
Teagasc Rural Economy and Development Programme (REDP) Peer Assessment 2022

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Author: Peer Assessment Panel

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High Level Findings & Recommendations

Recommendations are listed in order of priority. However, it should be noted that the Panel believes they are all important and complementary and should be implemented as a package.

| Programme level (€5.06m expenditure in 2022) | |
|---|--|
| 1. | The panel recommends increased recognition within Teagasc that, as its only social-science focused research programme, REDP has a unique and central role to play in delivering Teagasc’s mission. A sustainable Irish agri-food system requires not only technical innovation, but also economic, institutional and behaviour change within the sector and across wider society. This depends on robust, respected and applied economic and social research and related KT activities. REDP is generating high quality and valued REDP results, reputation and impact that merits increased investment, particularly in core staffing, to fulfil this role. |
| 2. | Additional support is recommended for the vital work of REDP’s KT Department: enabling Teagasc advisors to better prepare farm families for the transition, along with the reorganisation of advice teams to create regional ‘leads’ for key topics of diversification, organic farming, decarbonising and farm succession. |
| 3. | REDP managers and teams should devote time and effort to develop a clear, overarching programme strategy which knits together its constituent Department strategies and work strands, showing how they contribute to “Teagasc Together” and “Food Vision 2030”. Underpinned by a theory of change developed with support from the Evaluation Unit, the strategy should highlight and explain the key role of economic and social research in supporting transition to agri-food sustainability. By including the programme’s key stakeholders, including policy makers, food businesses, agencies, NGOs and the farming community in strategy development, this will enable them to affirm the importance of REDP to Teagasc’s mission. In this process, strengthened synergies between REDP teams should be encouraged, complementing REDP collaboration with other teams and partners beyond Teagasc. |
| 4. | REDP should invest more in cross-team learning and reflection, to focus on “impact pathways” and more fully capturing its impact. This should include regular learning events between Departments and the Evaluation Unit; targeted use of Walsh Fellowships in a joint programme with the Evaluation Unit; and other efforts to improve REDP’s ability to evidence the high value and impact of its activities, internally within Teagasc and to a growing range of external stakeholders. |
| 5. | REDP managers should devote time to team-building and focus on enabling management methods and actions to maintain and enhance staff satisfaction and performance. They should share good practice across the teams in creating an ambitious and supportive management culture, and clear pathways for career development. Regular meetings of the senior management team (REDP Head of Programme and Heads of Departments) will be an essential element in this. The Leadership Team would benefit greatly from external Mentoring /Coaching and it is recommended that such be made available to them. |
| 6. | REDP needs to sustain its capacity to anticipate and respond to continuous change. Reaching out to new constituencies locally, nationally and internationally, it should identify and pursue broad resourcing strategies embracing public and private funding – diversifying income sources to create more opportunities for longer-term research, focused on agri-food system shifts and future rural resilience. |
| 7. | REDP and Teagasc should monitor their diversity data and pro-actively address diversity imbalances, ensuring equal pay for equal work and a culture of respect and inclusion across the organisation. Teagasc Senior Management should implement routine annual reporting of diversity data, and adopt a set of positive actions to address diversity imbalances, including specific encouragement to achieve a more balanced gender profile in senior management positions. |

| Department level | |
|---|--|
| Agricultural Economics & Farm Surveys Department (€2.3m expenditure in 2022) | |
| 1 | Develop more integrated, real-time and cost-effective data management and sourcing by adopting new technologies and building partnerships with other bodies who gather relevant sector information. Also link with the AFBSA geospatial team to support new steps in regional modelling to better reflect Irish farm diversity. |
| 2 | Formalize the Department's valued 'call-off' role and expectations with DAFM, to free up time to build new horizon-scanning activities with DAFM and others. |
| 3 | Develop more regular communication of AEFS research findings and implications for the wider stakeholder community, including reaching out to new constituencies (e.g. new rural bioeconomy players) to inform current debates, discuss and assess different scenarios, and promote and maintain this team's independence and authority. |
| Agri-food Business and Spatial Analysis (€1.7m expenditure in 2022) | |
| 1 | Stakeholders believe in the transformational capability of this Department for Teagasc as a whole. This represents an opportunity for the team. AFBSA should invest in and develop stronger evidence of its impact and pathways to impact, to convince REDP colleagues, other programmes and Teagasc senior management of the value and potential of its research. |
| 2 | AFBSA could further enhance its impact by aligning and developing its internal and external change programmes, giving more attention to tracking and documenting impact and pathways to impact, with support from the Evaluation unit. |
| 3 | The Department should share its excellent practice in working cultures and methods across REDP and Teagasc, co-creating and embedding these high standards. |
| Farm Management and Rural Development KT Department (€1m expenditure in 2022) | |
| 1 | Management should develop a clear action plan for these two KT teams, defining what they aim to achieve, setting priorities, tracking and reviewing progress via learning loops, and building a robust case for additional resources, with stakeholder support. In this process, it should build more co-ordinated activities in which Farm Management and Rural Development teams work together to support Teagasc's mission. |
| 2 | Use the success of the workshops for generational transfer to link these with advice on new business models for sustainable farming and resilience. Seek external funding to enable this formula of working together with a number of outside specialists to continue and grow, hosting further events and running joint awareness-raising and promotional campaigns on other topics. |
| 3 | Expand the organics and renewable energy teams, ready to meet growing demand from farm families. Partner with equine and other leisure and tourism stakeholders to pool resources and enable further growth in these areas. |

Overview of Assessment of Quality, Impact and Viability

Overall Programme Level

| Criteria | Outstanding | Strong | Competent | Needs Improvement | Unacceptable |
|-----------|-------------|--------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|
| Quality | | | | | |
| Impact | | | | | |
| Viability | | | | | |

Department Level: Agricultural Economics & Farm Surveys Department

| Criteria | Outstanding | Strong | Competent | Needs Improvement | Unacceptable |
|-----------|-------------|--------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|
| Quality | | | | | |
| Impact | | | | | |
| Viability | | | | | |

Department Level: Agri-Food Business & Spatial Analysis Department

| Criteria | Outstanding | Strong | Competent | Needs Improvement | Unacceptable |
|-----------|-------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Quality | | | | | |
| Impact | | | | | |
| Viability | | Alignment with strategy | Human Resource Vulnerability | | |

Department Level: Farm Management and Rural Development KT

| Criteria | Outstanding | Strong | Competent | Needs Improvement | Unacceptable |
|-----------|-------------|--------|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Quality | | | | | |
| Impact | | | | | |
| Viability | | | Human Resource Vulnerability | | |

| | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Key | Outstanding | Strong | Competent | Needs Improvement | Unacceptable |
|------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|

Overview of Outcome Evaluation

Six outcome case studies included in the evaluation were chosen to illustrate the different ways in which REDP works to achieve outcomes and impact. The cases were chosen not as a representative sample but rather to be informative.

The case study outcomes ranged from multiple stakeholders using digital tools to optimize processes and engage in debates and projects on data governance, ethics and multi-actor innovation; to the establishment of national programmes, regulations and incentives targeted to Irish land use and soil conditions; and to national and sectoral policies and visions based on enhanced monitoring and evaluation of agricultural performance and quantitative economic modelling. They also included increased mediation and planning of succession and inheritance through key advisory activities; and option diversification based on knowledge, digital tools, targeted advice and networking.

These outcomes were achieved through a series of formal actions (projects) over time, and also informal actions (e.g. advocacy, networking and capacity development). The outcome trajectories clearly show how the REDP contributes to generate relevant societal impacts through innovative methods and knowledge, capacity building among a wide range of actors, and policy influence, aligned with Teagasc's theory of change.

The outcomes achieved, as presented in the case studies were very significant. They resulted from high quality, relevant research, adequately translated for different users and uses, and from active engagement with multiple stakeholders in the agri-food sector. In all cases, the activities of REDP teams were a key causal factor in the outcomes achieved, although the scale of outcomes achieved is varied.

The evidence provided in the cases, the REDP self-evaluation report, Director of Research's presentation and staff and stakeholders' face-to-face and online discussions with the panel **confirm the centrality and significance of the roles played by REDP in leading Teagasc's mission for a transition to sustainability in the Irish agri-food sector. They also show the need for key resources to increase the scale of this Programme's achievements.**

The outcome trajectories describe the role of other actors in achieving change at multiple levels and the consequences of enabling or hindering policy and research environments. Teagasc's and REDP's investment in this reflexive, case-study based process as part of the Peer Assessment process, in order to illustrate the different ways in which REDP works to achieve outcomes and impact, is commendable.

Executive Summary

The Peer Assessment Panel (PAP) assessed REDP and its component Departments against three criteria, i.e. quality, impact and viability using qualitative assessment (text) and quantitative assessment (the five assigned categories below). See also Appendix 3 for more detail on assessment categories.

| Categories | | | | |
|-------------|--------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|
| Outstanding | Strong | Competent | Needs Improvement | Unacceptable |

I. Programme Quality, impact and viability

Programme Quality

The PAP considers that the Quality of the overall RED Programme is Outstanding

The breadth, scope, and diversity of the programme is impressive and this is a strength. Teams publish and apply state of the art and innovative methods in economic, social, geospatial, human behavioural, motivational and strategic policy analyses. The scientific knowledge, communication, KT and technical capability that resides within the constituent Departments is coupled with a high level of practical knowledge relating to farming systems, farm economics, farm management and diversification and their roles and challenges in respect of sustainable rural development, with no notable gaps in relevant science coverage. The Programme derives added value for Teagasc and Irish agriculture via a significant international scientific reputation and range of collaborations, as well as active engagement with policy makers and rural and agri-food sector stakeholders. It embraces a very broad, and constantly moving, agenda with impressive adaptive capacity, especially considering the relatively modest scale of the Programme within Teagasc.

All Research Departments within the Programme have consistently contributed well-cited papers to the international scientific literature, and the quality of KT activities is clearly internationally excellent with good examples of effective partnering, co-creation and outreach. The contribution of the Programme by training a substantial body of Walsh Scholars in key 'soft skills' and socio-economic analytical expertise is also important.

Recommendations:

- 1. The panel recommends increased recognition within Teagasc that, as its only social-science focused research programme, REDP has a unique and central role to play in delivering Teagasc's mission.** A sustainable Irish agri-food system requires not only technical innovation, but also economic, institutional and behaviour change within the sector and across wider society. This depends on robust, respected and applied economic and social research and related KT activities. REDP is generating high quality and valued REDP results, reputation and impact **that merits increased investment, particularly in core staffing, to fulfil this role.**
- 2. Additional support is recommended for the vital work of REDP's KT Department: enabling Teagasc advisors to better prepare farm families for the transition,** along with the reorganisation of advice teams to create regional 'leads' for key topics of diversification, organic farming, decarbonising and farm succession.

3. **REDP managers and teams should devote time and effort to develop a clear, overarching programme strategy** which knits together its constituent Department strategies and work strands, showing how they contribute to “Teagasc Together” and “Food Vision 2030”. Underpinned by a theory of change developed with support from the Evaluation Unit, the strategy should highlight and explain the key role of economic and social research in supporting transition to agri-food sustainability. By including the programme’s key stakeholders, including policy makers, food businesses, agencies, NGOs and the farming community in strategy development, this will enable them to affirm the importance of REDP to Teagasc’s mission. In this process, strengthened synergies between REDP teams should be encouraged, complementing REDP collaboration with other teams and partners beyond Teagasc.

Programme Impact

The PAP assessed the Impact of the overall RED Programme to be Strong

There are many ways in which the Programme and its constituent Departments are successfully contributing to Teagasc’s mission to support a sustainable transition across the Irish agri-food system. These range from providing bespoke and responsive policy-relevant support to DAFM, to promoting sector-wide consideration of future sustainability challenges, and enabling farm families to better understand their options for successful and resilient development through careful planning and new enterprise development, within and beyond agriculture. The PAP found that overall, the outcomes achieved and as presented in the case studies have been significant, demonstrating high quality and relevant research alongside good engagement with relevant actors in the agri-food sector.

REDP plays a valued and absolutely pivotal role in Teagasc’s mission. Food system shift is a real challenge, in the context of climate change. All Departments in the Programme need to consider the value of closer collaboration and working together towards that mission. Both research and KT teams act as enablers of agri-food system change, towards sustainability: in policy and practices; in public understanding and perception, and in farm sector and food system shifts.

