



**QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM
FOR
EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVISION**

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Access:	Refers to a learner's ability to avail of appropriate opportunities to enter and succeed in programmes leading to awards, with recognition of learning already achieved.
Award:	That which is conferred, granted or given by an awarding body and which records that a learner has acquired a standard of knowledge, skill or competence.
Award Type:	Refers to a class of named awards sharing common features and level. These include Major, Minor, Supplemental and Special Purpose award types. Different award types reflect different purposes of award and allow for the recognition of all learning achievement.
Completion Rate:	The number of learners who achieve an NFQ award on a programme of education and training expressed as a percentage of the number of learners who commenced the programme concerned.
Credit:	A measure by which diverse learning achievements can be recognised; credit systems complement the Framework and the achievement of awards. Opportunities for credit accumulation enhance recognition of learning.
Evidence:	Material generated by the application of a procedure which demonstrates its effectiveness.
Further Education and Training:	Education and training other than primary or post primary or higher education and training.
Learner:	A person who is acquiring or who has acquired knowledge, skill or competence.
Major Award:	This award type is the principal class of awards made at each level of the National Framework of Qualifications. At most levels, such award-types capture a typical range of achievements at the level.
Minor Award:	This award type provides recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award. This recognition will have relevance in its own right.
Monitor:	A person who verifies that quality assurance procedures are being implemented as agreed. The monitor may be working on behalf of the provider (local monitoring) or QQI (national monitoring).
National Framework Of Qualifications:	The single nationally and internationally accepted entity through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards. The Framework has 10 levels, reflecting all learning from introductory to doctorate levels.
National Monitoring:	The process that QQI will operate to ensure that providers' quality assurance systems are effective in maintaining and improving the quality of validated programmes.
Peer Review:	The involvement in self-evaluation of a programme of a person from another provider, in further or higher education and training, capable of giving an informed view on the success of the programme and able to contribute to its improvement.

Programme:	A learning experience designed and offered by a provider, within the state, based on predetermined national standards and leading to a QQI award.
Programme Review:	The process whereby the provider reflects on its programme(s) to ensure its continued relevance. A review will be conducted more frequently but less formally and on a smaller scale than a programme self-evaluation. The findings of reviews will contribute to a self- evaluation.
Progression:	Refers to a learner's ability to move to another programme leading to an award at a higher level of the Framework, having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.
Protection for Learners:	Arrangements put in place by providers, offering programmes of three months duration or more and on a commercial basis, to protect the interests of learners in the situation where a programme ceases.
Provider:	A person who provides, organises or procures a programme of education and training.
Quality Assurance:	The system(s) put in place by a provider to maintain and improve the quality of its programme(s).
RPL:	Recognition of Prior Learning i.e. recognition of learning that has taken place but not necessarily been assessed or measured prior to entering a programme. Such prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal or informal routes.
Self Evaluation:	The process whereby a provider, with the involvement of learners and an external evaluator, evaluates the quality of its programme(s) and services. The findings of self-evaluation will be published in a standard format.
Special Purpose Award:	This award type is made for specific, relatively narrow, purposes often for certification of competence in specific occupational areas.
Supplemental Award:	This award type is for learning which is additional to a previous. They could, for example, relate to updating and refreshing knowledge or skills, or to continuing professional development.
Transfer:	Refers to a learner's ability to move from one programme leading to an award to another, including at the same level of the Framework, having received recognition for knowledge, skill or competence acquired.
Validation:	The process through which QQI evaluates a programme of education and training, to ensure that the proposed programme provides the learner with the opportunity to reach the standards of the award to which the programme is intended to lead.

ACRONYMS

ATP	Access Transfer and Progression
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DC	Disciplinary Committee
ETAMC	Education Training Approval and Management Committee
HR	Human Resources
H&S	Health and Safety
MIS	Management Information System
PC	Programme Committee
PDRC	Programme Development and Review Committee
PEL	Protection of Enrolled Learners
PDG	Programme Development Group
QAAC	Quality Assurance and Assessment Committee
QBS	QI Business System
RAP	Results Approval Panel
SDS	Share Drive System
TNA	Training Needs Analysis

PREFACE

This Quality Assurance Manual describes the internal Quality Assurance (QA) system against which Farm Ed Ltd delivers its training programmes. The system is designed and developed in line with the requirements for access to the Further Education and Training (FET) awards of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), as described in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012. The eleven core areas identified by QQI in the published, Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines, April 2016, are acknowledged, in addition to the additional requirements identified in the Sector Specific Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines, April 2016 (Independent/Private Sector). In documenting its quality system, the centre has drawn on its experience of facilitating education and training programmes in the agricultural sector since 2012.

The core areas in QA, identified by QQI, are as follows

1. Governance and management of Quality
2. Documented approach to Quality Assurance
3. Programmes of Education and Training
4. Staff Recruitment, Management and Development
5. Teaching and Learning
6. Assessment of Learners
7. Supports for Learners
8. Information and Data Management
9. Public Information and Communication
10. Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review
11. Other parties involved in Education and Training

Appendix 3 to Appendix 6 includes data capture and tracking templates used to retain evidence of QA procedure implementation, as learners and staff progress through a programme. These are indicative of the proposed approach that Farm Advisory Services Ltd will take in the implementation of its QA system in the future.

Throughout this document the term 'centre' is interpreted to refer to Farm Ed Ltd.

The Head of Training and Development, at the centre, retains the master and control version of this document.

A list of reference documentation, which informed the development of this manual, is included. Reference is made throughout to the centre's website, which is currently under construction.

This QA Manual is written in the present tense. It thus represents the Quality Assurance System that Farm Advisory Services Ltd plans to employ once QQI has approved the centre's quality system and validated its programmes.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context of Operation

Farm Advisory Services Ltd, The Granary Building, Cahir, Co Tipperary was established in 2012 as a private training, planning and advisory services provider to the agricultural sector in the region. Clients include full-time and part-time farmers in the dairy, beef, sheep and tillage sectors. In the early days, the organisation operated mainly in the areas of farm planning and agricultural advice. From its foundation demand for services grew mainly due to the fact that Teagasc, at the time, was unable to meet the demand for its advisory, planning and training services nationwide as a result of the moratorium on Public Service recruitment. The centre identified these gaps and set about addressing them. Consequently, additional employees were taken on and today the organisation employs 14 full-time staff; subject matter experts (SMEs), agricultural advisors, agricultural technicians, office staff and a panel of 6 part-time SMEs engaged at peak periods. All SMEs, advisors and technicians have agricultural sector related third level qualifications and have extensive practical experience in their respective areas of expertise. See Appendix 1 for a list of staff and their qualifications.

Over the years, Farm Advisory Services Ltd has developed an extensive national network of high profile organisations, with which it is in regular contact. This network includes:

- Agricultural Consultant Association (ACA)
- IFAC (Accountants and Tax Advisors)
- Teagasc
- Veterinary Council Ireland (local vet)
- Animal Health Ireland
- Education and Training Boards (ETBs)
- Macra na Feirme
- Irish Farmers Association (IFA)
- Dairygold
- Glanbia

The centre has direct access to a state of the art farm, owned by the CEO, for demonstration and assessment purposes. This is a significant asset to the centre's training provision and is located just outside Cahir. Additional independent farm facilities are available across the country through the centres extensive network of farmer clients; see Appendix 1 for training venue images.

The provision of SMEs to the Education Section of Teagasc has been a significant area of growth for the organisation from the outset. Teagasc engages these SMEs to facilitate agricultural related training within the framework of the Teagasc QA system approved by FETAC/QQI. In this regard the QQI validated Teagasc programmes; Agriculture Level 5 (Code 5M2373) and Level 6 (Code 6M2254 & 6S3006), have been facilitated by Farm Advisory Services Ltd at venues in Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Galway, Mayo, Westmeath, Offaly, Cavan, Monaghan, Laois, Kildare, Meath, Louth and Dublin.

The successful facilitation of programmes for Teagasc and the ever growing profile of the organisation in the agricultural sector as a provider of planning and advisory services, led to a request by Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETb), in 2013, to facilitate the delivery of its QQI validated agriculture programmes in the region, within the framework of the GRETb QA system approved by FETAC/QQI. This development provided

the opportunity to facilitate the delivery of the Agriculture Level 5 (5M2373) and Level 6 (6S3006) awards at venues across Galway and Roscommon.

In 2014, with the continued growth in demand for training, planning and advisory services in the West, management at Farm Advisory Services Ltd* decided to open an office in Maam Cross, Galway to manage the provision of services to the sector in Connemara and the Aran Islands.

*Note Farm advisory Services changed to Farm Ed Ltd in 2019

1.2 Mission Statement

The Farm Ed Ltd mission is as follows:

To provide a wide range of advisory, education and training services to the Irish farming industry, which are:

- in line with current and future needs
- embody best practice
- are easily accessed and
- quality assured

1.3 Organisational Structure

The organisational structure and related functional area or sections of Farm Ed Ltd in both Education and Training provision and in Administration are outlined below in Figure 1.

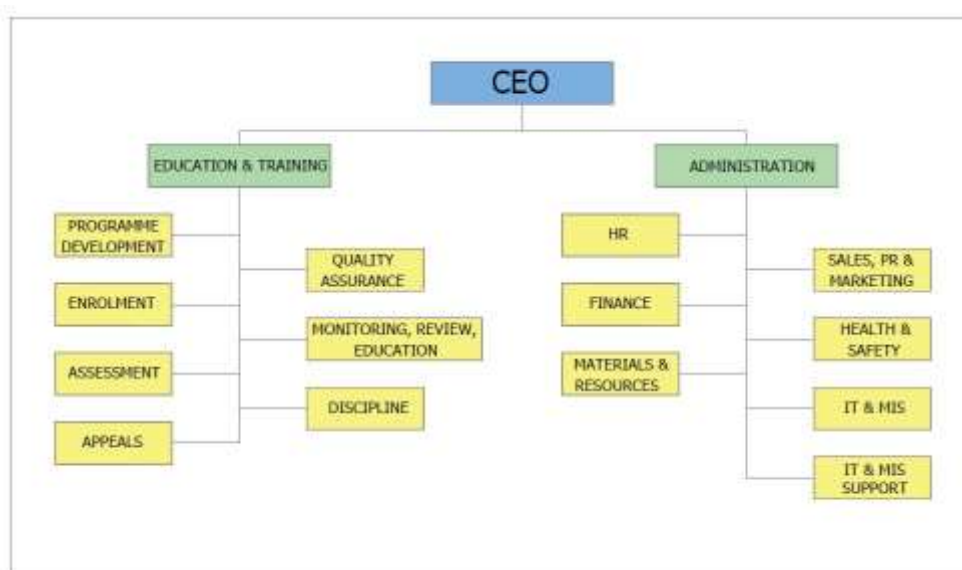


Figure 1 Organisational Structure

To ensure clarity for the reader, the following education and training personnel are identified below. Related roles and responsibilities are dealt with in detail in Section 2.11.

CEO
 Director of Training and Development
 Director of Quality and Assessment
 Director of Administration and Services
 Tutors
 Administration Staff

The Committees and Panels that oversee, provide governance and support the centre's Education and Training provision are outlined in Figure 2, Section 2.4

1.4 Strategic Objective

Since its foundation in 2012 in excess of 50% of business activity at the centre has been in the area of certified and uncertified training. Significant long term potential is identified in the agricultural sector for training, as full-time and part-time farmers demand QQI certification to access the Young Farmers Scheme, the National Reserve, Revenue Inheritance Benefits and Target Agricultural Modernisation Schemes. The centre's management identifies the potential market for this training as beyond the capacity of organisations currently delivering nationally; a fact acknowledged by Teagasc. Consequently, management, identifying a viable business opportunity, plans to seek access to QQI awards and ultimately establish a division within the organisation, dedicated to the delivery of QQI validated training programmes to the agricultural sector.

The organisation's ongoing experience facilitating agricultural related training since 2012, within the framework of approved quality assurance systems (Teagasc, GRETB) provides a solid foundation on which to prepare a submission to QQI and meet all FET requirements as defined in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012.

1.5 Focus on Best Practice

- Farm Ed Ltd aims to add value at all stages of its training provision. It aims to exceed stakeholder expectations and be an organisation in which learning and skill development thrives.
- The centre is committed to ensuring two-way communications with stakeholders to inform continuous development and improvement.
- The centre aims to maximise its KPIs; enrolment, retention, certification, operation within budget, etc.
- The centre aims to maximise the learning experience through the continuous monitoring, review and self-evaluation of performance.
- It gauges the expectations and needs of the agriculture industry through an extensive and growing network in the sector.
- Learners are selected through an interview process.
- Each Tutor knows the industry intimately, has many years of practice in his or her chosen area of expertise and has the capacity to enhance the learning experience of programme participants beyond the classroom.

