It also depends on the on-farm decision making level of young farmers. Perhaps a different level of engagement is needed for young farmers when they are not necessarily decision makers on the farm, e.g. Young Farmer Magazine/Ezine/Webpage.
- Another dimension of the integration issue that the panel was alerted to relates to discussion groups. In order to function effectively, these groups require confidentiality and trust among members, two characteristics which have to grow over a long time. This is an issue for integrating new members, and especially young farmers, into a long-established group, who might not want to integrate new members. The groups might note feel a need to integrate young farmers, which is recognised behaviour by established groups. However, young farmers have most to learn from such experienced farmers, groups and advisors.
- Yet another dimension the panel heard about was the gap between students and advisors. Education staff said that after the Green Cert there is a gap in terms of follow-on contact with students.

Knowledge Transfer

- The new Knowledge Transfer groups have been influential in the formation of new group structures. However, there are some agenda constraints and data recording requirements evident from working within this structure. Some farmers have opted to operate their group meeting outside of the Department regulated structure, facilitated by their Teagasc adviser.
- ICT is now a key information source used by farmers, particularly younger farmers as a tool to manage and grow their business. On-line applications such as ICBF, Pasturebase, various farm computer packages all indicate that there will be a future need for ICT support for the late adopters.
- Field-walks and open-to-all public events allow a “low-entry-level” engagement for farmers who may not be clients of Teagasc. These farmers would profit from knowledge transfer and may be future Teagasc clients.
- Generally, the panel reflected that they heard about many top-down KT processes with fewer examples of bottom-up (and often non-formal) processes. For example, data from research stations and BETTER farming programme are useful but are not always sufficiently “adapted” locally as an input for direct action. There is a need for transformation of this data to the local level. Clients express the need for realistic objectives, attainable in their region/adapted to their structures.
- The panel was pleased to hear about some specific initiatives to motivate clients to act more independently: WhatsApp groups with more responsibility attributed to the clients.

This approach gives direct access to fields, photos small “portions” to digest (short messages) allied to the positive factor of motivation from peers.

Reputation

- There is good stakeholder collaboration and management within the region. The panel heard, for example, about a joint technology transfer programme with Aurivo Co-op and Lakelands Co-op. The basis of the joint programme is the use of 2 strategically located Focus farms, one in Donegal and one in Sligo. Teagasc advisors also input to a comprehensive dairy advisory programme with Aurivo milk suppliers.
- The panel were also pleased to hear about regular joint events with Agricultural Merchants, the ten livestock marts around the region, and in terms of farming organisations, regular requests from IFA clubs for Teagasc advisors to make presentations at local meetings and Macra Na Feirme is involved in the delivery of the Leadership Module in the C.I.A. courses.
- Annual events are organised jointly with Animal Health Ireland. In addition, from a broader rural development perspective, Teagasc staff represent the organisation on the Boards of Local Action Groups and their Evaluation Committees; Heritage Committees and take other relevant positions as requested.
- The Education officers and Advisors in the region have developed working relationships with both Letterkenny Institute of Technology and Sligo Institute of Technology.
- There are a number of BETTER farms in the region which are used for the dissemination of best practice technology in the drystock sector. The BETTER farms are a joint effort between, Teagasc, Irish Farmers Journal, FBD Insurance, Kepak, ABP and Dawn Meats.
- It is important for Teagasc to ensure that the quality of outsourced work is audited (Internally or externally) as failure to do so could result in increased litigation and reputational damage to the organisation, as clients still see Teagasc as their primary relationship manager.
- Young farmers are the future clients of Teagasc. With the actual low attention to their needs at the beginning of their professional life-cycle, they could get used to finding advice elsewhere, with implications for building a relationship with Teagasc in the future.