REDP is making unique and valued contributions to investigating, understanding and unblocking barriers to positive change, among farmers, farm advisory services, across supply chains and policy making communities. It is supporting increased resilience and future-proofing in agri-rural business and community development across Ireland. This impact is recognised as significant and essential by its key stakeholders and collaborators in the sector, but it is given insufficient promotion and attention beyond these groups. Teagasc should recognise and support further investment in the programme, in recognition of its essential role.

Recommendations:

4. **REDP should invest more in cross-team learning and reflection, to focus on “impact pathways” and more fully capturing its impact.** This should include regular learning events between Departments and the Evaluation Unit; targeted use of Walsh Fellowships in a joint programme with the Evaluation Unit; and other efforts to improve REDP’s ability to evidence the high value and impact of its activities, internally within Teagasc and to a growing range of external stakeholders.

Programme Viability

The PAP considered the viability of the RED Programme to be **Strong**

There are several components to assessment of viability including: alignment with external policy drivers and end-user priorities; sufficiency of facilities and resources (financial and human) to deliver against expectations; and a clear, realistic strategy that specifies priorities, opportunities, and timelines as well as risks and their management.

REDP Departments' priorities are each closely aligned to the Teagasc strategy in different but complementary ways. Their focus spans central policy, a broad community of sector stakeholders and a myriad of local actors in agri-rural business and sustainability. The specialist knowledge and technical skills of the teams in economics, social science, human geography and applied and future-proofed KT demonstrate competitiveness and deliver necessary outputs which are truly impressive for the scale of resources available to them.

However, the PAP is concerned that this valuable expertise is vulnerable, because specialisms are often only one-person deep and many of the team work at a level which goes beyond expectations, for sustained periods of time. We believe that action is needed to enable a greater scale and longevity/continuity of resourcing to the Programme, in view of its key enabling role within and beyond Teagasc. Staff are frequently overloaded, particularly those in the most responsive roles (KT and economics); they suffer short-time oriented pressure on resources, and need support to take a longer and broader, system-wide approach to managing their workloads. At the same time, a predominance of very short-term contracts for junior staff across REDP, and particularly in AFBSA, threatens the continuity of this valuable work.

We suggest that the Departments' complementary strengths could be enhanced by resourcing and effort to enable increased investment in strategic and future-focused Programme leadership, and integrated team development. Investing in robust and high-quality management should be a Teagasc priority, which should include ensuring that excellent leadership and management training (including CPD) can be undertaken within core working hours.

The PAP received data that indicated significant gender imbalance in favour of males at senior grades throughout Teagasc. The Panel was informed that no data was collected routinely by Teagasc or was available in relation to: race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation, and monitoring the gender of applicants and appointments was only carried out routinely for senior positions. It appears that no monitoring of other diversity data informs recruitment and selection processes. These weaknesses are remiss in any public organization, and particularly one of such scale and sector significance for Ireland.

Recommendations:

- 5. REDP managers should devote time to team-building, and focus on enabling management methods and action to maintain and enhance staff satisfaction and performance.** They should share good practice across the teams in creating an ambitious and supportive management culture, and clear pathways for career development. Regular meetings of the senior management team (REDP Programme manager and Department Managers) will be an essential element in this. The Leadership Team would benefit greatly from external Mentoring /Coaching and it is recommended that such be made available to them.
- 6. REDP needs to sustain its capacity to anticipate and respond to continuous change.** Reaching out to new constituencies locally, nationally and internationally, it should

identify and pursue broad resourcing strategies embracing public and private funding – diversifying income sources to create more opportunities for longer-term research, focused on agri-food system shifts and future rural resilience.

7. **REDP and Teagasc should monitor their diversity data and pro-actively address diversity imbalances**, ensuring equal pay for equal work and a culture of respect and inclusion across the organisation. Teagasc Senior Management should implement routine annual reporting of diversity data, and adopt a set of positive actions to address diversity imbalances, including specific effort to achieve a more balanced gender profile in senior management positions.

II. Department Quality, impact and viability

Agricultural Economics & Farm Surveys (AEFS) Department

- The PAP considered that the Quality of the AEFS Department's activities was **outstanding** in both national and international contexts
- The PAP considered that the Impact of the AEFS Department's activities was **strong** in relation to national policy and with regards to stakeholder needs.
- The PAP considered that the Viability of the AEFS Department was **strong** with regard to alignment with national strategies and mission statements and in the management of human resources.

The Department provides high quality 'core' data and analysis for policy and R&D. It has a strong approach in sustainability, with innovation in indicators and in economic modelling. DAFM values the team's rapid and relevant response to requests for help and support. Stakeholders respect AEFS expertise (e.g. in the National Farm Survey, and in modelling impacts and scenarios for post-Brexit planning).

DAFM demands can sometimes be heavy and unpredictable: this 'call-off' work drains resources away from pro-active bidding for funding, growth plans and strategic team development. There is a need to expand AEFS scope and reach (in respect of both issues and systems), by connecting to other REDP teams and by changing time and resource management to make more space for creative thinking.

Recommendations

1. Develop more integrated, real-time and cost-effective data management and sourcing by adopting new technologies and building partnerships with other bodies who gather relevant sector information. Also link with the AFBSA geospatial team to support new steps in regional modelling to better reflect Irish farm diversity.
2. Formalize the Department's valued 'call-off' role and expectations with DAFM, to free up time to build new horizon-scanning activities with DAFM and others.
3. Develop more regular communication of AEFS research findings and implications for the wider stakeholder community, including reaching out to new constituencies (e.g. new bioeconomy actors) to inform current debates, discuss and assess different scenarios, and promote and maintain this team's independence and authority.

Agrifood Business & Spatial Analysis (AFBSA) Department

- The PAP judged that the Quality of AFBSA was **outstanding**
- The PAP judged that the Impact of AFBSA was **strong**
- The PAP judged the Viability of the AFBSA was **strong** in relation to alignment with strategy, a forward-looking agenda and creative project resourcing, and strong team motivation; but **competent** in respect of human resources because its expertise is only one-person deep on several topics and this cannot be easily addressed due to Teagasc's broader staff recruitment limitations (funding mainly short-term junior posts).

The team demonstrates strong holistic systems thinking. It is working on strategic EU and Ireland-relevant projects and is forward looking and ambitious in its agenda and methods. The PAP saw clear evidence of a supportive, collaborative culture and practices leading to positive outcomes for stakeholders and in the team itself. A particular strength is that AFBSA uses external funding and stakeholder involvement to create an exciting and expanding research portfolio on highly future-relevant topics and priorities. Stakeholders recognise and respect their cutting-edge value and vision.

However, the resources of the AFBSA team are modest, for such a broad portfolio of specialist knowledge and ambitions for impact. This leaves it vulnerable as in several areas its expertise is barely more than one-person deep. This also limits the number and scope of additional project involvement and participation. Insufficient resources are available to ensure recruitment and then retention of junior researchers in order to build more robust teams working on these key topics.

Responding to the request from the Department for suggestions for a suitable new name, the PAP suggests the following: Transitions Management and Co-creation (TMC).

Recommendations

1. Stakeholders believe in the transformational capability of this Department, for Teagasc as a whole – this represents an opportunity for the team. AFBSA should invest in and develop stronger evidence of its impact and pathways to impact, to convince REDP colleagues, other programmes and Teagasc senior management of the value and potential of its research.
2. AFBSA could further enhance its impact by aligning and further developing its internal and external change programmes, giving more attention to tracking and documenting impact and pathways to impact, with support from the Evaluation unit.
3. The Department should share its excellent practice in working cultures and methods across REDP and Teagasc, co-creating and embedding these high standards.

Farm Management (FM) & Rural Development (RD) KT Department

- The PAP considered the quality of FMRD Department's activities is **strong**
- The PAP considered that the impact of FMRD Department's activities was **outstanding** in relation to national policy and meeting stakeholder needs, despite being constrained by a lack of resources for their very important work, and a lack of supporting strategic leads in other KT advisory teams.
- The PAP considered that the viability of this Department was **competent**, doing extremely relevant, future-focused and strategic work but vulnerable due to significant staff overload and under-recognition within Teagasc.

This department, with both its FM and RD teams, plays a critical role for Teagasc. There is a significant risk of Departmental dependence on a few individuals: a staffing squeeze is apparent across the business of FM and RD. In addition, Teagasc advisors have a heavy Direct payment support load which compromises this teams' long-term ability to influence and improve advisory staff capacity to promote the Teagasc mission.

All family businesses face succession planning/ land mobility/ inheritance needs on a regular basis, and FM team is positioning, researching, facilitating, and bringing critical resources & skills together to meet those needs. This activity merits appropriate publicity (and planning). It is creating valued partnerships with key agencies. For RD, the PAP noted an extremely high level of output from a small team. It is interactive, adaptive and resourceful in delivery approaches – showing admirable teamwork under pressure. It plays an effective multi-actor brokerage role. There is evidence of strong collaborative relationships with local and national organisations (leveraging). It is active and influential in policy development. The new Organic farming target creates a resource/recruitment challenge, but also an important opportunity to strengthen the team and its profile internally.

There remains a challenge in securing KT time/priority to undertake RD training: many advisors fail to recognise the importance and relevance of RD work for the future farms of Ireland – a high proportion of Irish farms will not be specialist production units and must respond to climate, energy, biodiversity and wider community needs through alternative tactics including diversification and innovation in sustainable business development.

Recommendations

1. Management should develop a clear action plan for these two KT teams, defining what they aim to achieve, setting priorities, tracking and reviewing progress via learning loops, and building a robust case for additional resources, with stakeholder support. In this process, it should build more co-ordinated activities in which FM and RD teams work together to support Teagasc's mission.
2. Use the success of the workshops for generational transfer to link these with advice on new business models for sustainable farming and resilience. Seek external funding to enable this formula of working together with a number of outside specialists to continue and grow, hosting further events and running joint awareness-raising and promotional campaigns on other topics.
3. Expand the organics and renewable energy teams, ready to meet growing demand from farm families. Partner with equine and other leisure and tourism stakeholders to pool resources and enable further growth in these areas.

III. REDP Outcome Evaluation

The purpose of the outcome evaluation component of this review is to assess how the REDP Programme is working towards achieving outcomes. An outcome is a sustained change in behaviour (practices, relationships) or state (e.g., policy change, establishment of farmer association) in the Irish agri-food sector.

Six outcome case studies were included in the self-assessment document and formed the basis of the outcome evaluation. The cases were:

- Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation of Irish Agricultural Performance
- FAPRI-Ireland Models: Support for evidence-based policy making
- Teagasc Succession and Inheritance Knowledge Transfer Programme
- Responsive and Inclusive Digital Transformations on Farms
- Informing and assessing national policies on land use and soils
- Contribution of Teagasc RD to rural sustainability.

A purpose of the case studies is to better understand the outcome trajectory of each case, i.e. the sustained and evolving pattern of interactions between actors, knowledge, technology, policy and institutions out of which outcomes emerge, and Teagasc's role in that trajectory. The cases were chosen to represent the different ways REDP works to achieve outcomes and impact, not as a representative sample, but rather to be informative.

The PAP found that, overall, the outcomes achieved and as presented in the case studies were highly significant and result from high quality, relevant research and active engagement with stakeholders in the agri-food sector. The outcomes presented cover a range of proximate and intermediate changes within the broader agri-food system.

In all the cases, the activities of the REDP team were found to be a necessary contributory factor. In other words, the outcomes would not have been possible without them.

The conclusions from the analysis of the case studies feed into the Programme level recommendations for REDP, particularly recommendations 3 and 5 and the AFBSA Department recommendation 2.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Teagasc is committed to undertake external independent peer assessments of its research and knowledge transfer programmes on a 5-year cycle. The Rural Economy and Development Programme (REDP) was previously reviewed in 2016. Since that review, Teagasc has developed a revised protocol that includes a new evaluation component.