1.6 Range of Programmes and Mode of Delivery

Farm Ed Ltd, in identifying its niche agricultural market, plans to deliver the following QQI awards and related programme modules:

Major Award	Minor awards
Farm Administration 6S20487	6N1947 Work Practice 6N3005 Farm Performance Measurement 6N20462 Farm Management and Business Planning 6N20463 Sustainable Farming in the Environment 6N3525 Applied Livestock Breeding 6N20468 Crop Production Management 6N20472 Grassland Management
Agriculture 5M20454	5N1433 Work Practice (15) 5N20368 Principles of Agriculture (15) 5N20371 Farm Safety and Farm Assurance (15) 5N20374 Soils and the Environment (10) 5N20377 Farm Business and Technology (10) 5N20380 Safe Use of Pesticide Products (5) 5N0690 Communications (15) 5N1418 Start Your Own Business (15) 5N20385 Sheep Husbandry (10) 5N20388 Beef Husbandry (10) 5N20396 Dairy Husbandry (10) 5N20399 Grass Production (10) 5N20432 Grassland Machinery (5) 5N20435 Mechanical Pesticide Application (5) 5N20438 Manual Pesticide Application (5) 5N20441 Organic Manure Handling (5) 5N1748 Mechanical Hedge Trimming (5) 5N1750 Chemical Fertiliser Application (5) 5N1752 All Terrain Vehicle Operation (5)

Table 1 Proposed Programmes

Once QA approval has been achieved from QQI, programme validation requests to QQI will be on an award basis, commencing with the Farm Administration 6S20487 award. It is planned that the end of 2017 will see programme validation for all awards listed above.

All programmes will be tutor led and delivered in a classroom setting with some on-farm demonstration and assessment. Programme duration will be in line with QQI recommendations on directed and self-directed learning. Programmes will be delivered at the centre's training rooms in Cahir, at its farm just outside Cahir and at selected venues across the country, dictated by demand; see Section 7.6 and Section 7.7 for venue selection procedures. All programmes will be managed and quality assured from the Cahir office. See Appendix 1 for images of training venue.

1.7 Commitment to Quality Assurance

The QA system, documented in this manual, incorporates robust operational policies and procedures, in each of the core areas identified by QQI. A system of monitoring review and evaluation is also detailed; to ensure all QA processes remain fit-for-purpose and effective over time.

Farm Ed Ltd takes ownership of its QA system by promoting an internal operational culture of quality provision and continuous improvement. Quality and Quality Assurance are seen as integral elements of normal day-to-day activity. They are embedded and maintained across the entire organisation with roles identified for all stakeholders; learners, staff, employers, external partners, external agencies, etc. Respective roles, responsibilities and accountability are clearly defined and communicated. The focus is on the rigorous, evidence-based implementation of all quality related policies and procedures and the ongoing monitoring, regular review and periodic evaluation of all training related processes.

1.8 Engaging Stakeholders

Farm Ed Ltd is an organisation constantly evolving and transforming in response to the needs and demands of its stakeholders in the agricultural sector. Management acknowledges the role of feedback in the ongoing development and improvement of organisational performance. Consequently, timely feedback is actively sought from stakeholders to provide insight into performance and impact in the market place. Feedback responses provide an endorsement of achievement and inform decisions, strategies and actions for continuous development and improvement. The organisational objective is not just to meet, but exceed, stakeholder expectations. Feedback plays a pivotal role in assuring the quality of services offered.

See Appendix 3 for the templates the centre's proposes to use to collect feedback from learners mid-way and at the end of a programme. Similar questionnaires will be developed for other stakeholders.

2 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

2.1 Overview

The Governance structure of Farm Advisory Services Ltd oversees the education, training and related activities of the centre. Decisions associated with education and training provision are focused on providing quality programmes, optimising the experience for learners, maintaining standards and continuous improvement.

In its commitment to ensure decisions are independent of commercial considerations the centre invites independent external experienced expertise to sit on governance committees. The invitation of external experts to sit on various governance committees to challenge, advise and inform the strategic development of the centre is viewed as a key component in managing risk and charting a strategic direction for the organisation; see Section 2.12 for selection criteria.

2.2 Legal Entity

Farm Ed Ltd was incorporated on 2th November 2012 “to carry on the provision of information of all kinds in relation to, but not limited to, agricultural activities in Ireland...”

- Company Registration Number 519543
- VAT Number 1112822GH
- Bank Bank of Ireland, Cahir, Co Tipperary
- Solicitors Anthony Carroll & Co, Carlton House, Fermoy, Co Cork
- Accountants Wayne Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald & Associates,
Wellington Place, Wellington Street, Clonmel,
Co Tipperary

See Appendix 2 for Certificate of Incorporation.

2.3 Management of Risk

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to the on-going development, improvement and enhancement of all its processes and related roles, responsibilities, guidelines, policies and procedures. The management of risk, its anticipation, identification and assessment are a key priority. The earlier operational risks, at an administrative/management level or in programme delivery, are flagged, the sooner corrective plans and actions can be put in place to manage and reduce their impact. Consequently, monitoring, reviewing and periodic evaluation of all provision activity are key.

Procedures are in place to expedite any recommendations that emerge from time to time, with action and resources. In general, recommendations for development and improvement are addressed by the responsible Director unless they impact significantly on existing policy or procedure, in which case they are presented to the next scheduled meeting of the relevant governance committee.

2.4 Governance Structure

Identified below are the various groups, panels and committees that have oversight of the education and training related decisions at Farm Ed Ltd and ensure separation between business and education/training decisions. Terms of reference for each are also outlined.



Figure 2 Governance Structure

<i>ETAMC</i>	<i>Education Training Approval and Management Committee</i>
<i>PDRC</i>	<i>Programme Development and Review Committee</i>
<i>PDG</i>	<i>Programme Development Group</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Programme Committee</i>
<i>QAAC</i>	<i>Quality Assurance and Assessment Committee</i>
<i>RAP</i>	<i>Results Approval Panel</i>
<i>AAP</i>	<i>Assessment/Access Appeals Panel</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>Disciplinary Committee</i>

2.5 Education Training Approval and Management Committee (ETAMC)

The Education Training Approval and Management Committee (ETAMC) is responsible for the strategic planning of the training portfolio at the centre and the oversight of related quality and standards.

Terms of reference

Responsibilities of the ETAMC include:

- Oversee the planning and management of the centre's education and training portfolio
- Approve programmes pre-submission to QQI for validation
- Approve the planning and management of the centre's education and training portfolio
- Monitor compliance with the centre's policies and procedures as they relate to teaching, learning, assessment, admissions, progression, staff development, facilities and resources.
- Ensure the review and update of assessment and quality assurance procedures and related documentation
- Review reports and recommendations from subcommittees
- Establish ad hoc committees as the need arises
- Monitor compliance with quality assurance responsibilities and the requirements of validated programmes
- Approve staff appointments
- Review unresolved cases of misconduct referred from the disciplinary committee or appeals

Membership:

CEO
Director of Training and Development
Director of Quality and Assessment
Director of Administration and Services
Tutor Representative
Learner Representative (by invitation)
External Independent Expert/s
Chairperson (rotated); Director of Training and Development
Director of Quality and Assessment
Director of Administration

The ETAMC meets at least 2 times a year.

2.6 Programme Development and Review Committee (PDRC)

The Programme Development and Review Committee (PDRC) is responsible for the initial planning, design and development of programmes and the ongoing review, development and improvement of the centre's portfolio of programmes and services to learners.

All staff are encouraged by the CEO to have a role in identifying new training programmes, in advancing the profile and impact of Farm Ed Ltd in the agricultural sector nationwide and in supporting its mission and strategic objectives.

Terms of reference

Responsibilities of the PDRC include:

- Identify opportunity for new programmes
- Make recommendations to the ETAMC for new programmes
- Develop new programmes
- Review operational reports (performance indicators); QA, programme and services monitoring, learner participation, progression, retention and certification
- Ensure programme reviews and evaluations are completed by Programme Leaders
- Review stakeholder feedback with action plan as required
- Review programme review/evaluation reports with action plan as required
- Report to the ETAMC as required
- Schedule programme reviews and evaluations

Membership:

CEO
Director of Training and Development (Chairperson)
Director of Quality and Assessment
Director of Administration and Services
Tutors
External Independent Expert/s

The PDRC meets at least 3 times a year.

2.7 Quality Assurance and Assessment Committee (QAAC)

The Quality Assurance and Assessment Committee is responsible for the oversight of the centre's quality assurance system and all assessment related activity.

Terms of reference

Responsibilities of the QAAC include:

- Review the centre's internal and external QA monitoring reports
- Monitor compliance with the centre's QA system
- Monitor the update of relevant documentation and its dissemination to stakeholders
- Review Internal Verifier and External Authenticator Reports
- Establish a Results Approval Panel to approve assessment results pre submission to QQI for certification
- Establish an Assessment Appeals Panel, as the need arises
- Review performance indicators

The QAAC meets at least 2 times per year. Its meeting schedule coordinates with the centre's certification requests to QQI.

Membership:

CEO
Director of Quality and Assessment (Chairperson)
Director of Training and Development
Programme Leaders
Tutors
External Independent Expert/s

2.8 Programme Committee (PC)

The Programme Committee (PC) is responsible for the ongoing oversight of each iteration of a programme, as it progresses from enrolment, to commencement, delivery and completion.

Terms of reference

Responsibilities of the PC include:

- Oversee programme pre-planning and roll out
- Monitor/Review the effectiveness of a programme's teaching, learning and assessment, QA, related services, etc.
- Action recommendations, Programme Review Reports, etc.
- Review Internal Verifier and External Authenticator Reports
- Monitor and review and report on performance indicators; student progression and retention, etc.
- Review and report on programmes in line with agreed schedules
- Report to the PDRC, QAAC and the ETAMC as required
- Consider ATP and RPL Appeals

Membership:

Programme Leader (Chairperson)
Director of Quality and Assessment
Programme Tutors

2.9 Disciplinary Committee

The Director of Training and Development convenes and chairs the Disciplinary Committee as required. The Committee's membership depends on the nature of the matter to be addressed and must have at least 4 members including the Director of Training and Development and or the CEO.

2.10 Conduct of Meetings

An agenda is prepared by the Chair before each meeting and circulated to all members. Minutes are recorded. A quorum of four is required for each committee. Decisions are taken according to a majority vote. At each meeting the minutes of the previous meeting are circulated among those in attendance for agreement or amendment. The Director of Training and Development retains a file of minutes for all committees.

2.11 Centre Personnel

Chief Executive Officer

The role of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is to plan and plot the strategic direction of the organisation, to encourage, motivate and support tutors and administration staff so that Farm Advisory Services Ltd operates effectively as a provider of quality assured training, in line with the organisation's mission and strategic objectives. The CEO is an ex officio member of all governance committees.

CEO responsibilities include:

- Allocate human and physical resources
- Manage Sales, Marketing and Public Relations
- Plan and manage finances
- Ensure compliance with all legislative obligations; Health & Safety, HR, etc.
- Invite independent external expertise to sit on various committees
- Monitor performance against targets
- Identify, monitor and control risk
- Promote and develop external relations and strategic partnerships

2.11.1 Centre Management and Staff

The roles of education and training staff and their respective reporting lines are outlined in Figure 3 below.

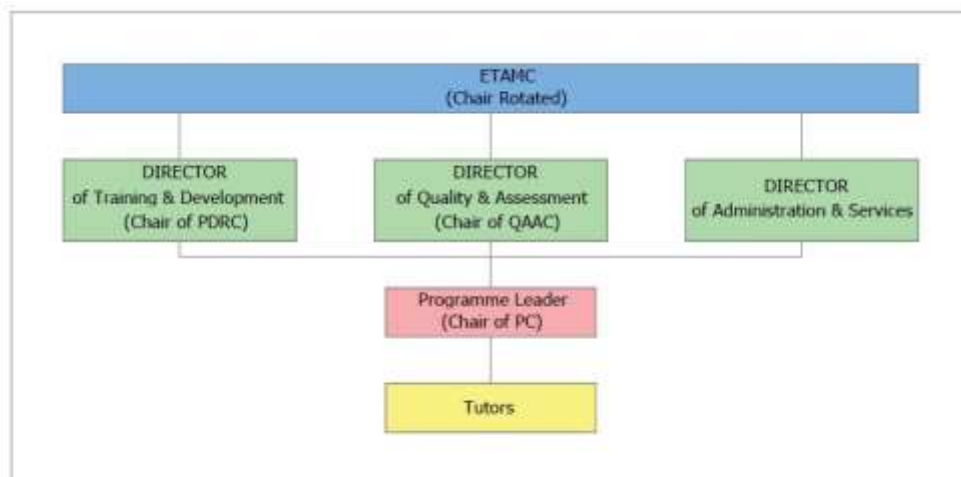


Figure 3: Governance Roles

2.11.2 Director of Training and Development

The Director of Training and Development is responsible for the effective and efficient management of new programme development and the oversight of current programme provision at the centre.