Recommendations:

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| 3.1 | Organise structural client feedback at a regional level to ensure that existing services are meeting client expectations and need. |
| 3.2 | Pilot a regionally-based task team to explore approaches to engaging with young farmers. |
| 3.3 | Ensure appropriate Quality Control systems are in place to maintain Teagasc's reputation and best interests of clients, in respect of external service providers. |

4. Positioning of the Region for the Future

Robustness and Sustainability

- **Strategic Planning:** The Regional Business Plan was prepared and submitted for a 12 month period and the key objectives and target of this short-term plan are aligned to achieve the longer term targets and deliverables as outlined in the FH 2020 and Food Wise 2025.
- **Financial Resources:** The high reliance on short term educational contracts is a significant concern for the area especially in light of the imminent expiry of 10 of these educational contracts. These contracts result in lack of continuity for students with their educational officer and may break linkage with the organisation. The Young Farmer market will form the basis for new clients in a consolidating market and it is important that Teagasc maintain this link into the future to maintain income revenues and preserve client numbers.
- **Expertise within the Region:** The region has a team of highly qualified, adaptive and motivated staff that are somewhat constrained by administrative procedures and time pressures associated with the various scheme deadlines. Advisers receive good support from specialist staff whilst acknowledging that the vastness of the region may limit the amount of one to one assistance. It was also noted that the dairy adviser had formulated a specific ration for his clients and sourced local feed company to manufacture to the specification.
- **Staff Mobility:** The panel noted that the current Education Officer was due to retire this year with the RD due for retirement next year. It is a priority that these influential and strategic positions are filled with a suitable hand-over period incorporated, to ensure a smooth transition for students and staff and to ensure that client needs are clearly identified and managed accordingly. More generally, a long term internal succession plan should be drafted to identify key roles and correlating staff that are suitable for these positions. On-going training (e.g. Leadership, personal development programmes etc.) should be incorporated as part of their personal development plan to ensure they have the personal resources needed to service the role.
- **Ability to Take on New challenges:** As mention throughout the report, the scale of the region adds another dimension to the intricacies of communication both with staff and clients. Part of the solution to this problem is the adoption of social media and ICT usage as an engagement mechanism, to highlight both national and regional events and seminars and to communicate with clients and discussion groups. Suggestion that a “WhatsApp” group should be in situ for all groups so key farm management data/suggestions can be shared and discussed openly within the group.
- **Capacity to Self-Evaluate:** While internal surveys have been completed, there is a need to introduce client surveys/feedbacks forms, to monitor and assess quality of service delivery e.g. Survey Monkey request sent to client mobile for completion.
- **Sustainability:** In terms of clients, the panel are of the view that sustainability includes economic, ecological and social aspects. The objectives for advisory work are based almost exclusively on economic indicators. Nevertheless, clients and advisors mentioned the importance of social aspects of their work, especially in a region with low population density. However, the panel noted that in the KPI’s for advisors found few indicators considering these aspects.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths:

- Team of excellent advisory, administrative and managerial staff in place.
- Strong relationship with external stakeholders which maximise engagements and knowledge sharing opportunities in the region.
- Execution of an efficient educational programme that caters for a high number of students.
- Register of past students is maintained to encourage attendance at Teagasc events and seminars to maintain relationship until the student becomes the farmer/decision maker.
- Recognised both nationally and internationally as a credible source of independent research.

Opportunities:

- Tax incentives for long term leasing will create an opportunity for farmers (especially young farmers) to secure lands on a longer term lease. Planning needed for these farmers to support expansion.
- High number of young farmers in this region. This suggests the need for a focus on succession and inheritance planning potential for region with support needed for appropriate other farming models such as collaborative farming, land mobility etc.
- Mentorship Programme to support Young Farmers in the region who would benefit from the expertise and knowledge of more established farmers.
- Leverage existing partnership with educational colleges to maximise ICT training potential as well as Agricultural training.