The protocol provides guidance on:

- Purpose and methodology
- Scope
- Assessment criteria
- Composition, selection, duties, and terms of reference of the Peer Assessment Panel (PAP)
- Contents of documentation to be provided to the PAP
- Timetable for preparation and reporting

The evaluation component of the protocol includes the deployment of a theory of change that has been adopted over recent years by the Teagasc Evaluation Unit and is included in Teagasc's current Statement of Strategy 'Teagasc Together'. This describes a systematic approach to identification of the different pathways through which Teagasc's combined research, advisory and educational programmes support the transition of Ireland's agri-food sector to a sustainable, competitive, resilient and diversified system. In preparation for the evaluation, the REDP leadership team developed six outcome case studies using this theory of change to learn about how their work is supporting the achievement of outcomes. These cases were provided to the PAP to facilitate their understanding of how the Programme is achieving its goals and as an evidence base for the evaluation component.

1.2 Objectives

The purpose of the Peer Assessment is:

1. To answer the evaluation question: *"How has REDP contributed to Teagasc's mission to support the transition of Ireland's agri-food sector to a sustainable, competitive, resilient and diversified system?"*
2. To assess if an effective and balanced scientific programme is being delivered which fulfils the mission of the programme and meets the needs of its stakeholders.
3. To determine the quality, relevance, and impact of the knowledge transfer programme.
4. To identify how the research and knowledge transfer programme could be improved to make best use of resources and contribute to outcomes and impact.
5. To provide accountability for public funds expended.

To meet these objectives, the Peer Assessment Panel (PAP) is required to assess the *quality, impact* and *viability* of the overall RED Programme and its component Departments

The Programme assessment also includes three further aspects: the *Walsh Scholarships Postgraduate Programme*; *Research Integrity*; and *Employee Diversity*

1.3 Peer Assessment Panel Membership

The membership of the Peer Assessment Panel (PAP) and their affiliations were:

- Professor Janet Dwyer (Chair) University of Gloucestershire, UK
- Professor Moira Dean, Queens University Belfast
- Dóirín Graham, CEO of Clare Local Development Company Ltd, Ireland
- Jim Woulfe, former CEO of Dairygold Co-Operative Society, Ireland

- Peter Parree, ZLTO (The Southern Agriculture and Horticulture Organization), The Netherlands
- Krijn Poppe, former research manager at Wageningen Economic Research, The Netherlands
- Dr Genowefa Blundo-Canto, CIRAD Innovation Unit, France

Expertise in research, knowledge transfer and policy issues were all represented among the membership of the Panel. Knowledge of end-user priorities and relevance as well as expertise in evaluating outcomes and impact of agricultural research were also represented.

1.4 Methodology

Before a two-day site visit to Teagasc Ashtown, Dublin, the PAP participated in two on-line briefing sessions that provided them with information about the context of the Programme and the assessment process including the three criteria to be appraised (Quality, Impact and Viability) and the evaluation question to be addressed. The Panel was also provided with, and reviewed, a detailed **Programme Description and Self-Assessment Report** prepared by REDP. This report included details of:

- Management structure, staffing and finances
- Past and future targets
- Strategy and interactions with industry
- Publications and bibliometric analysis
- Six outcome case studies involving each Department, selected to demonstrate how REDP is achieving outcomes and impact along three impact pathways. The six case studies were:
 1. Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation of Irish Agricultural Performance
 2. FAPRI-Ireland Models: Support for evidence-based policy making
 3. Teagasc Succession and Inheritance Knowledge Transfer Programme
 4. Responsive and Inclusive Digital Transformations on Farms
 5. Informing and assessing national policies on land use and soils
 6. Contribution of Teagasc RD to rural sustainability.

An analysis and separate evaluation report on the case studies were produced by the panel evaluator as an input for the PAP. In addition to these documents, the Panel was also directed to recent Irish Government and Teagasc publications. These provided the Panel with awareness of, and insights into, the policy environment and strategy statements that are of direct relevance to the RED Programme. They included:

- *Food Vision 2030 and “Teagasc Together” – Statements of Strategy 2021-2024*

The programme for the two-day on-site visit (14-15 November 2022) included eight discussion sessions with Teagasc staff and stakeholders as follows:

- Teagasc (Professor Frank O’Mara) and Director of Research (Professor Pat Dillon)
- Teagasc Evaluation Officer (Dr Kevin Heanue)
- Head of REDP (Dr Kevin Hanrahan)
- Members of the Agricultural Economics and Farm Surveys Department, including HoD.
- Members of the Agrifood Business and Spatial Analysis Department, including HoD.
- Members of the Farm Management & Rural Forestry Development Department including the HoD and acting HoDs.
- Four groups of Teagasc stakeholders representing both industry and policy end-users and internal stakeholders, as convened by each REDP Department.

The remainder of this report presents the findings of the PAP following its site visit.

2. Programme Quality, Impact and Viability

2.1 Programme Quality

The PAP considers that the Quality of the overall RED Programme is Outstanding

The breadth, scope, and diversity of the programme is impressive and this is a strength. Teams publish and apply state of the art and innovative methods in economic, social, geospatial, human behavioural, motivational and strategic policy analyses. The scientific knowledge, communication, KT and technical capability that resides within the constituent Departments is coupled with a high level of practical knowledge relating to farming systems, farm economics, farm management and diversification and their roles and challenges in respect of sustainable rural development, with no notable gaps in relevant science coverage. The Programme derives added value for Teagasc and Irish agriculture via a significant international scientific reputation and range of collaborations, as well as active engagement with policy makers and rural and agri-food sector stakeholders. It embraces a very broad, and constantly moving, agenda with impressive adaptive capacity, especially considering the relatively modest scale of the Programme within Teagasc.

All Research Departments within the Programme have consistently contributed well-cited papers to the international scientific literature, and the quality of KT activities is clearly internationally excellent with good examples of effective partnering, co-creation and outreach. The contribution of the Programme by training a substantial body of Walsh Scholars in key 'soft skills' and socio-economic analytical expertise is also important.

2.2 Programme Impact

The PAP assessed the Impact of the overall RED Programme to be Strong

There are many ways in which the Programme and its constituent Departments are successfully contributing to Teagasc's mission to support a sustainable transition across the Irish agri-food system. These range from providing bespoke and responsive policy-relevant support to DAFM, to promoting sector-wide consideration of future sustainability challenges, and enabling farm families to better understand their options for successful and resilient development through careful planning and new enterprise development, within and beyond agriculture. The PAP found that overall, the outcomes achieved and as presented in the case studies have been significant, demonstrating high quality and relevant research alongside good engagement with relevant actors in the agri-food sector.

REDP plays a valued and absolutely pivotal role in Teagasc's mission. Food system shift is a real challenge, in the context of climate change. All Departments in the Programme need to consider the value of closer collaboration and working together towards that mission. Both research and KT teams act as enablers of agri-food system change, towards sustainability: in policy and practices; in public understanding and perception, and in farm sector and food system shifts.

REDP is making unique and valued contributions to investigating, understanding and unblocking barriers to positive change, among farmers, farm advisory services, across supply chains and policy making communities. It is supporting increased resilience and future-proofing in agri-rural business and community development across Ireland. This impact is recognised as significant and essential by its key stakeholders and collaborators in the sector, but it is given insufficient promotion and attention beyond these groups. Teagasc should recognise and support further investment in the programme, in recognition of its essential role.

2.3 Programme Viability

The PAP considered the viability of the RED Programme to be **Strong**

There are several components to assessment of viability including: alignment with external policy drivers and end-user priorities; sufficiency of facilities and resources (financial and human) to deliver against expectations; and a clear, realistic strategy that specifies priorities, opportunities, and timelines as well as risks and their management.

REDP Departments' priorities are each closely aligned to the Teagasc strategy in different but complementary ways. Their focus spans central policy, a broad community of sector stakeholders and a myriad of local actors in agri-rural business and sustainability. The specialist knowledge and technical skills of the teams in economics, social science, human geography and applied and future-proofed KT demonstrate competitiveness and deliver necessary outputs which are truly impressive for the scale of resources available to them.

However, the PAP is concerned that this valuable expertise is vulnerable, because specialisms are often only one-person deep and many of the team work at a level which goes beyond expectations, for sustained periods of time. We believe that action is needed to enable a greater scale and longevity/continuity of resourcing to the Programme, in view of its key enabling role within and beyond Teagasc. Staff are frequently overloaded, particularly those in the most responsive roles (KT and economics); they suffer short-time oriented pressure on resources, and need support to take a longer and broader, system-wide approach to managing their workloads. At the same time, a predominance of very short-term contracts for junior staff across REDP, and particularly in AFBSA, threatens the continuity of this valuable work.

We suggest that the Departments' complementary strengths could be enhanced by resourcing and effort to enable increased investment in strategic and future-focused Programme leadership, and integrated team development. Investing in robust and high-quality management should be a Teagasc priority, which should include ensuring that excellent leadership and management training (including CPD) can be undertaken within core working hours.

The PAP received data that indicated significant gender imbalance in favour of males at senior grades throughout Teagasc. The Panel was informed that no data was collected routinely by Teagasc or was available in relation to: race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation, and monitoring the gender of applicants and appointments was only carried out routinely for senior positions. It appears that no monitoring of other diversity data informs recruitment and selection processes. These weaknesses are remiss in any public organization, and particularly one of such scale and sector significance for Ireland.

If the REDP is to excel and deliver on its remit to pursue stakeholder expectations then the Leadership / Management Team and sector leads will need to work more cohesively. Horizon scanning, regular (e.g. monthly) team reflection and collective planning will be essential for ongoing success, as well as regular programme level meetings between the Heads of Department and the Programme Director.

3. Assessment of Programme Resources, Diversity and Walsh Scholars

3.1 Human Resources

At the time of the assessment, the REDP Programme had a staff of 66.25 FTEs (full-time equivalents) which represented a 32% increase in resource over the six-year period since the previous review.

The ratio of permanent staff (administrators, researchers, KT specialists and technologists) to contract staff on period appointments (excluding Walsh Scholars) is approximately 65%:35%. This ratio has increased since 2016 as short-term period appointments have been the main route to Departmental growth in AFBSA, while staffing in the KT specialisms has declined and that in AEFS has remained fairly constant. If personnel change in the areas of greatest growth, this presents a significant risk and management challenge, given the need to ensure the development of technical knowledge and practical skills within a diverse programme, as well as maintaining strong and trusted relationships with key stakeholders (end-users, policy makers etc.). This issue was being addressed by the professional development of contract staff and acquisition of external project funding to maintain their numbers. However, the PAP considered that a more balanced and strategic approach to the funding and management of staff across all REDP Departments would be beneficial for strengthening its viability.

Throughout the PAP visit it was very obvious that all those REDP staff with whom the PAP engaged were capable and competent. They work hard, often under pressure and always focused on being responsive to Government, and especially to senior officials in the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine. However, it was also apparent that some groups and many individuals within REDP work in relative isolation from one another which may lead occasionally to a silo mentality emerging.

From evidence presented and discussed at review, it appears that current provision for leadership development is limited. Teagasc offers relatively standard in-house management training to its programme managers, and also an externally-provided leadership development programme which successful trainees assess as excellent. However, individuals are expected to pursue this in their own time outside office hours, which can be difficult. Those who are unable to do that may thus be held back in their ambitions to lead well.

3.2 Physical resources

The dispersed location of REDP Departments across 2 different Teagasc sites is likely to present a challenge to the co-ordinated development and cohesive management and leadership of the Programme. Whilst the PAP does not consider this to be insurmountable, it believes that greater attention to the task of Programme leadership and cohesive, holistic development of synergies across the RED Departments would increase the impact and recognition of the value of the programme for delivering Teagasc's mission.

3.3 Walsh Scholars

REDP is currently training 38 Walsh Scholars in key economic and social science skills and knowledge, and has trebled the number of scholars it supports, since 2016. This represents a significant investment in transferring relevant expertise and ability to policy and practice communities across the Irish agri-food and rural sectors. However, concerns were noted about a relative lack of funding provision to enable the retention of the brightest and best researchers within REDP from among their Walsh scholars, once they complete their doctorates.

3.4 “End-user” Stakeholder perspectives

Considering the evidence provided in the four stakeholder panels convened for the PAP (one panel per REDP Department/KT theme), we noted strongly positive perspectives on the work of each Department and its relevance for current and future sector development. Positive examples of valuable REDP work were many and were enthusiastically expressed by partners in rural development, in agri-rural policy and in leading sector organisations within Ireland. However we note that those attending the panels were specifically invited to them by REDP staff, which may mean that not all end-users were represented.