Director of Training and Development responsibilities include:

- Manage new programme development
- Manage the centre's training plan
- Manage programme validation
- Act as point of contact for certifying bodies ref. programme validation
- Oversee programme monitoring, review and evaluation

- Liaise with Programme Leaders on capacity to meet the centre’s training objectives
- Participate in the centre’s committees as requested
- Manage, monitor and review student feedback and supports in liaison with Programme Leaders
- Oversee admissions and registration of learners
- Liaise with administration and management staff as necessary on an on-going basis
- Present an annual report to the ETAMC

2.11.3 Director of Quality and Assessment

The Director of Quality and Assessment is responsible for ensuring the overall quality of programmes offered by the centre and safeguarding the integrity of the assessment processes.

Director of Quality and Assessment responsibilities include:

- Manage the assessment process and the centre’s quality assurance system
- Act as contact person for Programme Validation and Certification body/s
- Liaise with certifying bodies on ongoing developments and new initiatives
- Liaise with the centre’s administration and Programme Leaders on Assessment schedules and timetables
- Distribute assessment details to relevant stakeholders
- Liaise with assessment invigilators
- Approve assessment venues
- Ensure protocols for assessment instrument preparation and distribution are complied with
- Ensure post assessment protocols are adhered to; assessment evidence, marking, etc.
- Ensure current and historic assessment records are securely maintained
- Manage the appointment of Internal Verifiers and External Authenticators
- Manage the Results Approval and Appeals processes
- Manage the upload of approved results to the certifying body/s
- Manage requests for assessment accommodations ref extenuating circumstances, etc.
- Monitor, review, evaluate and report on all quality and assessment related matters to various committees
- Participate on the centre’s committees as requested
- Liaise with administration and management staff as necessary on an on-going basis
- Present an annual report to the ETAMC

2.11.4 Director of Administration and Services

The Director of Administration and Services manages the day-to-day office operations that support all aspects of service provision at Farm Ed Ltd; front office, accounts, payroll, IT/MIS, HR, travel, contracts, etc. S/he reports directly to the CEO, ensures effective information flow and the timely deployment of resources throughout the organisation. The role involves overall responsibility for each of the functional areas identified in Figure 4. In addition, the role is responsible for monitoring the welfare of learners in liaison with Programme Leaders and Tutors.

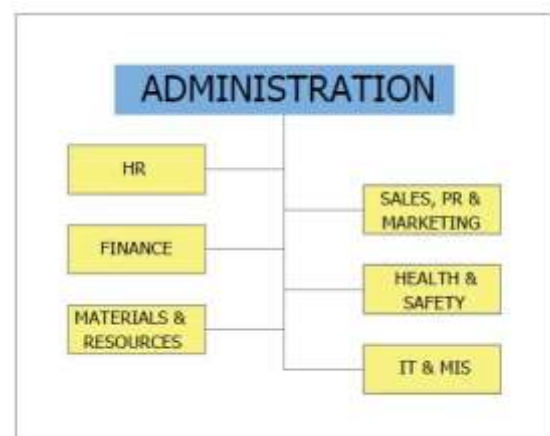


Figure 4: Administration

Director of Administration and Services responsibilities include:

- Manage administrative staff and day to day office operations
- Allocate responsibilities to admin staff
- Oversees network administration, broadband, social media and website
- Oversees the organisation's HR systems
- Oversees learner application and registration systems (QBS)
- Liaise with learners and learner representatives - learner welfare and supports
- Assist in negotiation of staff and client contracts
- Participate in long term organisational planning
- Provide support to the entire organisation
- Liaise with clients and suppliers.
- Review effectiveness of policies and procedures and advise on areas for development and improvement

2.11.5 Programme Leader

The Programme Leader is responsible for a programmes operational planning and its ongoing coordination, monitoring, review and development. This role operates in liaison with the Training and Development Manager.

Programme Leader responsibilities include:

- Support Tutors in programme pre-planning and delivery
- Act as point of contact for learners
- Provide student support in line with the centre's policy and procedures
- Liaise with the Director of Quality and Assessment in the approval external training venues
- Manage learner enrolment, registration and induction
- Manage programme material requirements and distribution
- Present an annual programme review report to the PDRC
- Monitor programme delivery in compliance with validated programme
- Monitor, review and report on the programme, related services and assessment; information to learners, learner satisfaction, feedback from tutors
- Monitor, review and report on QA compliance
- Participate in the centre's committees as requested
- Liaise with administration and management staff as necessary on an on-going basis

2.11.6 Programme Tutor

The programme tutor operates under the direction of a Programme Leader and the Director of Quality and Assessment.

Programme Tutor responsibilities include:

- Programme delivery and assessment in line with programme objectives and assessment requirements
- Preparation of assessment instruments in liaison with the Programme Leader
- Mark assessment evidence in line with the centre's protocols
- Provide feedback to learners in line with the centre's procedure
- Provide support and guidance to learners

- Liaise with administration and management staff as necessary on an on-going basis
- Retain program related assessment and QA records
- Retain records of learner participation, attendance, etc.
- Engage in ongoing monitoring review and evaluation of quality processes, programme delivery, content, materials, updates, assessment, etc.
- Participate in the centre's committees as requested

2.12 Independent Oversight

In its commitment to ensure decisions are independent of commercial considerations Farm Ed Ltd invites independent external experienced expertise to sit on governance committees. External independent SMEs provide an education, training and professional perspective on proposals that come before the different governance committees at the centre.

Selection Criteria

Those appointed are individuals with experience, expertise and professional status or background. They have the capacity to make informed comment and provide advice and direction on matters under consideration. External nominees for committee membership must be approved by the ETAMC. Terms and conditions are clearly documented and agreed before any nominee is appointed. Typically SMEs have a background in the agricultural sector, pedagogy, FET and QA in FET.

2.13 Finance

The CEO controls the allocation of budgets and oversees Farm Ed Ltd finances. The centre's management team manages day-to-day financial operations. Controls and procedures are in place to ensure good accounting practices. The Director of Administration and Services oversees procedures and controls in the accounts section. Any matters arising are reported directly to the CEO. All financial related processes and procedures are reviewed during the annual audit or more frequently as the need arises.

3 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

3.1 QA Policies and Procedures

As noted above, this manual documents the policies and procedures that describe how Farm Ed Ltd takes ownership of its QA system; the backdrop against which it delivers its education and training programmes. The centre's QA policies and procedures are designed to dovetail and provide a cohesive assurance system that is the framework within which all education and training provision at the centre is delivered. Each policy and procedure is defined to reflect the context of the organisation. The purpose and method of each is described. The evidence generated to assure good practice is listed. In addition, related roles and responsibilities and how the effectiveness of each is monitored and reviewed are described.

Farm Ed Ltd publishes its commitment to continuous improvement and the quality assurance of all training provision on its website for public information. In addition, all stakeholders, learners, employees, external bodies, etc. are briefed on their respective QA roles and responsibilities and have access to all related documentation through the centre's Shared Drive System (SDS).

3.2 Monitoring, Review and Evaluation of QA Policies and Procedures

The continuous development and improvement of QA related policies and procedures is a core commitment of Farm Ed Ltd. To this end, The Director of Training and Development and the Director of Quality and Assessment are committed to actively seek, on an ongoing basis, both formal and informal feedback from stakeholders to assess satisfaction levels and the effectiveness of processes. The aim is to maximise the learning experience, maintain quality and standards, and achieve programme objectives.

Method

Monitoring the effectiveness of the centre's QA system is ongoing as a programme progresses from enrolment to delivery, assessment and certification. This entails the monitoring of documentary evidence of policy and procedure implementation and feedback from related stakeholders. In addition, the QA system is regularly reviewed and periodically evaluated. Analysis of performance indicators plays a key role in these processes; retention, completion, progression, appeal requests/upheld, CPD schedules, etc. – ref EQAVET Indicators. Recommendations for enhancements that emerge, through whichever approach, are considered and approved for action in line with the strategic direction of the organisation. Any amendments and updates that emerge are reflected in the relevant documentation on the centre's SDS.

A document management system is in place to ensure all QA related documentation is up to date and that relevant stakeholders have access only to latest revisions. The Director of Training and Development, in liaison with the Director of Quality and Assessment, is responsible for retaining a history of revisions and updates of all QA related documentation on the SDS and maintains the master and control version of this document.

See Chapter 12; Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review.

See Also:

Monitoring Evidence of Implementation; *Sections 4.3, 5.3, 6.6, 7.9, 8.8, 9.6, 10.6, 11.8, 12.4, 13.5.*

3.3 Share Drive System

All staff have access to the centre's SDS, which is designed to provide a number of essential services, including Tutor access to up-to-date versions of all documents relating to the centre's QA system;

- QA Manual
- Detailed Procedure Documents e.g., Conduct of Examinations Procedure
- Learner Handbook
- Trainer Handbook
- QA and Programme related templates and forms

Only the most recent versions of QA related documentation is available on the SDS at any one time. Tutors are required, on all occasions, to download from this area when accessing forms, templates, etc. so that they are always working on current versions. The system operates on the premise that any document is only valid on the day it is printed.

4 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

4.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to applying clear, transparent and accountable procedures for programme design, approval, monitoring, and review. Programmes are developed in consultation with staff, employers, sector partners, learners and SMEs. All programmes are vocationally oriented, provide transfer and progression opportunities or opportunities for employment. Clear and unambiguous access, transfer and progression details are communicated through the centre's website, promotional material, social media, etc.

A structured approach is taken to identify the needs for and of proposed programmes. Appropriate expertise (internal and external) in subject area, pedagogy and quality assurance is engaged to input into programme design and development. An internal system of decision and approval is in place pre submission to QQI for validation. Rigorous pre programme commencement planning begins post QQI validation and programmes are regularly monitored and reviewed once operational. There is ongoing commitment and procedures in place to ensure continuous improvement and that programmes are adequately resourced through to completion.

External experienced expertise is engaged to inform and provide objective oversight and feedback to the PDRC, the PDG, QAAC and the ETAMC.

The following procedures document the approach taken to programme development, delivery and review:

- Programme Development and Approval
- Programme Monitoring and Review

4.2 Programme Development

The purpose of this procedure is to describe how Farm Ed Ltd employs a structured and well-defined approach to programme development, approval, delivery and review. The stages involved are as follows:

- New Programmes
- Needs Identification
- Design and Development
- Validation
- Planning
- Delivery
- Review

4.2.1 New Programme Proposals

Proposals for new education and training programmes emerge from various sources such as requests from the sector, requests from clients, Teagasc, Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine. All new programme proposals are channelled by the ETAMC to the PDRC.

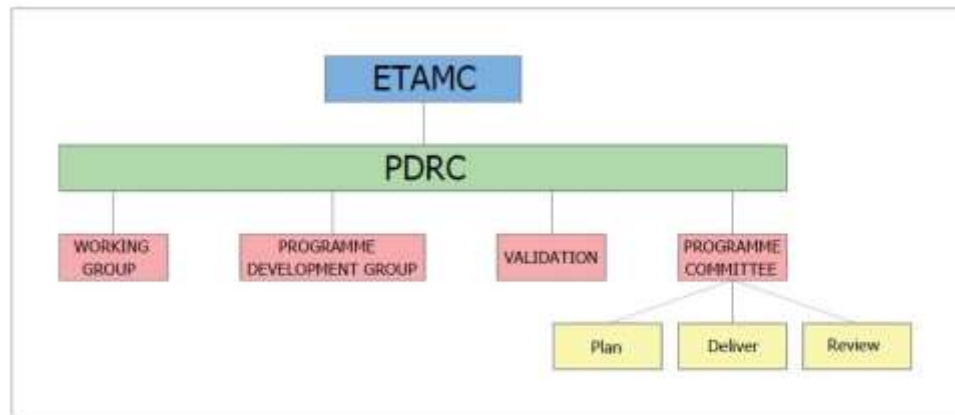


Figure 5: Programme Development

The PDRC considers all proposals. If a QQI Programme Specification in the target area has been published and the proposal is recommended as being in line with the strategic direction of the organisation, within its capacity to develop and is financially viable, it is approved by ETAMC for further research.