Weaknesses:

- Reliance on high volume of contracted educational officers could weaken existing Teagasc/student relationship and facilitate leakage of potential new business to private consultants.
- Workload driven by Department of Agriculture deadlines. These impacts on the advisors' ability to provide key supports to their farmers during these times e.g. grass budgeting support etc. in the spring. There is a need to engage with Department in an attempt to streamline these deadlines more evenly throughout the year to try and eliminate scheme completion bottlenecks.
- Knowledge Transfer Discussion Groups, while they facilitate the formation of group discussion can be prescriptive in nature and restrict agendas in line with strategic objective for the schemes. Need to review structure and purpose to greater serve the needs of the farmer. Challenge for Teagasc is to cater for a diverse range of enterprises and demographics within the region.
- Use of social media within the region is limited and could serve as a mechanism for greater engagement and shared learning within the region.

Threats:

- Loss of education officers, while noted above as a significant weakness within the Young Farmer Market, will pose a more significant threat to the region as they attempt to serve the needs of this cohort with reduced staff numbers.
- While outsourcing provides an opportunity to reduce admin workload for advisors, there is a reputation and litigation risk evident, if adequate controls are not put in place to mitigate these inherent risks.
- ICT usage is constantly evolving and unless Teagasc adapt and innovate their internal systems, their impact within the sector may be reduced.

Recommendations

- 4.1 Initiatives to source, acquire and retain a pool of young farmers to future proof and maintain client numbers in a consolidating sector are needed
- 4.2 Teagasc to lead a stakeholder-driven response to the pent-up demand for agricultural education in the region
- 4.3 Given the geographical scope of the region, devise a social media training and delivery plan to Teagasc staff to ensure better client engagement and education delivery.

Conclusion

The S-L-D Advisory Region is a relatively new entity which was established in 2011 when county Donegal was joined with Sligo and Leitrim, these latter two counties having previously been brought together under single management in 2007. It is a large region with heterogeneous soil and farm types. Poor physical and communications infrastructure in places adds to the challenges associated with KT service delivery.

The review panel makes 12 recommendations across a variety of issues. Key concerns are ensuring the pent-up educational demand in the region can be addressed; looking at ways to engage with and integrate young farmers into Teagasc services; the use of social media in particular to facilitate knowledge transfer; the request from farmers for more locally relevant data and advice and organising client feedback at regional level to ensure services are meeting client expectations and needs.

Review of Sligo-Leitrim-Donegal Advisory Region 2016

Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations

Date: Wednesday 4th October 2017

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

This action plan outlines the recommendations from the report on the Review of the *Sligo-Leitrim-Donegal Advisory Region 2016*. 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 & Leadership

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
1.1	Use the urgency and importance of the short term education officers' case as a lever to get a practical flexible solution for this kind of work.	Establish a minimum of one permanent Education Officer (EO) for each County in the Region. There is need to secure Temporary Education Officers (TEO) contracts to match the duration of the courses.	Senior Management and HR	3 rd Quarter 2018
1.2	Expand and update cross-enterprise POR's, not only to get the work done, but also to motivate advisors and staff. Examples might include environment, young farmers, ICT & innovation.	Recruit for retired POR positions in the region. Review the relevance of existing POR positions in the region and establish clearly defined roles. Establish POR with responsibilities for "young farmers".	Senior Managers, HR, Regional Manager	4 th Quarter 2018
1.3	Consider outsourcing of scheme-related administrative duties so as to redirect time to developmental advisory support. It is important for Teagasc to still "own" and manage their client relationships, despite the outsourcing of administration in order to ensure client contact and relationship longevity is maintained.	All future outsourcing contracts should include one administrative person per region. Advisors should remain in client contact through delivery of courses, events and newsletters. Teagasc should employ temporary advisory staff.	Senior Management	On going