A greater emphasis upon horizon-scanning work was called for, as well as an increase in Teagasc resourcing for the REDP and an increased ability to offer independent strategic advice to stakeholders concerning future resilience options and development pathways.

3.5 Research Integrity

The PAP saw no evidence of any lack of integrity in REDP research nor was it made aware of any incident within the RED Programme that required investigation. The initiation of a code of ethics for social science research by AFBSA shows that this issue is recognised as important for the Programme. A summary of research ethics applications and outcomes now needs to be collected annually and reported for all REDP departments’ research.

3.6 Diversity

The PAP received data that indicated significant gender imbalance in favour of males at senior grades throughout Teagasc. The Panel was informed that no data was collected routinely by Teagasc or was available in relation to: race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation, and monitoring the gender of applicants and appointments was only carried out routinely for senior positions. It appears that no monitoring of other diversity data informs recruitment and selection processes. These weaknesses are remiss in any public organization, and particularly one of such scale and sector significance for Ireland.

3.7 Programme Level Recommendations

- 1. The panel recommends increased recognition within Teagasc that, as its only social-science focused research programme, REDP has a unique and central role to play in delivering Teagasc’s mission.** A sustainable Irish agri-food system requires not only technical innovation, but also economic, institutional and behaviour change within the sector and across wider society. This depends on robust, respected and applied economic and social research and related KT activities. REDP is generating high quality and valued REDP results, reputation and impact **that merits increased investment, particularly in core staffing, to fulfil this role.**
- 2. Additional support is recommended for the vital work of REDP’s KT Department: enabling Teagasc advisors to better prepare farm families for the transition,** along with the reorganisation of advice teams to create regional ‘leads’ for key topics of diversification, organic farming, decarbonising and farm succession.
- 3. REDP managers and teams should devote time and effort to develop a clear, overarching programme strategy** which knits together its constituent Department strategies and work strands, showing how they contribute to “Teagasc Together” and “Food Vision 2030”. Underpinned by a theory of change developed with support from the Evaluation Unit, the strategy should highlight and explain the key role of economic and social research in supporting transition to agri-food sustainability. By including the programme’s key stakeholders, including policy makers, food businesses, agencies, NGOs and the farming community in strategy development, this will enable them to affirm the importance of REDP to Teagasc’s mission. In this process, strengthened synergies between

REDP teams should be encouraged, complementing REDP collaboration with other teams and partners beyond Teagasc.

4. **REDP should invest more in cross-team learning and reflection, to focus on “impact pathways” and more fully capturing its impact.** This should include regular learning events between Departments and the Evaluation Unit; targeted use of Walsh Fellowships in a joint programme with the Evaluation Unit; and other efforts to improve REDP’s ability to evidence the high value and impact of its activities, internally within Teagasc and to a growing range of external stakeholders.
5. **REDP managers should devote time to team-building, and focus on enabling management methods and action to maintain and enhance staff satisfaction and performance.** They should share good practice across the teams in creating an ambitious and supportive management culture, and clear pathways for career development. Regular meetings of the senior management team (REDP Programme manager and Department Managers) will be an essential element in this. The Leadership Team would benefit greatly from external Mentoring /Coaching and it is recommended that such be made available to them.
6. REDP needs to sustain its capacity to anticipate and respond to continuous change. Reaching out to new constituencies locally, nationally and internationally, it should **identify and pursue broad resourcing strategies embracing public and private funding – diversifying income sources to create more opportunities for longer-term research, focused on agri-food system shifts and future rural resilience.**
7. **REDP and Teagasc should monitor their diversity data and pro-actively address diversity imbalances,** ensuring equal pay for equal work and a culture of respect and inclusion across the organisation. Teagasc Senior Management should implement routine annual reporting of diversity data, and adopt a set of positive actions to address diversity imbalances, including specific effort to achieve a more balanced gender profile in senior management positions

4. Assessment of Agricultural Economics & Farm Surveys Department

4.1 Overview

Most of this Department is housed at the Athenry campus and conducts research in 2 main areas:

- Agricultural economics
- National farm survey.

The Department collects and provides high quality 'core' data and analysis for policy and R&D. It has a strong approach in sustainability indicators and innovation in data collection, and relevant topics in economic modelling (Brexit, CAP, Climate policy). The Department is doing research-based information gathering and economic analysis, providing accurate information to inform policy decisions; examining commodity markets and scenario modelling for future planning.

Over the past years the National Farm Survey, part of the EU Farm Accountancy Data Network has been able to collect and publish sustainability data that are very valuable for the current challenges in Irish farming and policy making. Although the strategy for the NFS is not very explicit, clever use has been made of opportunities in Horizon2020 projects like FLINT and MEF4CAP to innovate in the survey. More data has been collected from government agencies, to reduce administrative burdens on farmers in the sample and improve labour productivity of the technical staff. This approach is now extended to the data from farmers' trade partners in the private sector, respecting GDPR rules. Methods have been published in scientific papers.

Such data makes it possible for researchers to model effects of policies on farm income and environmental performance, and their trade-offs. The Ministry values the team's rapid and relevant response to requests for help and support. Stakeholders respect their expertise (e.g. in the National Farm Survey, in modelling impacts and scenarios for Brexit).

This Department is doing research-based information gathering and economic analysis, providing accurate information to inform DAFM decisions; examining commodity markets and scenario modelling for future planning. Stakeholders confirm that their data is invaluable: facilitating more sharing and integration of this data is crucial for the future, both within and beyond Ireland. Beyond DAFM, farmers and agri-food sector stakeholders now have more capacity and enthusiasm for using AEFS data – this is an opportunity. Giving farmers access to their data in easier to use forms could be very beneficial for future planning and development across the sector. Using more digital data flows from trade partners of the farmer could help to make the data more recent and less backward looking – which would be helpful for feedback to the farmers and support their collaboration with the survey.

With the innovations of the last years and the support of the stakeholders, the Irish FADN is well placed to evolve into the Farm Sustainability Data Network that the EU is developing, and AEFS can play an active role in this. However, it will also require more updates and greater efficiency in the NFS with a clear strategy and renewal of software –

which will necessitate investments. More impact could also be generated on a national scale: the optimization processes implemented by the Department for the NFS are relevant for changes in data collection and analysis processes internally (for other departments focusing on data collection) but also externally (sector/value chain organisations, public agencies, extension services and others that might have learned from the Department's practice to optimize their own processes). Collaboration in setting up a national programme for the digitalisation of the Irish sector (replacing paper invoices by digital formats to prevent typing in data with its costs and errors) would be beneficial for the sector, and the NFS would benefit as well.

The department provides DAFM with relevant and rapid policy support on topics like the Common Agricultural Policy, Brexit and Irish Climate policy. Published outputs are of high quality.

AEFS engages regularly with three central government Departments. These links are important – they build trust with government, and provide opportunities to inform the policy agenda. However, with controversy in the country over climate and biodiversity policies, it is also important for Teagasc's social and economic research to maintain a certain level of independence and respond to information demands from all stakeholders (including NGOs with critical views on current policies), sharing key research results that are not (yet) accepted truths.

DAFM demands can be heavy and unpredictable: this 'call-off' work drains resources away from pro-active bidding for funding, growth plans and strategic team development. AEFS is hoping to improve the specifics of its models – e.g. considering sustainability by farm types and performance levels. They are being pressed to do more longer-term futures modelling; with broader elements (e.g. LCA). They would like to be able to incorporate biodiversity impact into their models and to include specific information and analysis relevant to organic farming. Prioritizing the long wish list will be important. Modelling expertise is held only by 2 senior staff – this raises some concerns about critical mass and insufficient succession planning, in this area. Given the need to respond to and support DAFM on a daily basis, it can be hard to find capacity to respond to research calls and seek external funding.

However, stakeholders in DAFM would like them to do more scenarios/future horizon-scanning work, and system-wide analysis of sustainability challenges. Also, more regional and fine-grained modelling would be useful. The stakeholder group saw value in helping the team to create space for broader and future-focused thinking and reflection. This need to expand their research scope/reach (in respect of issues and systems) could be helped by connecting to other REDP teams, and by changing time and resource management to make more space for creative thinking.

4.2 Department Quality

The Department addresses research areas of high strategic relevance in terms of policy, industry viability and public concern. The aims of the AEFS department are aligned with those of Teagasc and the main client, the Irish Governmental Departments. The client orientation implies that there is not always time for more free research into new topics or to new methodologies, also as data intensive models need maintenance. There seems to

be a lack of time to attract extra funding in national or EU research programmes.

The PAP considered that the Quality of the AEFS Department is overall outstanding. In an international context the collection of sustainability indicators and the use of government databasis in the National Farm Survey is very strong. The modelling of the Irish farm sector on relevant policy topics is also strong.

The PAP recommends that AEFS develops a clearer strategy for more integrated data sourcing in its NFS in which more use is made of digital data from the farm sector to free up human resources and reduce administrative burdens of farmers. This could also make the data more timely and less backward looking. In publishing the data there could be valuable scope to link the work with the geospatial analysis team in AFBSA: anonymous data averages of yields, outputs, costs, emissions and margins could be estimated per hectare / animal, field and farm and be made publicly available to all farmers and other stakeholders in a geographical information system.

4.3 Department Impact

The PAP considered that the Impact of the AEFS Department activities was strong.

The department's work on the NFS and its focus on innovation in data collection, analysis and communication show its capacity to adapt and inform its multiple users in a targeted way. A rational and resource optimization approach emerges clearly from the practice of the department, whilst being attentive to users' needs. In terms of modelling, many users are appreciative of this knowledge and confirm that the consequences of its use are significant, particularly for policy decisions, such as those related to decoupling direct payments from agricultural production, evolution in the dairy sector and the impacts on farmers. The impact of AEFS work to model effects of issues like Brexit, the new CAP and Ireland's Climate Policy options clearly has a significant impact in enhancing the knowledge available for government decision-making, as well as for the future of the Irish agri-food sector more generally.

This work is relevant for all stakeholders. The PAP recognizes that the department is active in presenting its results to stakeholders. However, this is likely to become more important in the next decade, when climate and nitrate policies become more challenging and concerns will be raised that policy objectives and targets are not being reached. Different stakeholder groups may develop very different views on the future role of farming in the economy and the contribution of technical solutions, investments and/or structural and land use change in reaching policy objectives. Horizon-scanning of such potential futures is already called for by stakeholders, and it will be especially important that the department maintains its authority and independence in this critically influential work.

The PAP recommends that more regular communication of AEFS monitoring and modelling work to /with the wider stakeholder community, including emerging constituencies beyond the food sector, should be increased, to inform debates. Assessing different scenarios and monitoring developments will be a top-priority, for which its independence and authority will be essential.

4.4 Department Viability

The PAP considered that the Viability of the AEFS Department was strong with regard to alignment with national strategies and mission statements but with some challenges in respect of management of human resources.

The current viability of the AEFS department is very strong. The department is well aligned with its stakeholders. The staff are well-motivated and well managed.

However there are a number of challenges that the management should work on. The further digitalisation of the NFS will be necessary and fairly urgent. In its policy-oriented work, AEFS faces growing expectations from clients (e.g. for horizon scanning and new topics) and the policy needs in respect of climate adaptation and mitigation, water (quantity and quality) and biodiversity will challenge the limits of current models and methods. It is worrying that the staff and management reports that it has barely time to think about its strategy and work on securing additional external finance for projects, as was done successfully in the past and is evidenced clearly in AFBSA as having brought many benefits. Internal collaboration especially with AFBSA could help bring additional skills to AEFS modelling and analytical work (e.g. on geospatial techniques to enable more regionally-specific sector models). It also seems essential for AEFS to seek a more formalized agreement with DAFM around their needs for 'call-off' responsive policy work, to enable more strategic and pro-active planning for activities that DAFM would also like to see carried out by the AEFS team.

5. Assessment of Agrifood Business & Spatial Analysis Department

5.1 Overview

The Department is based at Ashtown & Athenry and has grown in size since the last peer-review. It has pro-actively built capacity to challenge the conventional staffing model in its area of Teagasc, fuelled by external funding. A holistic focus on future farming and food sustainability has enabled the team to build new links in its research on relevant sector and territorial issues, and growing stakeholder connections, as a result. Supporting and benefiting from these wider linkages takes time and requires strategic thinking and organisation. There is an impressive clear vision and forward-focused mission within the team.