4.2.2 Needs Identification

On ETAMC approval, the PDRC sets up a Working Group to research and report on the needs for and of a new/proposed programme in collaboration with learners, staff, sector advisory committees, social partners, target groups, internal and external experts, having regard to economic and labour market reports, Teagasc and Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine reports, EU Directives, etc.

The Working Group presents viable proposals to the PDRC, which include a schedule of required resources (personnel and otherwise), physical premises (venues), equipment, facilities, timelines, action plans, etc.

Once a programme is recommended for development by the PDRC it is presented to the ETAMC for approval with a commitment to allocate the required resources for programme development.

4.2.3 Design and Development

The PDRC establishes a Programme Development Group (PDG) to progress the project and engage with the required expertise; subject matter, pedagogy, quality assurance, sector representatives, etc.

The PDG considers the:

- programme specification
- staff requirement
- facilities and resources
- learner profile
- entry criteria
- transfer and progression options

- delivery modes and methodologies (classroom & on-farm)
- assessment techniques
- learner supports
- aims and objectives, indicative content and assessment
- tutors profile
- quality assurance
- specific validation requirements
- learner workload
- monitoring and review

4.2.4 Programme Approval

Once finalised by the PDG and the PDRC, the draft Programme Descriptor is presented to the ETAMC for final approval pre submission to QQI for approval.

4.2.5 Validation

The Director of Training and Development submits the proposed programme to the certifying body for validation and serves as the point of contact between the certifying body and the PDG until programme validation is to hand. The Director of Training and Development liaises with the PDRC and the PDG on any QQI requests for additional information that may arise.

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to ensuring that programme validation requests to QQI are in line with the guidelines outlined in the *Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training, April 2016/QP.17-V1* and that a programme evaluation report must be included with the application.

The following is indicative of the required documentation when requesting programme validation:

- an outline of the programme
- the target QQI award
- what and how it is taught, by what means and in which modes
- by whom, where and when
- how it is assessed, managed and quality assured
- assessment strategies and procedures;
- teaching and learning strategies
- staff requirements and CVs for key staff
- physical resource required
- five-year plan for the programme;

The centre is clear on the possible approaches taken by QQI to programme validations:
evaluation by one or more persons without site visits or
evaluation by one or more persons with site visits

QQI issues an independent evaluation report through the QBS, which may include a request for additional information (RFI). QQI may refuse to validate a programme, in which case the centre has the opportunity to appeal the decision.

Once a programme is validated by QQI, the responsible Programme Committee begins pre-commencement planning, having received approval from the next scheduled meeting of the ETAMC.

4.2.6 Planning

The Director of Training and Development liaises with the Programme Leader to establish a Programme Committee to commence operational planning and rollout; planning of resources, programme delivery materials, assessments, schedules, tutor allocation, learner/tutor feedback questionnaires, Health & Safety, venue checks, etc.

Tutors are identified and are briefed on roles, responsibilities, expectations, accountability, quality assurance, etc. and are issued with Handbooks, Programme Training Manuals and QA related documentation. Tutor CPD is scheduled, as the need arises. The needs of a diverse learner population (mature, part-time; employed, international, learners with disabilities) are taken into account when planning and providing learning resources and supports. All required facilities and resources are sourced and in place before programmes commence.

4.2.7 Delivery

Tutors are encouraged to use delivery methodologies appropriate to the learners, in line with the requirements of the validated programme. The Programme Leader liaises with learners and tutors throughout programme delivery and seeks both formal and informal feedback from all stakeholders involved. Areas for development and improvement are identified and actioned as the need arises, in line with the centre's quality assurance commitments.

4.2.8 Review

All Farm Ed Ltd programmes are subject to ongoing monitoring and regular review. This is the responsibility of the Programme Leader. A formal mid-term review is undertaken by issuing a satisfaction questionnaire. This confirms that the programme is on track, thus far, identifies any gaps and minimises the risk of not meeting all programme objectives.

In addition, all programmes are comprehensively reviewed on completion, when all stakeholders are invited to formally provide feedback. A review and analysis of related performance outcomes is also conducted at this stage. Whether at mid term or on programme completions, all recommendations are considered by the Programme Leader and the relevant committee/s, with action taken, as the need arise, see Appendix 3 for approach to seeking learner feedback.

4.3 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

The PDRC has oversight of the centre's policy on Programmes of Education and Training and procedures relating to programme development, approval and the subsequent monitoring, review and evaluation of programme delivery. The internal monitoring of programme delivery is ongoing with mid-term and end of programme review, in line with the centre's commitment to continuous improvement.

Method

The monitoring of procedures by the Director of Training and Development entails ongoing checks on the documentary evidence of procedure implementation, a review of feedback

from related stakeholders, a review of feedback from independent external experts and a review of 'how the process worked' once validation has been achieved for a programme.

In the case of recommendations emerging that may have significant impact on existing policy or procedure the Director brings these to the next scheduled meeting of the PDRC, the QAAC or the ETAMC (depending on the nature of the recommendation) for their consideration and the approval of a suitable action plan for implementation. Updates of a less significant level are dealt with at Director level.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- programme proposal to the PDRC
- record of programme development approval by the CEO
- membership of PDG
- correspondence with industry, external experts, etc.
- findings of surveys
- guidelines for preparing programme descriptors
- feedback from subject matter experts/industry advisory committee
- feedback from learners and staff
- programme descriptor
- record of submission for validation to certifying body
- request for further information from validation body
- programme validation record
- agenda, minutes, actions from related meetings
- records or action plan implementation

Staff Involved

Director of Training and Development, Development Team, Tutors, Network of Stakeholders, Sector Advisory Groups.

See Appendix 3 for one of the centre's proposed approaches to receiving feedback from learners mid way and at the end of a programme.

5 PROGRAMME ADMISSION

5.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to applying clear, transparent and accountable procedures for access to its programmes. All programmes are vocationally oriented and provide transfer/progression opportunities or opportunities for employment. Clear and unambiguous access, transfer and progression details are communicated through the centre's website, promotional material, social media, centre promotional events and during the centre's admission process. All admission procedures conform to requirements stipulated by QQI when approving the centre's Quality Assurance System.

The following procedures document the approach taken to learner admissions, transfer and progression.

5.2 Access, Transfer and Progression

The purpose of this procedure is to describe how Farm Ed Ltd provides comprehensive information to all stakeholders on its procedures that relate to learner admissions, opportunities for progression, recognition of prior learning and certification. The centre is committed to providing assistance (telephone support, one to one meetings, etc.) to ensure informed choices are made regarding the portfolio of programmes on offer, so that learners can successfully participate and achieve their full potential.

A range of media and public events are used to deliver ATP related information:

- website
- social media
- newsletter
- programme brochures and marketing materials
- open days organised prior to the commencement of each scheduled intake attendance/participation at agricultural sector exhibitions, seminars and conferences
- advertisements in press and radio prior to each scheduled intake
- school visits
- drop in, telephone, etc.

The stages involved in the centre's ATP process are outlined as follows:

- Learner Admission
- Supports - Disability and Special Learning Requirements
- Progression Opportunities
- Recognition of Prior Learning

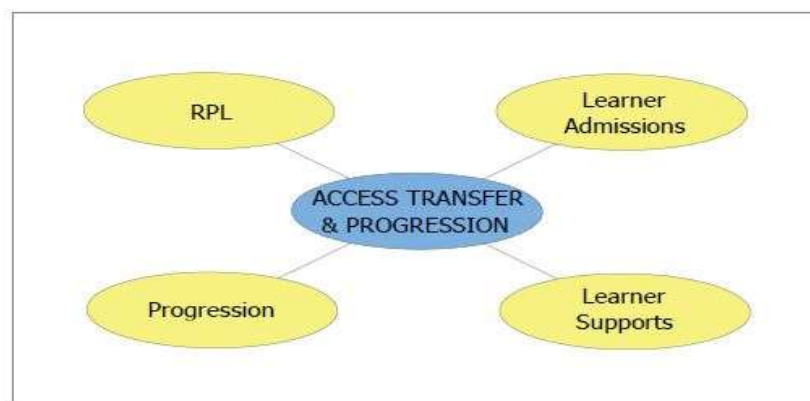


Figure 6: Access, Transfer & Progression

5.2.1 *Learner Admission*

Learners applying for admission to QQI validated programmes offered by Farm Ed Ltd must have achieved at least the minimum requirement for entry onto that programme. The required entry requirements are defined at the time of programme development and validation and must be consistent with the published award specification and QQI's approval of the centre's Quality Assurance System.

The procedures involved in the programme admission process are communicated in a clear and transparent manner, and are in line with the centre's commitments relating to Equality and Diversity.

Comprehensive information is published and made available to all interested parties on the portfolio of programmes offered by Farm Ed Ltd.

Programme details include:

- award title, type, level, awarding body
- entry requirements and arrangements
- content, structure and duration
- expected commitment, outline of assessment requirements
- outline of learner role and responsibilities
- transfer and progression opportunities
- programme and assessment fees
- cancellation and refund policy
- procedure for giving/receiving feedback
- learner supports
- health & safety and bio security information
- grievance procedure
- protection of enrolled learners
- overview of assessment requirements

5.2.2 *Allocation of Places on Programmes*

The centre engages a systematic and transparent approach to the allocation of places on programmes. Published programme information describes the programme application and place allocation procedures – application form to be completed and an interview to confirm that the applicant meets the minimum entry requirements, understands the programme objectives and commitment required, see Application Form in Appendix 4.

The steps involved in the allocation of places on programmes are as follows:

1. The applicant completes a pro forma Application Form
2. The completed Application form and supporting documentation is submitted to the centre's head office at Cahir and acknowledged on receipt.
3. The responsible Programme Leader checks the form for completeness and accuracy. Any gaps found are referred back to the applicant for clarification.
4. The applicant is scheduled for interview
5. The Programme Leader (or designate) and at least one other staff member conduct the programme application interview. This meeting assess the applicant's knowledge of the course and that the programme's minimum entry requirements are met e.g., relevant qualification at the level immediately below or at the same level of the qualification they are seeking to attain; (Leaving Certificate, Junior Cert, etc.).

6. Original documentary evidence of prior achievement is verified and a photocopy is attached to the Application Form. All photocopies of original documentation are signed and marked as 'original seen' by the chairperson of the interview panel.
7. If the candidate is deemed to have met the programme's entry requirements a provisional letter of acceptance onto the programme is offered to the applicant.
8. A non-refundable Booking Deposit is payable, by a specific date, to secure a place on a programme.
9. Learners are informed of the dates for programme registration, programme induction, the programme commencement date and schedules, and the final date for payment of programme fees.

All correspondence relating to access to the centre's programmes is through the administration office. Depending on demand, applicants may be ranked and places allocated accordingly.

An applicant can appeal to the centre's Programme Committee if not successful in achieving a place on a programme, see Section 5.2.7 below.

5.2.3 Supports - Disability and Specific Learning Difficulties

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to providing equality of access and opportunity so that all learners can demonstrate their true knowledge and competency. The centre welcomes applicants who have a verifiable disability or specific learning difficulty.

All applicants to the centre's programmes are asked to disclose if they have disability or a specific learning difficulty on the centre's Application Form and, once again, during the application interview. The Application Form clearly states that disclosure in no way adversely affects their application.

The applicant must provide records of related professional assessment/s outlining the nature of the disability/specific learning difficulty, before any supports are put in place. Every effort is made to provide appropriate support and help for learners with disability/specific learning difficulty once a place is offered, subject to available resources.

The Director of Administration and Services, in liaison with the Programme Leader, is responsible for making appropriate provisions, in this regard. Supports provided in no way compromise the award standard.

Programme related learning supports include

- alternative venue for assessment
- additional time for assessments
- wheel chair access
- special seating
- learning materials in alternative format (where possible)
- alternative format for assessment evidence
- a scribe for written examinations
- a reader for assessment
- rest periods

See also *Section 8.3; Learner Assessment Information*.

As the centre develops it is anticipated that the need for additional learner services will emerge following on from feedback from learners, learner representatives, programme leaders and tutors. The delivery of any such services will be considered and rolled out in line with centre's commitment to ongoing development and improvement and optimising the learning experience for all programme participants.

5.2.4 Progression Opportunities

The centre's published programme information includes details of related transfer and/or progression opportunities; employment, further education and training opportunities with the centre or another FET provider, higher education and training institution, etc.