2. Recommendations for Productivity and Service Delivery

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
2.1	Ensure that regionally-specific data is easily accessible to clients through various media.	Produce regional e-Profit Monitor data, collate and compile local performance data, for use in regional newspaper articles, Facebook, Puca texts and regional farm events. S/L/D heavy soils research farm relating to weanling production. Leadership must be given by Teagasc on farming in high rainfall areas.	Farm management specialist, PORS, Advisors, Administrative staff. Researchers.	2017/2018
2.2	Present data in comprehensible, easily digestible formats (e.g. info graphics) to accommodate different client absorptive capacity.	Develop social media videos of farm practices and events. Regular regional updates on T-net and use of regional newsletters. Develop a farmer friendly template regarding terminology, graphics and explanations for presentation use.	Regional Social media Advisor & Education Officers	Mid-2018
2.3	Explore the utilisation of experienced discussion group members as mentors to new Teagasc-facilitated young farmer discussion groups.	Invite experienced discussion group members to facilitate young farmer's discussion groups once per year.	Group facilitators.	Autumn 2017

3. Recommendations for Relevance and Impact

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
3.1	Organise structural client feedback at a regional level to ensure that existing services are meeting client expectations and needs.	Develop event specific feedback sheets. Put in place a regular system of collecting feedback from farmers. Hand out feedback sheets after discussion groups, farm walks, seminars and events.	Regional Manager & PORs	December 2017
3.2	Pilot a regionally-based task team to explore approaches to engaging with young farmers.	To set up a task force in each county of Advisory and Education Officers to ensure that CIA students are informed of the benefits of being a client of the Advisory Service.	Regional Manager	First Quarter 2018
3.3	Ensure appropriate Quality Control systems are in place to maintain Teagasc's reputation and the best interests of clients, in respect of external service providers.	Continue with the present system of Advisors checking outsourced work. Regular meeting with service providers.	Regional Manager	On-going

4. Recommendations for Positioning for the Future

No.	Recommendation	Actions to be taken	Person responsible	Date for completion
4.1	Initiatives to source, acquire and retain a pool of young farmers to future proof and maintain client numbers in a consolidating sector are needed	Update existing past student data base each year. Extend invitation to past students who are non-clients to attend Teagasc public events Presentations to classes re Advisory service. Referrals from EOs.	Regional Manager Advisors and Education Officers.	Last Quarter 2017 and last quarter each year.
4.2	Teagasc to lead a stakeholder-driven response to the pent-up demand for agricultural education in the region.	To regularly inform the farming organisations and the wider farming community of the benefits to those who complete Agricultural Education. Also to make known the expertise, facilities and student capacity available in the region.	Regional Manager and Education Officers	April 2018
4.3	Given the geographical scope of the region, devise a social media training and delivery plan to Teagasc staff to ensure better client engagement and education delivery	To organise in-service training in the region to be delivered by regional staff who are already competent in social media use.	Regional Manager	Last Quarter 2017

Appendix 2 Advisory Regional Review Panel

Function / Role	Name
Chair	Peter Páire is Programme Leader Health and Smart Farming in ZLTO, the Netherlands. His career began as a Socio Economic Advisor in a farmer's organization. Since 1990 he develops projects in new areas for farmers, such as Precision Agriculture, New Economic Opportunities, and Environmental management. He was a founder of the ZLTO project unit in 1993 that built out to 35 people 20 years later. This is now incorporated in the ZLTO department of Craftsmanship & Entrepreneurship
KT Professional with Advisory and/or Education background	Bruno Häller is Professor at the Teaching and Advising Unit at the Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agriculture, Forest and Food Sciences, Zollikofen Switzerland. He previously worked as Head of the Extension Service of the Agricultural Institute Grangeneuve, Fribourg.
Farmer stakeholder	Brian Treanor, Brian is a dairy farmer supplying Lacpatrick Co-op in Monaghan
Independent Industry Representative	Noreen Lacey, National Agri-Business Manager, Sector Specialists – Business Banking AIB Group
Secretariat	Kevin Heanue, Evaluation Officer, Teagasc

Appendix 3 Advisory Regional Review High Level Evaluation Criteria

1. Management and Leadership

Management and Leadership refers to the coordination and administration of activities in the Region. The focus in this area includes how the organization 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.

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 eProfit 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 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.

4. Positioning for the Future

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