AFBSA plans targeted communications and PR outputs to ensure its work reaches the right people. There is an educational public engagement agenda and workstream, which is impressive. They have innovated externally in their broad project portfolio, and also internally within Teagasc – e.g. setting up the 'coding club', and a qualitative methods group to promote better understanding and application of innovative approaches amongst those working with these techniques across the organisation.

Discussion with the team identified as its success factors: key personnel, strong peer support, mentoring, and a culture of team support. These are evidenced by collaborative decision-making across the team, writing retreats, shared management practices, giving and receiving feedback on research findings and communications. The team is also very diverse.

Relative areas of challenge were cited by team members as a reliance on short-term staff contracts for much of their project work, and a very thin complement of permanent experts on key topics which could leave them very vulnerable to future staff change (e.g. upon retirement, or simply due to career progression meaning that people move elsewhere).

Responding to the request from the Department for suggestions for a suitable new name the PAP suggests the following: Transitions Management and Co-creation (TMC). This is succinct and yet also indicates a forward-looking and broad agenda for action.

5.2 Department Quality

The PAP judged that the Quality of AFBSA was outstanding

AFBSA work is thematic and uses innovative methods and tools (e.g. living labs, motivational interviewing), working with key partners. The culture is enabling and staff affirm its value. They aspire to establish and lead a new programme on behaviour change for climate change and biodiversity. Publications evidence the cutting-edge nature of their use of methods and the excellence of their output.

5.3 Department Impact

The PAP judged that the Impact of AFBSA was strong

The co-design approach chosen by the department addresses the potential digitalization divide in the sector by co-developing tools that are adapted to different users and this appears to have contributed to their rapid uptake and use among relevant groups. The team's focus on data awareness and the ethical issues surrounding digitalization, and their bottom-up approach enable good use of the tools and knowledge generated by the department. Moreover, capacity development is embedded in this bottom up and transdisciplinary approach. The department also makes an outstanding contribution to technology development and policy making through its development and updating of spatial data and analysis infrastructure.

Recommendation:

Stakeholders believe in the transformational capability of this Department for Teagasc as a whole. This represents an opportunity for the team. AFBSA should invest in and develop stronger evidence of its impact and pathways to impact, to convince REDP colleagues, other programmes and Teagasc senior management of the value and potential of its research.

AFBSA could further enhance its impact by aligning and further developing its internal and external change programmes, giving more attention to tracking and documenting impact and pathways to impact, with support from the Evaluation unit.

5.4 Department Viability

Viability requires having in place clear and well-conceived future-proofed plans that enable forthcoming opportunities to be grasped while also having contingencies to deal with future risks (known and unknown). The PAP judged the Viability of the AFBSA was **strong**, despite institutional constraints that mainly relate to staffing.

Recommendation:

Share good practice in working cultures and methods across/with the RED Programme and across the whole Teagasc organisation, co-creating and embedding its values as an exemplar.

6. Assessment of Farm Management & Rural Development KT Department

6.1 Overview

This Department has two separate teams focused on 1) enhancing farm business management competence and forward planning, including succession, and 2) supporting development strategies and options including diversification into alternative enterprises such as equine and renewable energy generation; also organic farming, for which Teagasc has recently announced a significant new research capacity, to be established in the coming year.

The PAP was impressed at the scope and impact of the team and felt that its profile within Teagasc did not adequately reflect its significance or impact.

In respect of farm advisors – there are many private advisors that farmers will pay for, to get the services that they want and already recognize that they need. Average farm incomes in the dairy sector now are as high as €130,000/year, meaning that paying for advice is affordable for many. However, these kinds of advice will tend to be specific, technical and not sufficiently future-focused or resilient in the face of Ireland's anticipated sustainability and climate challenges.

Teagasc advisors, in contrast and additional to commercial advisors, need to be facilitators for 'marketing' such key issues to farmers – bringing key players together, scanning the future, being on the front foot in anticipating and preparing for change; The competences are there among this specialist team: they are clearly able to be pro-active on topics and awareness-raising. What is holding these specialist advisors back is the diversion of too much front-line advisor resource into what are basically administrative support roles: e.g. time-consuming 'form-filling' assistance for farm families, and ensuring farmers fully understand regulations and standards (e.g. for farm buildings). With the new CAP (from compliance to compliance and performance), we expect that the administrative needs of farmers will grow, which could increase the pressure on this department.

Farm Management unit plays a critical role for Teagasc. All family businesses face succession planning/ land mobility/ inheritance on regular basis, and the FM team is positioning, researching, facilitating, and bringing critical resources and skills together.

There is a significant risk of dependence on a few individuals arising from an apparent staffing squeeze across the business. In addition, Teagasc advisors have a heavy direct payment claims support load which compromises FMRD's specialist teams' long-term ability to reach all relevant KT staff with its critically important training and support. Its key stakeholder is the KT wing of Teagasc: 280 advisers and 70+ teachers. These teams need to be targeting financial stock-takes at critical moments in the farm cycle, looking at the roles and situation of all farm family members. However, advisers spend a lot of time helping farms to make their DP claims because farmers themselves see this as a key role without appreciating its impact upon their wider advisory support needs.

The FM team supports Teagasc digitalisation and delivers specific training, e.g. online events. They meet monthly with the head of KT and regional KT Directors. However, technical teams tend to dominate training session agendas. Walsh scholars in this Department working with cross-disciplinary supervisory teams help develop skills and insight: this is an innovative way to build capacity in the team.

Stakeholders feel this Department has a key role promoting sustainability of farms and food production. This needs more round-table discussions inclusive of and within Teagasc, reaching out and showcasing the value of 'softer skills' in social science and behaviour change across the organisation. For example, the profit monitor is very useful but could be more widely promoted among farmers: it seems that this is only really used within discussion groups, right now.

FM currently has a role in training people as regards regulatory standards on farm buildings. It is not clear if this role could or should be more appropriately financed and/or provided by the regulators, as well as promoted via the relevant construction sectors who should be required to meet such standards through certifications.

Within RD Unit, their key diversification / rural development resources, staffing and focus are minimally provided for by core Teagasc funding. Rural resilience needs for the future in Ireland mean that these things are becoming more important – they merit more profile and resources to match the scale of needs. For example:

- Irish farming should do more to encourage women and more diversity in the sector, to develop greater adaptive capacity and ability.
- Farms face critical future points for transition, in circumstances where people need to be more willing to change behaviours – succession should be seen as an opportunity for this more fundamental transition, involving diversification and the sustainable exploitation of new ideas and resources.

The new Organic farming target creates a resource/recruitment challenge, but also an important opportunity to strengthen the team and its profile internally. There remains a challenge in securing KT time/priority to undertake RD training. Many advisors are challenged to recognise the importance and relevance of RD work for the future farms of Ireland – a high proportion of Irish farms will not be specialist production units and must respond to climate, energy, biodiversity and wider community needs.

The RD team also has a strong public good role, reaching out to the wider community beyond Teagasc farmers. Other Rural agencies have poor reach to farm families. They support priority areas for rural communities, working closely with other actors and

stakeholders e.g. to host events. Their reach depends a lot on KT advisers in the regions with RD interests who can pick up and spread their knowledge, but the core team is very stretched.

Their roadshow events were clearly very successful – acting as a broker for all agencies to network and share expertise. Very important developmental work is done in their specific topic areas – organics, equine, energy, business diversification. However, they have no capacity to track their impact in a robust way. Successes need documenting to convince a wider audience of their value. Staff note little time for strategic planning – a lot of activity is ongoing within the teams and with stakeholders on a formal and regular basis.

6.2 Department Quality

The PAP adjudged that the quality of the Department was **strong**. With relatively limited resources, high quality tools, events and programmes are produced.

The Farm succession network has reached a very high level of collaboration with others. The FMRD team is extremely efficient, but too small to handle the KT training and outreach activities that farmers and stakeholders appreciate and expect from Teagasc specialists. This team has contributed a great deal to achieve a more strategic stakeholder approach within the organisation: Teagasc has been in the forefront of AKIS development across Europe, in the recent past. Given sufficient attention to this role and these vital KT specialisms, it would be well-placed to re-establish that position, going forwards.

The succession service is innovative and inclusive. There could be opportunities to attract sector co-funding for the support provided to advisers: it needs appropriate framing with publicity and planning. The department is efficient and also very effective in creating valued partnerships with key agents (solicitors, accountants, technicians, policy, etc).

We note an extremely high level of output from a small RD team. It is interactive, adaptive and resourceful in delivery approaches – showing admirable teamwork under pressure. It plays an effective multi-actor brokerage role. There is evidence of strong collaborative relationships with local and national organisations (leveraging). It is active and influential in policy development.

6.3 Department impact

The PAP adjudged that the impact of the Department was **outstanding** and highly relevant. Investment of more resource and more tracking of impact pathways is likely to increase their strategic impact for Teagasc as a whole.

The case-study (Teagasc Succession and Inheritance Knowledge Transfer Programme) provided very clear evidence not only of the impact of the Department, but also about how seriously the question of impact is taken by the team, contributing in particular to smoother generational renewal. Stakeholders affirm that this department offers huge value and opportunity but has only a small resource. They stress that the teams are doing really great work but that the resources aren't there to support it.

The approach supports the development of adapted tools and approaches such as the Succession Partnerships and Transferring the Family Farm (TTFF) clinics, adapting the strategy to provide more general information as well as targeted one-on-one information to address individual queries, supports the use of its outputs. Capacity development is an

important focus, through training, tools and manuals, for farmers and especially for Teagasc advisory staff, in line with continuous professional development strategies. Feedback from advisors and farmers is regularly used to update the knowledge and training provided.

The Rural Development unit contributes to significant uptake of the department's outputs despite a significant reduction in personnel over time. It does so by an adaptation strategy leveraging upon technological advances, enterprise diversification and policy influencing actions. The type of outputs produced is extensive and ranges from communication tools reaching about 45,000 farms regularly, to networking events, training and needs assessments at scale. This scale is achieved through digital tools, building capacity and collaborating closely with diverse stakeholders engaged in advice, education, entrepreneurship and health.

The diversification of expertise in the department seems to have favoured this reach, covering organic production, the equine sector, tourism and diversification including renewable energy generation. The capacity development strategy of RD teams is clearly highlighted and includes training series, tools, championships and supporting youth organizations. The RD policy influencing strategy relies on frequent engagement and relationships with public agencies, participating in committees and boards.

6.4 Department Viability

The PAP considered that the Viability of the FMRD Department was **competent**, as a result of significant human resources challenges that are imposed by external constraints. Institutional constraints were mentioned in this assessment as primary contributory factors, we found no failures in governance or leadership at Department level.

The team is stretched too thin and vulnerable to individual losses. The Senior Management Group of Teagasc should invest more in this profile of employees, as the expected return on this investment will be high, for the achievement of the strategy and mission. Teagasc advisors don't always recognise how important RD work is, for farm futures. They act as key brokers for transition. They need stronger links with entrepreneurship training among farmers, for this. They need at least one fulltime person per topic, in each advisor region. The staff cap on Teagasc is a significant issue: they are overworked and under stress, a lot of the time.

Recommendations

1. Management should develop a clear action plan for these two KT teams, defining what they aim to achieve, setting priorities, tracking and reviewing progress via learning loops, and building a robust case for additional resources, with stakeholder support. In this process, it should build more co-ordinated activities in which FM and RD teams work together to support Teagasc's mission.
2. Farm Management should use the success of the workshops for generational transfer to link these with advice on new business models for sustainable farming and resilience. Seeking external sponsorship should enable this formula of working together with a number of outside specialists to continue and grow, hosting further events and running joint awareness-raising and promotional campaigns on other topics.

3. Rural Development should expand the provision of organics and renewable energy teams, ready to meet growing demand from farm families for these business options. It should partner with equine and other leisure and tourism stakeholders to pool resources and enable further growth in these areas.