5.2.5 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

In matters relating to the recognition of prior learning Farm Ed Ltd complies with all requirements stipulated by QQI in the approval of the centre's Quality Assurance System and in the validation of the centre's programmes.

Farm Ed Ltd has a recognition of prior learning procedure that facilitates entry to a programme. Thus, applicants to the centre's programmes have the opportunity to put forward programme related prior learning:

- to meet programme entry requirements
- to gain exemptions from elements of a programme where learning outcomes have already been met, but not assessed
- to gain credits towards an award for previously certified learning

Programme Entry Requirements

Requests, to consider prior learning equivalent to the stated minimum entry requirements for entry to a programme, are considered during the application interview. Additional information, to that already provided in the Application Form, may be required before a decision is made.

Exemption from Programme Elements

The Programme Committee, in consultation with an independent external SME (as the need arises), considers requests for exemptions from elements of a programme. Applicants are required to submit formal evidence of learning achieved to support this request. Applications, of this nature, are normally from learners who have already successfully gained a place on a programme. Successful applicants, in this regard, are required to complete all programme related assessment, as per the validated programme.

Previously Certified Learning

The relevant Programme Committee, in consultation with an independent external SME, considers RPL requests where a learner, in seeking an exemption from one or more QQI FET components, presents a non-QQI bone fide education or training institution qualification, e.g. a UK awarding body, an Irish University or Institute of Technology.

Such applicants are required to support their request with documentation issued by the relevant awarding body and certified as genuine. Farm Ed Ltd reserves the right to seek additional supporting evidence from the named awarding body in the application, as it sees fit.

The Programme Committee will consider such requests on the basis that the learning outcome for the relevant programme component(s), has been achieved.

In addition to the aforementioned, some exemptions of this nature can be processed directly through the QBS Certification system. In such cases, applicants are required to support their request with documentation issued by the relevant awarding body and certified as genuine.

Unsuccessful RPL applicants have the opportunity to appeal the centre's decision to the Programme Committee, see 4.4.5 below.

5.2.6 Learner Induction

The transition from school to further education can be a challenging experience in a learner's life. Similarly, the transition for those returning to education and training after a long absence can be equally challenging. Farm Ed Ltd recognises the importance of its learner induction process in paving the way for learners to successfully achieve their education and training goals. Learner Induction is organised by the Programme leader and aims to facilitate a learner's transition to FET by:

- welcoming learners
- introducing staff and their roles
- explaining the programme they are commencing
- making learners aware of available supports and facilities
- ensuring clarity on their and the centre's roles and responsibilities
- explaining related health and safety, and bio security procedures
- encouraging the development of an inclusive and participative community of learners.

Each learner is provided with a copy of the centre's Learner Handbook during the induction process. Learners are encouraged to retain the handbook as an ongoing resource for reference as they progress through their programme.

5.2.7 Admission\RPL Appeal

An admission\RPL appeal must be lodged in writing to the Director of Training and Development within 5 working days of receipt of the centre's related notification, stating the grounds on which the appeal is being appealed.

The Programme Committee is convened to consider the appeal. The appellant may request to address the meeting and\or have one person accompany them to the meeting. Requests to address the committee must be submitted in writing to the Director at the time of the appeal. The Director of Training and Development informs the applicant of the outcome of the appeals within 5 working days.

5.2.8 Programme Fees, Refunds and Cancellation

Farm Ed Ltd structures its programme fees to include all programme materials and related assessment fees. All learners are made aware of the following:

- programme booking deposits are non-refundable.
- programme fees must be paid in full 14 working days prior to the scheduled commencement date of a programme.
- if an applicant commences a programme and subsequently withdraw from the programme at any stage the programme fee is not refundable.

- booking deposits and programme fees will be refunded only if a programme is cancelled by the centre due to unforeseen circumstances.

5.2.9 *Learner Records*

See Chapter 11; Information and Data Management, Section 11.3; Learner Records.

5.3 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

The monitoring and review of procedures relating to learner access, transfer and progression is ongoing, in line with the centre's commitment to quality improvement, and particularly focused after each programme intake.

Method

Programme Leaders and Tutors actively seek both formal and informal feedback from learners and other stakeholders on satisfaction levels on the centre's ATP processes. In addition, regular analysis of performance indicators is also undertaken, e.g. appeal rates. The Programme Leader, in liaison with the responsible Director, immediately effects modifications and adjustments of a 'minor' nature.

In the case of modifications and adjustment emerging that may have greater impact on existing policy or procedures the responsible Director brings these to the next scheduled meeting of the PDRC, the QAAC or the ETAMC (depending on the nature of the recommendation) for their consideration and the approval of a suitable action plan for implementation.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- learner / staff feedback surveys
- minutes of meetings
- ATP procedures
- application forms / records of appeals
- interview procedure and related documentation
- staff CPD records

Staff Involved

Director of Training and Development, Director of Administration, Programme Leader, Tutors, Network of Stakeholders, Sector Advisory Groups.

See Appendix 4 for documentation that demonstrates the centre's proposed approach to retaining evidence of ATP procedure implementation.

6 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd aims to engage suitably qualified staff for all organisational roles related to its education and training provision via a rigorous recruitment process, which is well defined, transparent and compliant with all legislative requirements.

All HR responsibilities and related matters arising, at Farm Ed Ltd, are supported by Peninsula, an independent external consultancy firm specialising in HR, Employment Law and & Safety.

The centre is committed to ensuring all staff have sufficient experience and expertise to fulfil their roles. Tutors are required to have significant verified teaching/lecturing experience or formal pedagogical training. All Tutors are Garda Vetted, as some learners attending programmes may be less than 18 years of age.

All staff are comprehensively briefed on their roles, responsibilities, lines of communication, contracts of employment and opportunities for professional development. The Director of Administration and Services is responsible for retaining HR records on all part-time and full-time staff.

This procedure describes how the centre recruits staff at all levels within the organisation. This role is primarily the responsibility of the CEO advised by the Director of Training and Development, the Director of Administration and Services and both internal and external experts. The aim, at all times, is to recruit the right person with the right skills in line with best practice and legal requirements.

The Farm Ed Ltd recruitment process is documented by addressing the following procedures:

- Recruitment and Selection
- Staff Induction
- Staff Communication
- Staff Development

6.2 Recruitment and Selection

When a vacancy occurs the CEO, in liaison with relevant advisors, documents a job description, the minimum experience and academic requirements and selection criteria for the post. The position is advertised strategically to attract suitable applicants; internally, website, social media, national press, agency, etc. Applicants are requested to supply their curriculum vitae, a copy of relevant qualifications and any other documentation to support their application. An interview panel is arranged and a briefing of the panel is scheduled. Applicants are interviewed. Shortlisting of candidates may occur. The selection panel makes its recommendations and the successful applicant/s are contacted. Records of the interview process are retained.

6.3 Staff Induction

All new employees, on commencing their role with Farm Ed Ltd, complete a staff induction programme. This briefs them on the organisation's background, mission, organisational structure, operational processes, reporting structures, IT systems, roles and responsibilities

of colleagues, etc. The process aims to ensure new staff take ownership and have a clear understanding of their role and how it fits in the organisation and merges with the centre's QA system. A Training Needs Analysis (TNA) is completed with the responsible line manager and a CPD schedule is put in place for the new employee, as the need arises. All staff members receive a contract of employment and are subject to a six monthly Performance Appraisal, for the first two years. After this initial period, subject to satisfactory performance, reviews are on an annual basis.

New tutors are introduced to the programme team and are allocated a mentor. Their induction process includes a full briefing on programme documentation, assessment strategies and related quality assurance processes and procedures. The mentor advises on any matters arising and monitors the Tutor's programme delivery and assessment to ensure programme standards and objectives are achieved.

6.4 Communication

Good communication is seen as a key ingredient in forming effective operational teams and in building and retaining a client base. It minimises confusion and errors, increases productivity and fosters a culture of shared responsibility. The CEO promotes an 'open door' approach to communications across the organisation. All employees are encouraged to contribute both feedback and suggestions for improvement in their areas of responsibility. Guidelines are provided on 'house styles' when communicating with colleagues, learners, the public and other stakeholders via reports, emails, phone calls and meetings.

6.5 Staff Development

Farm Ed Ltd encourages and facilitates the continuous professional development of staff. Budgets are allocated in line with the strategic objective of the organisation. All staff have the opportunity to attend any of the centre's programmes free of charge. Targeted training is scheduled, as the need arises, to support programme delivery, assessment and programme content update in line with developments within the sector. Tutors are encouraged and supported to attend sector related national and international conferences and seminars to appraise themselves of topical issues, new technologies and approaches, regulatory and legislative developments, etc. They are also encouraged to participate in sector related networks and promote the sharing of best practice.

A TNA is completed for each staff member during annual reviews and on joining the organisation. The Director of Training and Development, in liaison with the Director of Quality and Assessment, schedules CPD in line with agreed budgets. CPD ensures that Tutors are kept up to date on teaching and learning methodologies, delivery modes, programme content, new technologies, QA developments, EU Directives, Dept. of Agriculture policies, etc. Details on proposed staff training events are communicated across the organisation by email. Records of staff CPD are retained by HR and include attendance lists, feedback, evaluations, etc.

6.6 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

The monitoring and review of Staff Recruitment Management and Development policy and related procedures is ongoing and is the responsibility of the Director of Administration and Services.

Method

The Director of Administration and Services actively seeks feedback from all stakeholders on the effectiveness of the centre's recruitment process. The Director addresses matters of a minor nature.

Key indicators that inform this process include:

- staff retention/turnover rates
- staff feedback
- learner feedback on programme delivery and assessment
- assessment appeals rates
- stakeholder feedback on programme effectiveness ratings
- feedback from mentors
- programme satisfaction levels

Recommendations for modifications and adjustment to the centre's recruitment processes, that impact significantly on existing policy or procedure, are considered by the ETAMC and actioned, as appropriate, in line with the centre's commitment to continuous development and improvement and minimising risk to the organisation.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- performance indicators as identified above
- job description
- statements of qualifications and experience required for the job
- application forms
- criteria for shortlisting
- records of interview planning
- records of correspondence
- records of interviews
- staff induction checklist
- contract of employment
- staff TNAs
- CPD schedules
- records of CPD attendance; seminars, information sessions, workshops, conferences
- staff handbook
- HR policy & procedure manual
- CPD feedback and evaluations
- mentor feedback

Staff involved

CEO, Director of Administration, Director of Training and Development, Subject Matter Experts (internal & external).

7 TEACHING AND LEARNING

7.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to enabling a quality teaching and learning environment that is fit for purpose and facilitates the achievement of programme objectives and standards.

This commitment is supported by:

- published standards
- qualified tutors
- evidence based quality assurance
- learner and tutor supports
- facilities and resources aimed at maximising the learning experience
- an open door communications policy

The following procedures document the approach taken to teaching and learning at the centre:

- equality and diversity
- health and safety
- teaching methodologies
- programme venues
- Bio Security risks
- learner complaints

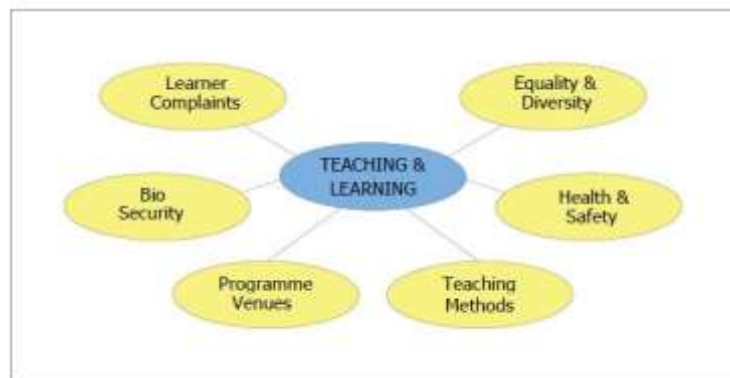


Figure 7: Teaching & Learning

Related topics are also discussed in Chapter 9; Supports for Learners.

7.2 Equality and Diversity

Equality Statement

Farm Ed Ltd aims to ensure that all learners, staff and other stakeholders are treated equally and are in no way discriminated against in any of the areas identified in the relevant legislation (Equal Status Act 2000 and The Employment Equality Act 1998): gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and membership of the travelling community.

The centre recognises that equality lies in the recognition of the individual's dignity and the right to be treated with respect. A complaints procedure is in place for anyone who feels they have been in any way discriminated against on any of the nine grounds listed. Both learner and staff induction processes address the centre's position on equality and diversity and the individuals' rights in this regard.

7.3 Health and Safety

Farm Ed Ltd aims to be fully compliant with all Health & Safety legislation. Each Programme Leader is responsible for ensuring that programme venues, internal and external, meet all

H&S and Bio Security requirements pre-programme commencement; see Section 7.6 and Section 7.7.

Peninsula, an independent external consultancy firm specialising in HR, Employment Law and Health & Safety, has been recruited by the centre to advise on matters arising in its areas of expertise.

The following work related H&S requirements are in place:

- safety statement
- risk assessment (trips and slips, etc.)
- fire drill records
- scheduled inspection of lift, fire alarm, fire extinguishers, signage, etc.
- public liability insurance
- employers liability insurance
- first aid
- hazard list
- bio security procedures

7.4 Teaching Methodologies

Tutors are encouraged and supported to explore and implement best practice in teaching and learning methodologies in programme delivery and to ensure that the learner is always at the centre of the learning experience – the tutor’s voice is not the only voice to be heard.

Learners are encouraged to draw from their own experiences and link to the current learning context. The learning experience is seen as a collaborative one in which all present participate and the tutor facilitates as a guide. There should be no passive participation. Feedback sessions are encouraged so that learners can identify their strengths and target areas that need improvement. The aim is to develop confidence, competence and curiosity and provide opportunity to explore, enquire and discover.

The following classroom/on-farm strategies are encouraged:

- in-class activity
- group work/discussion
- questions and answer sessions
- practical sessions – resources and facilities
- demonstration
- multimedia
- feedback sessions
- self-reflection

The following strategies are employed to facilitate effective teaching and learning:

- mid term reviews – staff and learner survey
- end of programme reviews
- focus groups with employers, agencies, etc.
- analysis of KPIs
- tutor CPD; teaching methodologies, learning styles, classroom management
- review and update of learning materials reflect advances in the field of study
- on line learning resources

- tutorials
- feedback – formative and summative
- attendance at conferences, seminars, etc. to reflect best practice in the teaching and learning
- learner complaints/appeals procedures

7.5 Measuring Effective Programme Delivery

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to ensuring an effective learning environment that provides the optimum experience for learners on all its programmes. A key strategy in achieving this is the ongoing monitoring and review of the effectiveness of a programme as Tutors deliver content and assess learner achievement, see Appendix 3 for a learner Mid Term Feedback survey.

Method

The Programme Leader, in liaison with the Director of Training and Development, is responsible for the ongoing monitoring and review of a programme from commencement to completion. Feedback on learner satisfaction levels is captured to inform this process in a number of ways as follows:

- learner mid term and end of programme feedback (See Appendix 3)
- learner representative feedback to the ETAMC
- IV and EA reports
- tutor feedback
- review of performance indicators; attendance, completion rates, certification rates, etc.

Areas for development and improvement are identified and discussed with the Tutor by the Director or Programme Leader. An action plan for the implementation of any required supports and interventions is agreed. The Director of Training and Development retains records of any matters arising in this area.

7.6 Programme Venues

Farm Ed Ltd offers some of its programmes at external venues throughout the country. In this regard the centre aims to provide venues that meet the following quality criteria:

- accessible for people with a disability (wheel chair, limited mobility)
- comfortable, quiet, clean and safe
- access to food and related services (full day events)
- access to multimedia systems
- internet access (as the need arises)
- compliant with all H&S, bio security and Insurance requirements
- comfortable space per participant
- suitable chairs
- natural light
- air-conditioning/heating
- power points
- flip chart, data projector
- parking

The Programme Leader visits each venue before programmes commence and a Venue Checklist (see Appendix 6) is completed and retained on file as part of the centre's QA for that programme.

7.7 Access to Farms and Bio Security Risks

Some programmes offered by Farm Ed Ltd require skills demonstrations and assessments be conducted on farms. The centre ensures, during pre-planning, that facilities on host farms meet all programme needs and are fully compliant with H&S and Bio Security requirements. In this regard, the centre also ensures that there is no 'conflict of interest' by choosing farms that are independent of the participating learners. The centre uses its own farm, located just outside the Cahir office, whenever feasible.

The Programme Leader or designate conducts an advance planning visit to the host farm to complete a risk assessment and to ensure the following are in place:

- a covered sheltered space to meet and greet the learner groups
- a covered sheltered space to deliver a presentation - flip chart easel, flip chart pads, markers, clipboards, etc. (provided by Farm Ed Ltd)
- adequate parking space away from the farmyard
- bio-security equipment – first aid kit, foot bath, gloves, etc. (provided by Farm Ed Ltd)
- H&S statement
- access to a toilet and hand washing facilities

Bio-Security Risks on Farms

Farm Ed Ltd is ever vigilant to ensure Bio Security risks are minimised when visiting host farms to conduct skills demonstrations and assessments. The purpose of this procedure is to describe how Bio Security risks are minimised for all stakeholders concerned.

Before a host farm visit the Programme Leader/Tutor briefs learners on their H&S and Bio Security roles and responsibilities during the visit.

All learners, under the guidance of the Host Farmer and Tutor must:

- stay together and not wander off from the group
- obey all safety signs on the host farm
- not smoke
- not enter the calving area/lambing area during the calving/lambing season
- avoid contact with bulls
- not enter the machinery workshop or the machinery storage areas
- wear disposable gloves if handling animals, grass, silage, crops, feedstuffs, chemicals etc. (to avoid zoonotic diseases/poisoning)
- avoid contact with unrestrained cattle within confined areas
- never enter the cab of any powered machines, e.g. tractors, etc.
- never switch on electrical appliances
- never start engine powered equipment, e.g. lawnmowers, chainsaws etc.
- take care when crossing a public road from one part of the host farm to another
- stay well clear of cliffs, riverbanks, quarries, pits, etc.
- take care entering through large hinged doors that are not tied open
- stay well clear of operating machinery

Prior to the visit each learner must complete a Host Farm Visit Learner Agreement in line with the centre's commitment to assure the H&S of all participants and minimising bio security risks. See Appendix 6 for examples of related forms.

7.8 Learner Complaints

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to creating a learning environment that is supportive, respectful and fair, one that provides equality of opportunity and where learners are free from discrimination and harassment. In the event that a learner feels s/he has been unfairly treated, bullied or harassed, treated unreasonably or in any way offensive, while taking a training programme, the centre's complaints procedure can be availed of. Complaints are a serious matter and are addressed expeditiously, as follows:

Informal

Matters of concern can often be resolved in an informal way. Consequently, an attempt should be made, in the first instance, to deal with a complaint as informally as possible. This can be achieved by approaching the learner's Tutor or Programme Leader, who is committed to making every effort to resolve issues. If the learner is not satisfied with the outcome then there is an opportunity to make a formal complaint. If the learner is not in a position to approach either the Tutor or Programme Leader then any other centre representative should be approached. In addition, all learners are advised, during their induction process, of a confidential email address that can also be used to advise of any concerns.

Formal

A formal complaint must be made in writing by completing the official complaints form and submitting it to the CEO, the Director of Training and Development, the Director of Administration and Services or the Programme Leader.

- all formal complaints are acknowledged within 3 working days.
- a Complaints Appeal Committee is convened
- the complaint is investigated, in confidence, fairly and impartially.
- a response is issued within 14 working days.
- in the event of an interim response, a date for a comprehensive response is provided.
- if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome, an appeal can be made, in writing, within 5 working days of receipt of the comprehensive response.
- the appeal is acknowledged within 3 working days. a response is issued within 15 days of receipt of the appeal

Nothing in the foregoing inhibits or restricts the right of an individual to seek redress before the appropriate third party as provided for in current legislation.

7.9 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

The monitoring and review of teaching and learning related procedures is ongoing from programme commencement to completion.

Method

The Programme Leader actively seeks formal and informal feedback from learners to assess satisfaction levels and to provide suggestions for improvement. Specifically, feedback is sought on the effectiveness of programme delivery, teaching methodologies, programme venues, equipment and facilities. In this way, the Programme Leader, who reports to the Director of Training and Development, ensures the adequacy and effectiveness of teaching and learning facilities and resources, as they relate to the needs of the programme on offer.

Complaints and high dissatisfaction levels, of whatever nature, are a source of significant concern, investigation and review. Any recommendations, modifications and adjustment for development and improvement identified, of a 'minor' nature, are actioned immediately by the Programme Leader in liaison with the responsible Director.

If there are recommendations emerging that may have greater impact on existing policy or procedure the responsible Director brings these to the next scheduled meeting of the PDRC, the QAAC or the ETAMC (depending on the nature of the recommendation) for consideration and the approval of a suitable action plan for implementation.

The aim, at all times, is to maximise the learning experience, minimise risk for the organisation, maintain quality and standards and achieve all programme objectives.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- equality statement
- learner induction checklist, learner handbook
- H&S statement
- venue checklist, bio security checklists
- tutor job description and contract
- tutor induction, handbook
- records of CPD
- host farm visit learner agreement (signed)
- correspondence with host farmers
- complaints procedure
- records of complaints received, records of complaints upheld
- appeals procedure
- appeals received, records of appeals upheld
- stakeholder feedback
- risk assessment

Staff Involved

CEO, Director of Training and Development, Programme Leader, Tutors, Host Farmer, Learners.

See Appendix 6 for examples of templates that demonstrate the centre's proposed approaches to retaining evidence of procedures relating to assuring a fit for purpose teaching and learning environment.

8 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

8.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to manage and implement a quality assured assessment process, for both formative and summative assessment, that is fair, consistent, efficient, transparent and fit for purpose. Related roles, responsibilities, expectations and rights are clearly documented and communicated to the relevant stakeholders towards meeting all quality assurance requirements and programme standards. The centre assures all aspects of its assessment process through the rigorous implementation of straightforward, efficient, timely and transparent procedures that aim to ensure the security and integrity of the assessment process in line with the validated programme.

The following procedures are in place:

Planning of:

Assignments

Projects

Skills Demonstrations

Collections/Portfolio of Work/Learner Record

Examination Papers

Information to learners/Learner Responsibility

Security and Integrity/Credibility of Assessment

Workplace assessment

Feedback to Learners

Assessment conducted on QQI validated programmes is criterion referenced against the learning outcomes published for the target award. Learners must be assessed against all learning outcomes for an award.

8.2 Assessment Planning

This procedure describes how a programme's assessment is planned and related documentation is developed in a way that assures the integrity of the assessment process and the achievement of standards.

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to ensuring that all Tutors are fully trained in the assessment processes related to a particular programme and in the centre's security arrangements around the preparation and distribution of assessment instruments. A 'house style' is followed in documenting all assessment briefs, skills demonstrations, examination papers, attendance lists, marking sheets, etc., see Appendix 3. Particular care is taken to ensure readability and understanding of requirements when preparing all assessment instruments.

The Programme Leader meets with the tutor/s pre programme commencement to plan the programme's assessment. Tutors verify that assessments are:

- in line with the validated programme
- fair, consistent and fit for purpose
- assessing the learning outcomes as prescribed by the validated programme
- have the capacity to assess at the required standard

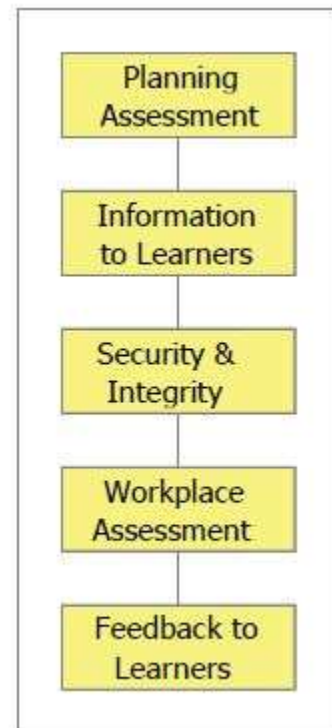


Figure 8: Assessment of Learners

Integration of assessment is considered where an award consists of more than one programme module. Programme planning includes training in the assessment process.

8.2.1 *Standardisation of Assessment*

Farm Ed engages cross moderation of provisional assessment outcomes to ensure consistency of assessment across programmes/modules, where more than one assessor is engaged in the assessment of a programme in a certification period, see Appendix 5 for a Cross Moderation Report template.

An alternative to this approach is to have a Lead Tutor /Assessor mark learner assessment evidence from all programme events in a certification period. The Director of Quality and Assessment decides on which standardisation strategy to employ.