7. REDP Outcome Evaluation

7.1 Addressing the Evaluation Question

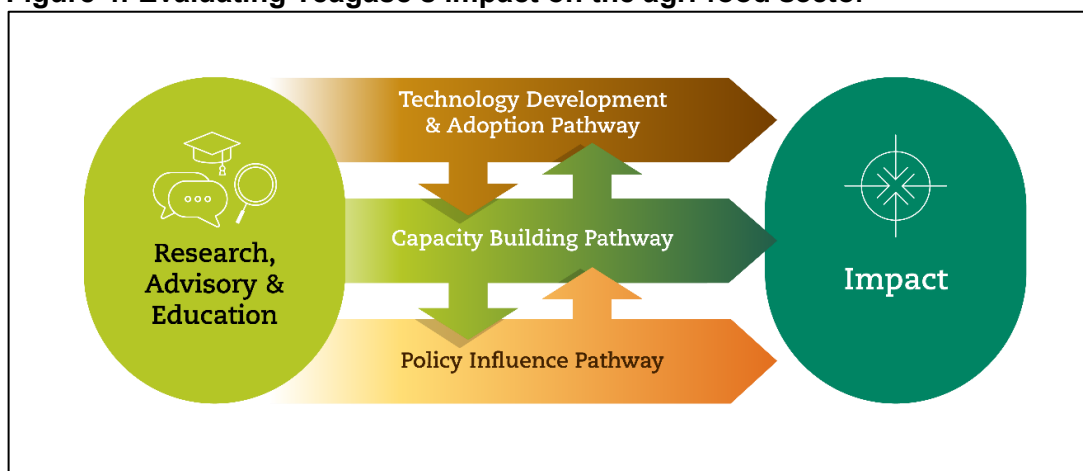
The evaluation component of this review was operationalised by the PAP through the following evaluation question:

“How has REDP contributed to Teagasc’s mission to support the transition of Ireland’s agri-food sector to a sustainable, competitive, resilient and diversified system?”

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess how the RED Programme is working towards achieving outcomes in the Irish agri-food sector. An outcome is defined as “*a sustained change in behaviour (practices, relationships) or state (e.g., policy change, establishment of farmer association) to which Teagasc has contributed*”. The PAP recognises that Teagasc produces research and engages in KT and advisory activities (some of which go beyond the programme being evaluated) in collaboration with and alongside other actors in the Irish agri-food sector. This includes farmers, the private sector, public agencies, NGOs and civil society, as well as other research, education and advisory services. The evaluation is, therefore, not measuring the attribution to outcomes solely of REDP activities and recognises that research and KT activities interact with systemic dynamics to bring about change.

Teagasc Together strategy outlines a long term and systemic view of change. It assumes that outcomes from Teagasc research and KT (which are achieved through activities of the REDP departments) will, over time and through ongoing interaction with others, bring about a transition in Ireland’s agri-food sector to a more sustainable, competitive, resilient and diversified system. Teagasc uses a published framework or theory of change (see Figure 4 page 59 of ‘*Teagasc Together*’, reproduced below) which shows how Teagasc activities contribute to impact in the agri-food sector through three interconnected impact pathways (technology development and adoption; capacity development; and policy influencing). These are interlinked with self reinforcing feedback loops around the capacity development pathway, which builds the capacity of the agri-food sector to innovate and transform. The framework is an aid to clarifying how the contributions made to specific outcomes can be understood as *plausible contributions* to the overarching goal.

Figure 4: Evaluating Teagasc’s impact on the agri-food sector



Source: Figure 4 page 59 'Teagasc Together'

In line with Teagasc's theory of change, the outcome cases all draw significantly upon the three impact pathways through which Teagasc impacts the agri-food sector. This highlights that the programme not only values the development and transfer of gap-filling research and technologies, but also focuses on making this knowledge accessible and usable for end-users, knowledge brokers and supporting and regulatory actors.

The outcome cases identify the trajectories that enabled the generation of significant outcomes supporting national planning and strategy; in agricultural, environment and trade policy; in the establishment of new national programmes; in the use of digital tools and knowledge by a large number of Irish advisors and farmers; in contributing to smooth generational renewal of farms; and in large-scale access to diversification knowledge and interactions.

These outcomes were achieved through formal and planned actions over time but also through informal actions (advocacy, networking, capacity development). Two strategies appear across the six case studies:

- Capacity development among different types of user (advisors, farmers, policy makers, other researchers)
- Anticipation of, and response to users' needs by filling anticipated gaps in knowledge or responding to direct demands and user feedback.

According to at least three outcome case studies (informing policy on land use and soils, rural sustainability, and succession and inheritance), the REDP programme also generates uptake of knowledge, tools and capacity internally within Teagasc.

The stakeholders of the REDP all acknowledge the outstanding contribution that the programme and its departments are making, and this emerges from the outcome case studies. Nonetheless, the evidence-generation efforts of the programme could be strengthened by regular review (e.g. yearly or bi-annually) and allocating specific resources (time, capacity, investment) to outcome and impact assessment studies. **The programme would benefit from regular “pause and reflect” moments (e.g. yearly) on the outcomes achieved and the strategies that generated them, but also on what worked less well and why, learning from cross department experiences.**

Capacity development externally and internally appears a key mechanism to foster behaviour change, but the extent of uptake is insufficiently evidenced. Moreover, the relational aspects of research uptake and scaling are under-represented in the case studies (except for rural sustainability). Understanding the changes in interactions, relationships, emergence of new actors, pioneers, champions that were fostered or generated unintentionally during scaling processes can highlight positive mechanisms from which other parts of the institution can learn. Finally, there is a strong focus on anticipating / responsive research: however, the mechanisms to understand/obtain user needs and demands are not always clear. Describing them in a more explicit way can generate useful learning to foster positive approaches.

7.2 Technology development and adoption pathway

There are multiple examples of how the REDP contributes to the technology development and adoption pathway. A strategy that appears across five case studies, including one from the rural development department (succession and inheritance), is the systematic development and updating of knowledge, methods and tools that focuses on filling knowledge gaps.

The actions of the AFBSA Department have informed the creation of the National Land Cover and Land Use mapping programme and the development of new Areas of Natural Constraint regulations under the CAP. The use by the DAFM of the AgriSnap App to securely and efficiently address queries from farmers and technical advisors led to over 3,000 farmers and farm advisors using the app. The use of the AgileTECH tool by Animal Health Ireland at national level also shows the potential reach of these technologies. **However, the time might have come for a robust assessment of the impacts of this innovation process.**

The Farm Management department's approach to fill knowledge gaps and support the development of adapted tools and approaches such as the Succession Partnerships and the TTFF clinics, adapting their strategy between general and one-on-one information supports the direct use of its outputs. The RD unit reaches about 45,000 farms regularly through digital tools and fosters networking events, training and needs assessments at scale. Nonetheless, whilst the outcomes are clearly described, the ultimate impacts are less clear: for instance, "RD organics played a role in doubling the organic area" **but the evidence for this and how it links to the demonstrations and training carried out should be highlighted.**

7.3. Capacity development pathway

Each of the outcome trajectories presented relies on targeted capacity development of diverse users (advisors, farmers, policy makers, other researchers). Anticipation and response to users' needs was also a key strategy implemented by the programme. Every outcome trajectory targeted different user's needs by filling anticipated gaps in knowledge to inform decision-making, or by responding to direct demands (analysis on demand), or by reacting to user feedback.

In three cases (rural sustainability, succession and inheritance, and digital transformations) an explicit bottom-up approach that includes a focus on networking and interaction building is a key mechanism to favour uptake.

Whilst all cases have an element of making knowledge accessible, two outcome cases explicitly describe the strategy to do this either through a series of targeted workshops, training, focus groups and large-scale networking events at national and sectoral level (rural sustainability) or through advocacy and targeted communication and formats (informing policy on land use and soils).

The importance of the capacity development pathway is clear as it emerges as a key strategy throughout the six case studies. **However, at least half provide little detail as to how this capacity is built for external stakeholders and whether this is part of planned and formal strategies or more informal actions when the opportunity arises.** Internal capacity development is also apparent in three case studies, but not for the others. **This could be further highlighted to show how the programme's results feed into Teagasc's strategic agenda more broadly.**

7.4 Policy influencing pathway

The contribution of the programme to the policy influence pathway is clear and highlighted by some key outcomes. The reference to the NFS results in key policy documents (e.g. Food Vision 2030, FoodWise 2025) and in the use of data to inform practices of EPA and DAFM, but also of sector-based groups, highlights this. The AEFS Department contributed to transform priorities in national planning documents and incentives, and to inform the decisions of varied stakeholders, for instance the Climate Change Advisory Councils and Dairy and Beef Environmental groups.

Findings from regular surveys at succession events from the FM unit feed into policy decision making nationally, particularly in fiscal and taxation policy, and also at the EU level via CAP strategic actions. The RD policy influencing strategy relies on frequent engagement and relationships with public agencies, participating in committees and boards.

For future evaluations, it would be useful to identify key use of results from the REDP in policy documents in order to understand the extent to which they inform formal policy making. Also, describing the key mechanisms through which modelling results reach different users would be worth to identify positive dynamics.

Appendix 1: Profile of Peer Assessment Panel members

Professor Janet Dwyer is Professor of Rural Policy at the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), University of Gloucestershire, UK. A sustainable development and policy analyst, she has 35 years' experience in applied research and expertise in rural, agricultural and environmental policy, focused upon agri-environment schemes, sustainable farming initiatives and rural development including LEADER. Janet was CCRI Director 2013-2021, strengthening its national and international reputation for robust, impactful research. Current work includes supporting rural resilience through the UK's agricultural transition, and analysing rural enterprise and innovation. Janet was President of the UK Agricultural Economics Society 2021-22, and awarded an OBE in 2022 for services to rural research.

Professor Moira Dean is Professor in Consumer psychology and food security at Queen's University Belfast. She has carried out research into consumer food choice, food safety, food fraud, risk perceptions and food supply chain management in the areas of organic food, beef, fish, wholegrain, portion size, healthy shopping, cooking skills and food labelling, with different stakeholders. Moira has worked on numerous projects funded by government agencies, research councils, the European Union and Industry. She is experienced in qualitative and quantitative methodologies for the assessment of attitudes, values, perceptions and barriers associated with food, health and sustainable living.

Dóirín Graham is CEO of Clare Local Development Company Ltd, Ireland. CLDC is a community-led local development organisation which was established in 2009 to deliver a range of rural development (LEADER), social inclusion (SICAP), training, community development and enterprise supports to communities in Co. Clare. Before 2009, Dóirín was CEO of Rural Resource Development, the LEADER LAG for Co. Clare, having started out as Projects Officer with Clare LEADER in 1993. Dóirín studied Agricultural Science in UCD which she followed with a Masters Degree in Rural Development.

Jim Woulfe is the former CEO of Dairygold Co-Operative Society, Ireland. Dairygold is one of Ireland's leading Agri & Dairy businesses with 7,000 shareholders, directly employing 1275 people and has Annual Revenues in excess of €1.15 billion. Jim has worked in the Agri-Food sector throughout his career. A UCC Dairy Science graduate he has held many leadership roles throughout his career including Head of HR, Head of Agri Business prior to being appointed CEO in 2009. Jim successfully led Dairygold through the EU deregulation of Milk Controls and subsequent growth and expansion thereby maximising returns to farmers while simultaneously growing the net asset value of the business.

Peter Paree is a project leader and developer at ZLTO (The Southern Agriculture and Horticulture Organization), in The Netherlands. His projects are in agriculture, rural development and crossover agri-tech. He works in strategic advice, project and programme management. He links management strategies of farmers to their environment, in projects that foster the goals of farmers, clients, neighbours and society. He supports and combines the entrepreneurial efforts of stakeholders in innovation: embracing relevant advisory services, scientists, ICT, mechanisation and farmers in regional, national and EU projects, focusing on Horizon Europe. He is involved in a number

of Precision Agriculture projects, of which Internet of Food and Farm 2020 (IoF2020) is the biggest.

Krijn Poppe is a former research manager and senior economist at Wageningen Economic Research, The Netherlands. Since 2016 he works 1 day per week as Member of the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure to provide strategic advice to the Dutch ministers and the parliament on complex societal challenges. He has been involved in many European projects. His work focused on supporting decision makers in policy and business to understand and act upon trends in agri & food, based in science. His own research interests focused on ICT, research-infrastructures, knowledge and innovation systems, accounting, the Common Agriculture Policy and food systems policy.

Dr Genowefa Blundo-Canto, CIRAD Innovation Unit, France. Genowefa is a development economist based at the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (Cirad), previously a post-doc at the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and a research fellow at Bioversity International. Her work focuses on impact evaluation of agricultural research for development (AR4D) with a focus on mixed methods, participatory and systemic approaches and navigating complexity at multiple scales. Thematically, she focuses on the links between interventions enhancing the use of agricultural biodiversity and their multidimensional impacts, with a special interest in food and nutrition security and social equity. She has participated in multiple research projects with a focus on Latin America, and more recently on West Africa and South East Asia.

Dr. Kevin Heanue is Teagasc's Evaluation Officer and has three main responsibilities. First, to develop, co-ordinate and conduct evaluations of Teagasc's research, advisory and education programmes. Second, to lead, guide and manage the strengthening of the evaluation role within Teagasc and the organisation's evaluation strategy, capabilities, policies, methods, practices and instruments. Third, to develop and lead a research programme on evaluation capacity building, evaluation frameworks, tools and methods. He was the independent Teagasc representative on the PAP and provided the secretariat to the PAP.

Appendix 2: Schedule for site visit

| Time | Action | Key Topics |
|-------|---|---|
| 19.00 | Dinner in Carlton Hotel, Blanchardstown see here | Attended by Director, Pat Dillon, Kevin Hanrahan, HOD's, Peer Review Panel, Secretariat |

Day 1: Monday 14th November at Teagasc Research Centre Ashtown

| Time | Action | Key Topics |
|---------------|---|---|
| 08.00+ | Transportation from accommodation to Teagasc Ashtown | |
| 09:00 – 09:30 | Introduction & Panel closed discussion led by Kevin Heanue & Panel Chairperson | Confirmation of approach to peer assessment, who will be in each session, lead panel discussant and the structure and format of end report. |
| 9.30 – 10.30 | Overview of Programme Kevin Hanrahan, Head of REDP (presentation 15 mins) plus discussion | Overview of programme, research strategy, structure, funding, policy, publications and support mechanisms, technology transfer, strategy, outcome case studies, evaluation question |
| 10.30 – 11.00 | Panel deliberations (with tea / coffee in room) | Report and assessment criteria (quality, impact and viability) and evaluation question. |
| 11.00 – 11.50 | Agricultural Economics and Farm Surveys (Trevor Donnellan) Presentation (10 minutes) plus discussion | Discussion of Dept structure, objectives, outputs, impacts, outcome case studies, strategy / positioning for the future |
| 11.50 – 13.00 | Panel deliberations | Report and assessment criteria (quality, impact and viability) and evaluation question. |
| 13.00 – 14.00 | Lunch | |
| 14:00 - 14:50 | Farm Management Knowledge Transfer (Fintan Phelan / Kevin Connolly) Presentation (10 minutes) plus discussion | Discussion of Dept structure, objectives, outputs, impacts, outcome case studies, strategy / positioning for the future |
| 14:50 - 15.30 | Panel deliberations | Report and assessment criteria (quality, impact and viability) and evaluation question |
| 15.30 | Tea / Coffee | |
| 15.45 – 16.20 | Meeting with FM stakeholders | Current experiences with Teagasc Views on future needs and capacity of Teagasc to meet these needs |
| 16.25 – 17.00 | Meeting with AEFS stakeholders | Current experiences with Teagasc Views on future needs and capacity of Teagasc to meet these needs |
| 17.00 – 17.30 | Panel deliberations | Report and assessment criteria (quality, impact and viability) and evaluation question |
| 19:00 | Dinner in Carlton Hotel, Blanchardstown | Attended by Peer Review Panel, Secretariat |

Day 2: Tuesday 15th November at Teagasc Research Centre Ashtown

| Time | Action | Key Topics |
|---------------|---|---|
| 9.00 - 9.50 | Rural Development Knowledge Transfer (Fintan Phelan/Mary Ryan) Presentation (10 minutes) plus discussion | Discussion of Dept structure, objectives, outputs, impacts, outcome case studies, strategy / positioning for the future |
| 9.50 – 10.15 | Panel Deliberations | Report and assessment criteria (quality, impact and viability) and evaluation question. |
| 10:15 | Tea/coffee | |
| 10:30 – 11.05 | Meeting with AFBSA stakeholders | Current experiences with Teagasc Views on future needs and capacity of Teagasc to meet these needs |
| 11.10-11.35 | Meeting with RD stakeholders | Current experiences with Teagasc Views on future needs and capacity of Teagasc to meet these needs |
| 11.45- 12.30 | Agri-Food Business and Spatial Analysis (Maeve Henchion) Presentation (10 minutes) plus discussion | Discussion of Dept structure, objectives, outputs, impacts, outcome case studies, strategy / positioning for the future |
| 12:30 – 13:00 | Panel deliberations | Preparation for verbal exit presentation |
| 13:00 – 14.00 | Lunch | Panel only (working lunch) |
| 14.00 - 16.00 | Panel draft report and prepare exit presentation | |
| 16.00 – 17.00 | Verbal Exit Presentation by the panel Attended by the Frank O'Mara, Pat Dillon, HOP, all HODs, staff | Panel present overview of emerging findings and recommendations from review |
| 17.00 | Finish | |

Appendix 3: Assessment Criteria and Categories from Evaluation Protocol

Assessment criteria

The PAP assesses the research and KT programme and sub-programmes on the basis of the three criteria outlined below, i.e. quality, impact and viability, using qualitative assessment (text) and quantitative assessment (five assigned categories) (see Table 1).

1. Quality

The panel assesses the quality of the unit's¹ research and the contribution that the research makes to the body of scientific knowledge. The panel also assesses the scale and productivity of the unit's research results (e.g. scientific publications, instruments and infrastructure developed, and other contributions to science) and the unit's scientific reputation. Bibliometric analysis together with information on other science-based outputs, activities (e.g. collaborations, joint programmes) and inputs (e.g. funding) are key inputs to this criteria's assessment.

The panel assesses the quality of the KT unit's activities and methods and the contribution those activities and methods make to the transfer of scientific knowledge. The panel also assesses the scale and productivity of the unit's activities (events, publications, stakeholder involvement, training, education provision and other contributions to knowledge transfer).

2. Impact

The panel uses the Synthesis Report of the Outcome Case Studies and the case studies themselves in order to answer the impact evaluation question, "How and to what extent, has the [name] Research Programme contributed to Teagasc's mission to support science-based innovation in the agri-food sector and wider bioeconomy so as to underpin profitability, competitiveness and sustainability?" In doing so, the panel will also comment on the main pathways through which the programme has achieved impact and the implications for Teagasc's overarching Theory of Change outlined in its Statement of Strategy.

3. Viability

Incorporating information from 1) and 2) above, in particular the extent to which the programme is building and maintaining its capacity to adaptively manage and respond, and considering the programme's SWOT analysis, the panel assesses the strategy that the research and KT units intend to pursue in the years ahead. In addition, the extent to which they are capable of meeting their research, knowledge transfer and impact targets during this period and if those targets are correct. It also considers the governance and leadership skills of the units' management.

¹ Programme or Department, whatever is the relevant focus

Walsh Scholarships Postgraduate Programme, research integrity and diversity

Each programme assessment will also include assessment of three further aspects: the Walsh Scholarships Postgraduate Programme; research integrity; and diversity.

1. The Walsh Scholarships Postgraduate Programme (WSP)

The assessment committee considers the supervision and instruction of PhD candidates. The relevant subjects include the institutional context of the PhD programmes, the selection procedures, the programme content and structure, supervision and the effectiveness of the programme plans and supervision plans, quality assurance, guidance of PhD candidates to the job market, duration, success rate, exit numbers, and career prospects. The research unit undergoing assessment responds to a number of questions in the self-assessment, described in the format provided in Appendix 4. The unit should use these questions to reflect on its own PhD programmes and on how it supervises PhD candidates. The assessment committee discusses this during the site visit, comments on this in its report, and, where appropriate, makes recommendations for improvement.

2. Research integrity

The assessment committee considers the research unit's policy on research integrity and the way in which violations of such integrity are prevented. It is interested in how the unit deals with research data, data management and integrity, and in the extent to which an independent and critical pursuit of science is made possible within the unit.

The assessment committee bases its assessment on how the research unit itself describes its internal research culture. The research unit undergoing assessment responds to a number of questions in the self-assessment, described in the format provided in Appendix 4. The unit should use these questions to reflect on its own data management practices, the level of internal research integrity, and the transparency of its research culture. The assessment committee discusses these points during the site visit, comments on this in its report, and, where appropriate, makes recommendations for improvement.

3. Diversity

The assessment committee considers the diversity of the research unit. Diversity can act as a powerful incentive for creativity and talent development in a research unit. Diversity is not an end in itself in that regard but a tool for bringing together different perspectives and opinions. The assessment committee bases its assessment on how the research unit itself describes its internal diversity. This refers to such topics as gender, age, and ethnic background. The research unit undergoing assessment responds to a number of questions in the self-assessment, described in the format provided in Appendix 4. The intention is for the research unit to use the answers to reflect on its own diversity. The assessment committee discusses these points during the site visit, comments on this in its report and, where appropriate, makes recommendations for improvement.

Table 1: Explanation of assessment categories

| Qualitative Assessment | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Category | Programme Quality | Programme Impact | Programme Viability |
| Outstanding | Research is world leading with researchers working at the forefront of their field internationally. KT has some international visibility and very high national visibility. Acknowledged leader in KT methods, programmes or results. Comprehensive evidence of adaptive management | The programme makes an outstanding and substantial impact | Outstanding governance and leadership; capable of meeting its targets for innovation and technology adoption, capacity building and informing policy; has a clear strategy. |
| Strong | Strong research unit which is one of the few most influential research groups in the world in its particular field. Strong KT Department with very high national visibility employing the most up to date methods. Comprehensive evidence of adaptive management | The programme makes an important and strong impact | Strong governance and leadership; capable of meeting its targets for innovation and technology adoption, capacity building and informing policy; has a clear strategy. |
| Competent | Competent research unit conducting very good, internationally recognised research. The KT Department has high national visibility and employs the most up-to-date methods. Good evidence of adaptive management | The programme makes a very good impact | Competent governance and leadership; likely to meet its targets for innovation and technology adoption, capacity building and informing policy; strategy needs some strengthening. |
| Needs Improvement | The research unit conducts good national level research. The KT Department has national visibility and employs a range of methods. Selected evidence of adaptive management. | The programme makes a good impact | Governance and leadership needs improvement in order to be capable of meeting its targets for innovation and technology adoption, capacity building and informing policy.; strategy needs improvement. |
| Unacceptable | The research unit does not achieve satisfactory results in its field. The KT Department has low or no national visibility and employs a limited range of methods. Little or no evidence of adaptive management | The programme does not make a satisfactory impact | Governance and leadership not satisfactory; unlikely to meet its targets for innovation and technology adoption, capacity building and informing policy; strategy not clear. |