8.2.2 *The Lead Assessor – Skills Demonstration*

Farm Ed Ltd, in assuring 'fair and consistent' assessment as learners undertake skills demonstration assessments, appoints a Lead Assessor to oversee the process. Those appointed to this role are individuals with pedagogical and occupational competence in the delivery and assessment of the target programme. This approach facilitates a consistent approach to the assessment process across the assessment team. Appointments are approved by the QAAC.

The role of a Lead Assessor is summarised as follows:-

- to lead the assessment team in the roll out of skills demonstration assessment in line with the validated programmes and national standards.
- to brief the assessment team in their role as skills demonstration assessors
- to support assessors when competing their role
- to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of assessors in their role.
- to monitor and ensure consistency of marking between assessors and national standards
- to monitor and ensure assessment is conducted in line with the centre's quality assurance policies and procedures
- to report to the Director of Quality and Assessment on observations; including recommendations for development of the assessment process
- to provide feedback to assessors and propose areas for development, as the need arises
- to complete documentation related to the role
- all assessment instruments and evidence are securely stored pre and post assessment

8.3 **Learner Assessment Information**

This procedure describes how learners are informed on assessment roles, responsibilities and requirements.

Farm Ed Ltd publishes a comprehensive Learner Handbook that includes details on learner roles and responsibilities relating to the assessment process. Learner induction addresses all contents of this handbook, see Learner Handbook (draft) submitted with this QA Manual. Learners are informed on specific programme assessment requirements by their tutor on commencement and on an ongoing basis as they progress through their programme.

Learners are informed on:

- assessment dates & times
- role of the assessor
- coursework submission procedures
- submission deadlines
- plagiarism & malpractice
- declaration of authorship/ownership
- assessment repeats
- assessment appeals
- skills demonstration schedules

All learners are briefed on the availability of reasonable accommodations and resources; special requirements relating to assessment; verified extenuating circumstances and compassionate considerations. The centre is committed to the provision of such accommodations and resources, without compromising the award standard. Related requests are made to the Programme Leader on the official form and must be accompanied by professional reports of support. *See also Section 5.2.3; Supports and Specific Learning Difficulties.*

Assessment accommodations may include one or more of the following:

- modified assignment briefs/ examination papers
- scribe, reader
- sign language interpreters
- rest periods
- specialist equipment
- assistive technology
- extra time
- extension of coursework submission deadlines
- reschedule of assessments (extenuating circumstances)

8.4 Security and Integrity/Credibility of Assessment

This procedure describes how the security, integrity and credibility of assessment related processes and materials are assured in the planning and roll out of the assessment process.

Farm Ed Ltd has procedures in place to assure confidentiality around the preparation of all assessment instruments. All tutors are briefed/re-informed on their roles and responsibilities in this regard during the assessment planning before a programme begins.

All assessment related materials are securely stored and verified/signed-off pre and post assessment.

- all examination papers are 'unseen' and identify the LOs being assessed
- all assignment/project/skills demonstration/learner briefs identify the LOs being assessed and are reviewed post each assessment period and amended as the need arises
- well-defined procedures are in place around the issue/receipt of examination papers/scripts, records of skills demonstrations, coursework, etc., with the different stages verified (signed) by the learners/tutor/admin staff/invigilator

- an invigilator, independent of the programme, supervises all written examinations
- invigilators receive a briefing on their role
- learners are required to declare ownership/authorship of coursework submitted for assessment
- learners sign off as they submit their scripts or complete their skills demonstration
- learners must produce photo id on entry to written examinations and skills demonstration

8.5 Workplace Assessment

The purpose of this procedure is to describe how Farm Ed Ltd assures assessment performed by assessors other than those formally engaged in the delivery of a programme.

Some programmes offered by the centre require assessment by assessors other than staff tutors/assessors e.g., host farmers. In such cases the Programme Leader or designate briefs the third party assessor on their respective roles, responsibilities and expectations. Clear guidelines are provided to assure the quality of assessment in this regard. Once briefed, third party assessors are required to sign off on their understanding of their assessment role. Records of such briefing are retained as part of the portfolio of QA evidence for that programme.

8.5.1 Assessment in a Farm Setting

The skills demonstration assessment technique is used to assess practical based learning outcomes on many of the programmes offered by Farm Ed Ltd. Typically, these take place in a farm setting and are conducted by the centre's staff.

Pre-planning by the programme team, led by the Programme Leader in liaison with the Lead Assessor, ensures that sufficient and appropriate learner evidence is retained to meet the requirements of the validated programme and the results authentication process e.g., photographic evidence, a learner account of the task and comment by the assessor when a candidate does not achieve the maximum allocated mark for a task.

A separate set of procedures has been devised to ensure all health and safety and bio security responsibilities are adhered to when visiting farms, see appendix 6, Section 7.6 and Section 7.7.

8.6 Repeat Assessments – Written and Skills Based

A learner must achieve a minimum of a pass in all components that make up a QQI award. If a learner does not achieve a minimum of a pass in all components of an award s/he is normally permitted a second attempt at the unsuccessful assessment element/s. The scheduling of this second assessment is agreed between the responsible Tutor and Programme Leader and will normally provide sufficient time for the candidate to prepare for this assessment event.

Outcome of a Repeat Assessment

A candidate who is unsuccessful in a reassessment will have their case considered by the relevant Programme Committee. Each case is considered in its own merits in light of extenuating circumstances that may prevail. Possible outcomes are as follows:

- the learner may be required to repeat attendance of the course before having the opportunity for subsequent assessment.

- the learner may not be permitted to progress to a higher-level course at the centre until all assessments have been achieved.

8.7 Feedback to Learners

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to providing timely and constructive formative and summative feedback to learners at appropriate points in the programme. Such feedback assists learners advance their learning and achieve their full potential.

Tutors provide informal feedback on an ongoing basis as learners progress through their programme. Formal feedback is provided on coursework submitted for assessment within an agreed timeframe of submission. This summative feedback assists learners as they prepare for the next element of assessment on their programme. The Tutor retains records of formal feedback and a copy is provided to the learner.

8.8 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

The monitoring of assessment related procedures is ongoing throughout a programme, with oversight by the Director of Quality and Assessment.

Method

Programme Leaders are regularly in contact with Tutors and learners for feedback on the progress of a programme's assessment. In addition, the Director of Quality and Assessment periodically monitors the documentary evidence generated by the assessment process. In this way, the need for intervention is identified at an early stage and the appropriate corrective action taken by the Director, in line with the centre's commitment to continuous improvement, maximising the learning experience and achieving all programme objectives.

Any modifications or adjustments identified that may significantly impact on existing policy or procedure are brought to the next scheduled meeting of the PDRC, the QAAC or the ETAMC (depending on the nature of the recommendation) for their consideration and the approval of a suitable action plan for implementation..

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- guidelines for assessment
- programme descriptors
- assessment plan/schedule
- emails, correspondence, etc.
- assignment briefs, skills demonstration briefs, marking schemes, sample answers
- examination papers, marking schemes, sample answers
- records assessment training (CPD)
- agenda, minutes of associated meetings; action plan
- cross moderation plan
- learner handbook
- tutor handbooks
- records of learner induction
- requests for extension submission deadlines, compassionate consideration, special requirements, etc.
- records of accommodations provided
- assessment attendance lists
- coursework submission lists
- ownership/authorship statements for coursework

- briefing documents for workplace assessment
- records of learner/tutor feedback
- records of appeal requests/upheld
- invigilator reports
- learner assessment evidence

Staff involved

Programme Leader, Director of Quality and Assessment, Tutors/Assessors, Third Party Assessors, Lead Assessors.

See Appendix 5 for examples of templates that demonstrate the centre's proposed approaches to retaining evidence of procedures relating assuring fair and consistent assessment of learners.

See Learner Handbook (draft) – which accompanies this QA Manual

9 Finalising Assessment Results

9.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to managing and implementing a quality assured post assessment and marking process that supports the integrity of learner results pre submission for certification.

The centre has documented a set of procedures that authenticates the validity of the assessment process and assessment outcomes.

The following procedures are in place:

- Internal Verification
- External Examining (Authentication)
- Results Approval
- Assessment Appeals

9.2 Internal Verification

The purpose of this procedure is to document the process by which assessment policies and procedures, relating to the planning, management and implementation of all aspects of assessment, are internally verified.

The Director of Quality and Assessment appoints an Internal Verifier for each programme going forward for certification. Typically, centre Tutors independent of a programme will complete this role.

A briefing on the role and clear guidelines are provided by the Director or designate. The process includes checking that ALL assessment procedures have been applied across the range of programme related assessment activities, from planning to finalising results.

The process:

- verifies that all assessment procedures have been applied across the range of assessment activities
- confirms the completeness and accuracy of learner evidence (that the evidence exists and that it is marked and recorded accurately)

9.2.1 Role of Internal Verifier

Farm Ed Ltd appoints an Internal Verifier for each assessment period, to systematically check that assessment procedures have been applied consistently across assessment activities, to verify the accuracy of provisional assessment results, on a sample basis, and to produce an Internal Verification Report. The Director of Quality and Assessment briefs the internal verifier on the role and clear guideline documents/checklists are provided to assist in the process, see IV Checklist 1 in Appendix 5.

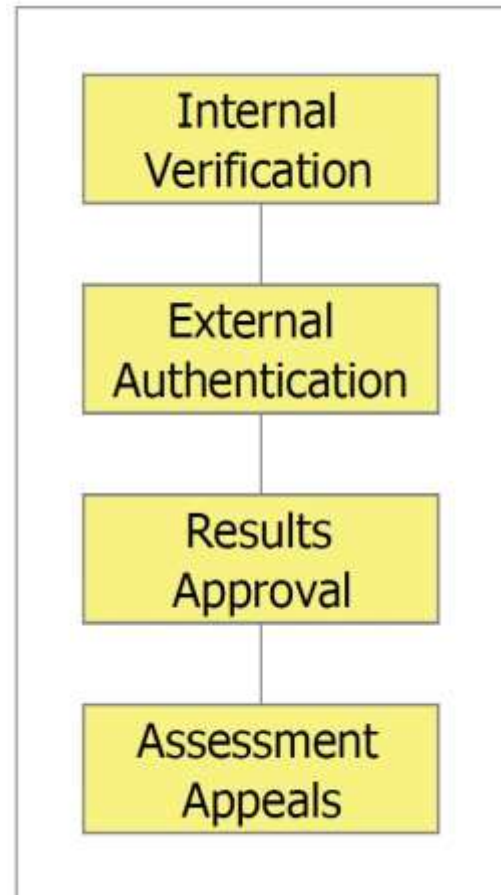


Figure 9: Results Authentication

Verifying Adherence to Assessment Procedures

The internal verifier checks adherence to QA assessment procedures and confirms:

- compliance with ALL quality assured assessment procedures across ALL programmes
- learner evidence matches the assessment requirements of the validated programme
- learner evidence is generated as per the technique identified in the validated programme
- information on assessment was provided to learners i.e. submission dates, guidelines/briefs, assessment criteria
- appropriate documentation was issued to learners
- appropriate documentation was used to record learner results

The internal verifier:

- checks that assessment evidence is available for ALL learners presented
- provisional results are available
- percentage marks are consistent with grading bands
- results are recorded for all learners presented
- results have been uploaded correctly to the certification system
- notes any irregularities and take corrective action
- liaises with the Director of Quality and Assessment on any issues arising

On a SAMPLE (ref sampling strategy below) of learners the Internal Verifier:

- checks marks have been allocated in line with guidelines
- checks marks are totalled correctly
- checks percentage marks calculated correctly
- checks marks are transferred correctly from learner evidence to learner marking sheet/record
- checks marks are transferred correctly from learner marking sheet/record to the certification system
- checks percentage marks allocated are consistent with QQI grading bands
- notes any irregularities and take corrective action
- liaises with the Director of Quality and Assessment on any issues arising

Any omissions, irregularities, non-conformances, etc. identified during the IV process are noted in the IV report and must be addressed by the relevant Tutor/Assessor before the External Authentication process commences.

9.2.2 Sampling Strategy

Sampling is the process of selecting a portion of learner results and learner evidence for the purposes of completing internal verification and external authentication of assessment. The sample chosen provides sufficient evidence to enable the Internal Verifier / External Authenticator confidently confirm that assessment procedures have been adhered to for the group of learners for whom the centre is requesting certification.

The Director of Quality and Assessment documents a sampling strategy for each assessment period. The sample chosen must enable the identification of any deviation from best practice in the assessment process. The sample chosen must be sufficient in size to allow sound judgement be made about the fairness and consistency of assessment decisions and the achievement of standards.