Appendix 4: Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations

**Peer Assessment of Rural Economy and Development Programme
(REDP) 2022**

Action Plan for Implementation of Recommendations

Date: March 20th 2023

Submit to: Prof. Pat Dillon, Director of Research

| No. | Programme Level Recommendations | Actions to be taken | Person (s) responsible | Date for completion |
|-----|---|---|--|--|
| 1 | <p>The panel recommends increased recognition within Teagasc that, as its only social-science focused research programme, REDP has a unique and central role to play in delivering Teagasc’s mission. A sustainable Irish agri-food system requires not only technical innovation, but also economic, institutional and behaviour change within the sector and across wider society. This depends on robust, respected and applied economic and social research and related KT activities. REDP is generating high quality and valued REDP results, reputation and impact that merits increased investment, particularly in core staffing, to fulfil this role.</p> | <p>REDP would welcome additional resources. However, action relating to this programme level recommendation would have to be considered by Teagasc SMG.</p> <p>The programme needs to be competitive (relative to the university and wider public sector) in attracting early career researchers.</p> | <p>Director of Research and Other members of SMG with input from HOP and HOD</p> | <p>Input into annual cycle of research posts prioritisation within the Research Directorate. Q4 2023</p> |
| 2 | <p>Additional support is recommended for the vital work of REDP’s KT Department: enabling Teagasc advisors to better prepare farm families for the transition, along with the reorganisation of advice teams to create regional ‘leads’ for key topics of diversification, organic farming, decarbonising and farm succession.</p> | <p>Actions recommended would have to be supported and implemented by KT Directorate and are beyond the remit of the REDP programme.</p> <p>The Farm Management and Rural Development (FMRD) Department will continue to actively work with managers and advisors from across Teagasc KT Directorate to deliver on our programme of work in the areas mentioned, but also in Business Planning, Equine and Farm Buildings.</p> | <p>FMRD HOD, Director of KT and Head of Advisory.</p> | <p>Q4 2023</p> |
| 3 | <p>REDP managers and teams should devote time and effort to develop a clear, overarching programme strategy which knits together its constituent Department strategies and work strands, showing how they contribute to “Teagasc Together” and “Food Vision 2030”. Underpinned by a theory of change developed with support from the Evaluation Unit, the strategy should highlight and explain the key role of economic and social research in supporting transition to agri-food sustainability. By including the programme’s key stakeholders, including policy makers, food businesses, agencies, NGOs and the</p> | <p>REDP research will continue to inform our understanding of how farmer decision making and changes in same affect the sustainability of the agri-food sector and inform policy making that supports the transition to a sustainable agri-food system.</p> <p>Teagasc REDP Managers (HOP, HOD) and programme staff, with support from the Teagasc Evaluation unit, will develop a programme strategy. This strategy development process will reflect both Teagasc’s organisational Strategy and the peculiarities of the</p> | <p>HOP & HOD</p> | <p>Q2 2024</p> |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|--------------------------------|---|
| | farming community in strategy development, this will enable them to affirm the importance of REDP to Teagasc's mission. In this process, strengthened synergies between REDP teams should be encouraged, complementing REDP collaboration with other teams and partners beyond Teagasc. | REDP programme/stakeholders etc. as well as the resources available to REDP. | | |
| 4 | REDP should invest more in cross-team learning and reflection, to focus on "impact pathways" and more fully capturing its impact. This should include regular learning events between Departments and the Evaluation Unit; targeted use of Walsh Fellowships in a joint programme with the Evaluation Unit; and other efforts to improve REDP's ability to evidence the high value and impact of its activities, internally within Teagasc and to a growing range of external stakeholders. | REDP Managers (HOP & HOD) will explore the capacity to develop a joint programme with the Evaluation Unit focused on evaluating the impact of the REDP research and KT programmes. Explore the value of a process, supported by the Evaluation Unit, where researchers create Case studies narratives on aspects of their research programme. | HOP & HOD and Evaluation Unit. | Q3 2023 |
| 5 | REDP managers should devote time to team-building and focus on enabling management methods and actions to maintain and enhance staff satisfaction and performance. They should share good practice across the teams in creating an ambitious and supportive management culture, and clear pathways for career development. Regular meetings of the senior management team (REDP Head of Programme and Heads of Departments will be an essential element in this. The Leadership Team would benefit greatly from external Mentoring /Coaching and it is recommended that such be made available to them. | HOP will schedule regular (monthly) in person Programme Management team meetings. REDP staff are located across the country. This means that in-person meeting of all staff are more challenging to organise. Each Department in REDP will continue to have at least monthly online or in person meetings. Creating clearer career development pathways than exist currently is contingent on developments outside of the control of programme and departmental managers. Heads of Department have already completed the Teagasc Leadership Development Programme. Other Staff are currently enrolled or have recently completed the Teagasc LDP. REDP managers will continue to encourage and support REDP staff to undertake this programme and other | HOP & HOD | Q2 2023 for schedule of regular programme leadership meetings |

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| | | continuous professional development programmes funded by the Teagasc training budget. | | |
| 6 | REDP needs to sustain its capacity to anticipate and respond to continuous change. Reaching out to new constituencies locally, nationally and internationally, it should identify and pursue broad resourcing strategies embracing public and private funding – diversifying income sources to create more opportunities for longer-term research , focused on agri-food system shifts and future rural resilience. | <p>Action 3 above (development of a research programme strategy) will consider the programme's different constituencies and the Programme's capacity to expand given current and likely future human resources.</p> <p>Opportunities for increasing external funding of programme activities and the balance between reactive short-term externally funded activities and longer term research programme development will also be considered.</p> <p>Challenges already exist in hiring suitably qualified researchers and the capacity to successfully complete additional externally funded projects will need to be carefully assessed.</p> | HOP & HOD | Q2 2024 |
| 7 | REDP and Teagasc should monitor their diversity data and pro-actively address diversity imbalances , ensuring equal pay for equal work and a culture of respect and inclusion across the organisation. Teagasc Senior Management should implement routine annual reporting of diversity data, and adopt a set of positive actions to address diversity imbalances, including specific encouragement to achieve a more balanced gender profile in senior management positions. | <p>This recommendation can only be addressed within the context of the organisation's diversity and inclusion data collection strategy and HR processes.</p> <p>Actions by REDP can monitor performance across an identified set of diversity indicators agreed with Teagasc SMG and HR Department.</p> <p>Actions to address any identified imbalances are beyond the sole control of the Programme and would be taken at an organisational level.</p> | SMG & HOP | Q4 2023 Agree Diversity Indicators Q1 2024 report on diversity indicators with Business Planning Documents |

| No. | Department Level Recommendations | Actions to be taken | Person responsible | Date for completion |
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| Agricultural Economics & Farm Surveys Department | | | | |
| 1 | <p>Develop more integrated, real-time and cost-effective data management and sourcing by adopting new technologies and building partnerships with other bodies who gather relevant sector information. Also link with the AFBSA geospatial team to support new steps in regional modelling to better reflect Irish farm diversity.</p> | <p>The Agricultural Economics and Farm Surveys (AEFS) Department develops and adopts new data collection practices on an ongoing basis. This use of new technology in data collection will continue and will be supported by the AEFS Department's existing work programme including the Horizon MEF4CAP H2020 project.</p> <p>The AEFS Department already has data sharing agreements with CSO, DAFM and ICBF. The Department will continue to further linkages with other agencies that collect data across the farming population and with existing Teagasc data platforms such as NMP on-line and PastureBase.</p> <p>The main function of the data collection undertaken by the National Farm Survey (NFS) is the creation of microeconomic data on farming for research purpose and to fulfil Ireland's requirement to provide a FADN dataset for Ireland. The provision of real time farm data is not part of that process.</p> <p>However, the Department produces twice yearly situation and outlook publications which track current and short term developments in agricultural prices and incomes based on the integration of real-time price data with existing farm-level data.</p> <p>Research and technical staff from AEFS already collaborate with spatial analysis researchers from the AFBSA Department. AEFS will continue to pursue further collaboration opportunities with staff from AFBSA in areas such as biodiversity measurement.</p> | HOD | Q2 2004 & Q4 2023 and all subsequent years |

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| 2 | <p>Formalize the Department's valued 'call-off' role and expectations with DAFM, to free up time to build new horizon-scanning activities with DAFM and others.</p> | <p>The AEFS Department is strongly of the view that the policy research it undertakes must continue to be relevant to policy makers in Ireland.</p> <p>The established relationship with policy makers in Ireland and the EU will continue to be maintained and guide the Department's policy research programme.</p> <p>The AEFS department has an increasing number of EU projects and these facilitate the AEFS Department's horizon scanning activity and integration in EU research networks.</p> <p>The AEFS Department has made a written submission to DAFM Research Division detailing 12 areas for consideration for future research calls.</p> <p>Given the finite resources available, the AEFS Department must focus on exploring policy reform options that have a realistic chance of implementation.</p> <p>A more formal "call-off role" between the AEFS Department and DAFM would require an agreement between Teagasc and DAFM at the most senior level. Teagasc will explore with DAFM the feasibility of such an agreement.</p> | SMG, HOP and HOD | <p>Q1 2023</p> <p>Subject to agreement with SMG and DAFM Q4 2023</p> |
| 3 | <p>Develop more regular communication of AEFS research findings and implications for the wider stakeholder community, including reaching out to new constituencies (e.g. new rural bioeconomy players) to inform current debates, discuss and assess different scenarios, and promote and maintain this team's independence and authority.</p> | <p>The AEFS Department issues a number of press releases throughout the year, which are well received. These include including the SCSI/Teagasc report, the NFS report and the Outlook report, Sustainability Report.</p> <p>AEFS Department staff will continue to engage with national media in relation to its work.</p> <p>Additional press releases will be produced when research from internal and external projects is published or presented at major conferences.</p> | HOD | Q4 2023 |

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| | | <p>The AEFS Department regularly engages with stakeholders in terms of its research programme via Teagasc events and via Agricultural Economics Society of Ireland events such as Annual AESI Conference and AESI Early Career Researcher Day.</p> <p>The widening of the set of stakeholder to incorporate new topic areas (an example is the new organic economics research programme and data collection within the NFS) will be actively considered as part of the annual research proposal cycle.</p> <p>The AEFS Department will work with the Teagasc HR Department to explore how the AEFS Department's web presence can be enhanced and the Department will liaise with the Teagasc HR department about leveraging other Social Media Channels.</p> | | |
| Agri-food Business and Spatial Analysis | | Actions to be taken | Person responsible | Date for completion |
| 1 | Stakeholders believe in the transformational capability of this Department for Teagasc as a whole. This represents an opportunity for the team. AFBSA should invest in and develop stronger evidence of its impact and pathways to impact, to convince REDP colleagues, other programmes and Teagasc senior management of the value and potential of its research. | <p>Engage with evaluation unit to identify additional training opportunities with regards to impact creation and reporting</p> <p>Submit min. 3 impact case studies for the Teagasc annual publication per year</p> <p>Work with HOP to identify appropriate actions and to engage support of SMG</p> | <p>HOD</p> <p>All PIs</p> <p>HOD/HOP</p> | <p>As per HQ deadlines</p> <p>Q2 2023</p> |
| 2 | AFBSA could further enhance its impact by aligning and developing its internal and external change programmes, giving more attention to tracking and documenting impact and pathways to impact, with support from the Evaluation unit. | Engage with evaluation officer to identify appropriate actions including the possibility of working with others across the organisation to design research impact and evaluation into projects and programmes. | HOD | Q2 2023 |
| 3 | The Department should share its excellent practice in working cultures and methods across REDP and Teagasc, co-creating and embedding these high standards. | Department willing to do so on request from other parts of Teagasc and according to available resources within the Department. | HOD | Q4 2023 |

| Farm Management and Rural Development KT Department | | Actions to be taken | Person responsible | Date for completion |
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| 1 | Management should develop a clear action plan for these two KT teams, defining what they aim to achieve, setting priorities, tracking and reviewing progress via learning loops, and building a robust case for additional resources, with stakeholder support. In this process, it should build more co-ordinated activities in which Farm Management and Rural Development teams work together to support Teagasc's mission. | <p>Given the large size of FMRD relative to other KT Departments and the number of programme areas covered the feasibility of re-establishing Rural Development and Diversification as a separate KT Department will be explored.</p> <p>Resources are also required to support the area of national importance – energy/rural development and to build a more resilient specialist base by not relying on individuals to carry all the expertise on a vital topics.</p> <p>Decisions on human resources are taken at SMG level. The FMRD HOD and REDP HOP will make proposals for additional staff resources.</p> | HOD, HOP & SMG | Q2 2023 |
| 2 | Use the success of the workshops for generational transfer to link these with advice on new business models for sustainable farming and resilience. Seek external funding to enable this formula of working together with a number of outside specialists to continue and grow, hosting further events and running joint awareness-raising and promotional campaigns on other topics. | <p>Capacity to respond to this proposal is contingent on additional staff resources.</p> <p>The FMRD Department will seek to progress the model further with the development of the Succession Teams model.</p> | HOD and Farm Management Staff | Q4 2024 |
| 3 | Expand the organics and renewable energy teams, ready to meet growing demand from farm families. Partner with equine and other leisure and tourism stakeholders to pool resources and enable further growth in these areas. | <p>A proposal will be developed for consideration by Teagasc SMG relating to a new structure for Rural Development and Diversification and renewable energy specialist resourcing.</p> <p>A plan will be developed with the equine / RD specialists and stakeholders to explore pooling resources options.</p> | <p>HOD, HOP & SMG</p> <p>RD Coordinator, (Mary Ryan) with Equine & RD specialists.</p> | <p>Q2 2023</p> <p>Q4 2023</p> |

End