The sample chosen should:

- be representative of all awards being processed for certification

- cover the full range of attainment in terms of grades achieved
- include a random selection of evidence for each grade/band
- identify evidence that is borderline between grades
- ensure new assessor judgments/decisions are sampled

9.2.3 *The Internal Verification Report*

The Internal Verifier completes an Internal Verification Report once the IV process has been completed. The purpose of this report is to document the findings of the IV process. The centre retains this report and makes it available to the External Authenticator and Results Approval Panel. The report provides an auditable trail for both internal and external (QQI) monitoring. It captures evidence that the internal verification process has taken place and acknowledges strengths, gaps and areas for development and improvement in the assessment process.

9.3 External Authentication

The purpose of this procedure is to describe how Farm Ed Ltd externally authenticates the standard of a programme against the national standard for that programme.

The Director of Quality and Assessment appoints an External Authenticator/s (EA) for each assessment period. The EA provides independent authoritative judgement on the fairness and consistency of assessment, its compliance with the national standards and the centres commitment to quality assured training provision. In this way, the credibility of the assessment processes is established and assurance is provided that the centre's assessment results are marked in a valid and reliable way and are compliant with the validated programme. The EA acknowledges the good practice at the centre and provides recommendations for development and improvement, as the need arises.

9.3.1 *Role of the External Authenticator*

The External Authenticator:

- confirms the fair and consistent assessment of learners in line with the centre's procedures
- reviews the centre's internal verification report(s)
- applies a sampling strategy to moderate assessment results
- moderates assessment results
- meets with related staff and learners
- participates in the results approval process, if requested
- notes any irregularities
- liaises with the Director of Quality and Assessment
- makes recommendations on observations made
- documents an External Authentication Report

9.3.2 *Criteria for Appointment*

Farm Ed Ltd appoints External Authenticators prior to each certification request to QQI and is committed to ensuring that only suitably qualified SME will be engaged to conduct the independent external authentication of its assessment processes and provision results. The following criteria form the basis of each appointment:

- technical and subject matter expertise within the subject area; agricultural sector
- experience of the target programme delivery and assessment
- practical programme related experience in the agricultural sector
- training received in the authentication process

- has the requisite communication skills to liaise with centre management, tutors and learners
- has administrative and IT skills e.g. report writing, time-management, etc.
- has ability to operate within the code of practice and guidelines issued QQI
- is available as per agreed schedule
- is independent of the centre

9.3.3 *Moderating Results*

The External Authenticator moderates assessment results by judging a sample of the marked evidence presented against the standards outlined in the Award Specification. The Director of Quality and Assessment provides the sampling strategy to the EA.

The critical points at which judgment is applied are the boundaries between bands/grades: Referred/Pass, Pass/Merit, Merit/Distinction. The external authenticator reviews results and checks the standard of evidence at each grade band by moderating samples of evidence within each grade band and at the borders of grades.

9.3.4 *The External Authentication Report*

The EA completes an External Authentication Report confirming the outcome of the external authentication process. This report is available to the Results Approval Panel (the next stage in the process) and provides an auditable trail for both internal and external (QQI) monitoring. It provides evidence that the external authentication process has taken place and may include recommendations for grade changes. It comments on the moderation of results against national standards, it acknowledges strengths, gaps and areas for development and improvement in the centre's assessment process.

9.4 Results Approval

The purpose of this procedure is to describe how provisional results are reviewed and finalised at the centre. This process ensures that learner results are quality assured and signed off before a request is made for certification. The process also ensures that appropriate decisions are made regarding the outcome of assessment and the authentication processes.

The Director of Quality and Assessment convenes the Result Approval Panel meeting, a subgroup of the QAAC, once IV and EA are completed. Due consideration is given to the relevant IV and EA report/s.

The purpose of this panel is to:

- formally consider the IV and EA reports
- ensure assessment decisions and results are reviewed, judged and processed in a fair, consistent and transparent manner
- approve the provisional results as the final results
- agree the submission of final (approved) results for certification
- identify/discuss any issues arising and make recommendations for corrective action
- recommend the issue of approved results to learners, flagging the opportunity to appeal

A Results Approval Panel report is prepared, which is retained at the centre and made available to QQI on request. It forms evidence that the authentication process has taken

place. Any issues arising, in relation to the assessment process and results, are identified and recommendations are made for corrective action, as the need arises. The report also acknowledges strengths, gaps and areas for improvement and development. Each member of the panel signs the RAP report.

Once provisional results are approved the Director of Quality and Assessment formally requests QQI for certification through the QBS and issued results to learners flagging the opportunity to appeal.

9.5 Learner Assessment Appeals

This procedure describes how learners may appeal their final assessment results. The opportunity to appeal is available once assessment results have been finalised and issued, post the RAP meeting. Requests for appeal must be made within 14 days of the centre issuing final results.

It is noted, that assessment grades cannot drop further to the outcome of an appeal.

9.5.1 *Grounds for Appeal*

A learner has the opportunity to have an assessment appeal on the basis of the assessment process or the assessment result. A learner may believe that s/he was unfairly treated during the assessment process, that there were inconsistencies in the way an assessment was conducted or that the marking process was not fair and consistent.

9.5.2 *Steps Involved*

The steps involved in making an assessment appeal are as follows:

- The learner makes contact with the centre's head office in Cahir, indicating their intention to appeal their final assessment result and requests an Appeals Request Form, see Appendix 5.
- The Director of Quality and Assessment issues the Appeals Request Form to the learner.
- The learner completes the Appeals Request Form and returns it to the Cahir office with the appropriate fee, which is refundable if the appeal is upheld.
- The appeal request is acknowledged and the learner is informed of the centre's commitment to process the appeal within 14 working days.
- The Director of Quality and Assessment, in liaison with the Programme Leader, convenes an Assessment Appeals Panel to review the appeal request. Where appropriate, this includes a review of the assessment result and a second marking of learner evidence by an assessor (SME) other than the one that made the original assessment decision.
- The Assessment Appeals Panel finalises the learner's appeal.
- The Programme Leader informs the learner of the outcome of the appeal within 14 days of receipt of the appeal request.

9.5.3 *Outcome of an Assessment Appeal*

1. If there is no change in grade then the learner is so informed. The centre does not have to contact the certifying body, as there is no change of grade.
2. If there is a change in grade the learner is so informed. The Director of Quality and Assessment informs the certifying body and a request is made to amend the QBS and issue an amended certificate if a certificate with the original result has already been issued.

9.6 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

The Director of Quality and Assessment has oversight of the policy and procedures relating to finalising assessment results. The monitoring of related procedures are ongoing throughout the process and a review is conducted after each certification period.

Method

The Director of Quality and Assessment has oversight of all procedures relating to finalising assessment results. Once approved results are put forward for certification to QQI the Director convenes a review of the results authentication process. This review, attended by Programme Leader/s and Tutor/s reflects on the process and identifies any areas that need development, streamlining or improvement. The review is informed by end of programme feedback from staff and learners, authentication reports and an analysis of performance indicators.

The responsible Director immediately addresses minor items that may arise. Matters arising that may impact significantly on the centre's current policies or procedures are presented for discussion and approval (with action plan) to the next scheduled meeting of the PDRC, the QAAC or the ETAMC, depending on their nature.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

records of briefings

- membership of panels
- IV and EA procedure documents
- IV report, EA report, provisional results
- records of issues arising/action plan
- final/approved results
- certification request to QQI
- agenda, minutes of associated meetings; action plan
- records of correspondence
- records of appeals/outcomes
- name and contact details of External Authenticator(s)

Staff Involved

Tutor/Assessors, Internal Verifier, Director of Quality and Assessment, Programme Leader, External Authenticator, Results Approval Panel.

The centre plans to use the published QQI templates for the IV Report and the EA Report.

10 SUPPORTS FOR LEARNERS

10.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to providing appropriate learner supports and resources to ensure a quality learning experience and successful participation on programmes. Comprehensive information on available supports is communicated on programme commencement and on an ongoing basis throughout programme delivery. Details of available learner supports are published on the centre's website, the Learner Handbook and programme documentation. Responsibility for the provision of learner supports lies with the Director of Administration and Services. Pre programme commencement planning ensures that all required resources are in place for successful programme delivery.

The centre provides support for learners as follows:

- Programme Leader
- Pastoral and Guidance services
- Related services
- Learner Representation

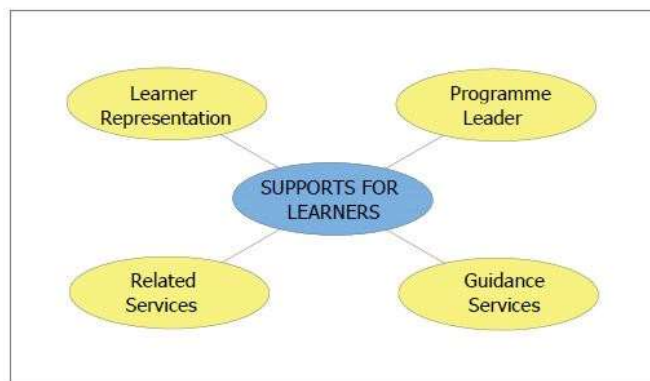


Figure 10: Supports for Learners

10.2 Programme Leader

Farm Ed Ltd promotes an 'open door' approach to communications with all stakeholders. Openness and transparency are key to the centre's ongoing development and improvement. A Programme Leader is appointed for each programme that acts as the 'first port of call' for learners on matters arising, whether they are programme, pastoral or guidance related. Learners are encouraged to build a relationship with their Programme Leader from programme commencement.

10.3 Pastoral and Guidance Services

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to providing a pastoral and guidance service to learners on request. All learners are advised on programme commencement how to request these services through their Tutor, the Programme Leader or the Director of Administration and Services.

Supports provided include:

- guidance on access transfer and progression routes
- guidance on opportunities post programme
- counselling – anxiety concerns, relationship concerns, emotional concerns, etc.

Where the required in-house services are not available, referral to an appropriate external service is arranged or advised.

10.4 Related Services

The following programme related supports and services are available to all learners:

- tutorials
- feedback on draft coursework pre submission for assessment
- library access
- online programme materials on the SDS/Dropbox

- up-to-date information bulletins - WhatsApp

Learners are provided with a confidential email address, moderated by the Head of Training and Development, which can be used to provide feedback on their experiences or to raise matters of concern. In addition, learners can avail of telephone and email support from their programme Tutor. Arrangements, in this regard, are advised on programme commencement.

10.5 Learner Representation

The centre encourages the selection of a learner representative from each programme to liaise with the Programme Leader on any matters arising. Programme representatives have the opportunity to attend the open session of their respective Programme Review meetings and meetings of the ETAMC. In general, the centre is committed to provide an efficient and timely turnaround on all queries. Contributions from student representatives are valued as key components in the centre meeting all its quality objectives.

10.6 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

The Director of Administration and Services has oversight of supports for learners at the centre. The ongoing monitoring of these supports is the responsibility of the Programme Leader, who actively seeks both formal and informal feedback from learners on their experiences, in this regard. Thus, satisfaction levels are gauged and suggestions emerge. The Programme Leader liaises with the Director of Administration and Services in affecting 'minor' operational matters for development and improvement. On occasions where there is need for considerable investment, or where proposed change may impact significantly on the centre's current policies or procedures, the responsible Director presents a case to the next scheduled meeting of the PDRC, the QAAC or the ETAMC, for discussion and approval.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- learner surveys/feedback
- learner representative feedback
- feedback summaries
- action plans for development and improvement
- agenda, minutes of associated meetings

Staff Involved

Director of Administration and Services, Tutors, Programme Leader, Learners.

See Appendix 3 for Learner Feedback Surveys (mid-term & end-of-programme).

11 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT

11.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to maintain, review and continuously develop its Management Information System (MIS). The system provides support for the collection and analysis of data that provides reliable and timely information for planning, operational decision-making, ongoing monitoring and review, and the provision of reports to certifying and regulatory bodies.

The centre's commitment to maintain a robust and secure Information and Data Management system is documented under the following headings:

- Management Information System
- Learner Records
- Data Analysis
- Data Protection
- Freedom of Information

11.2 Management Information System

The centre's MIS is acknowledged as a mission critical corporate asset and an area of high risk for the organisation. It is an MS Excel based system programmed to provide reports to inform timely and efficient decision-making. It maintains operational data for current use and historical review. It is network based and allows secure remote access.

Data is securely stored internally on industry standard systems, with plans to backup externally in the future. The server is secured using "Kaspersky Security 10 Server Edition". This product caters for Firewall, Internet Security access, general Anti-Virus and incorporates the Kaspersky's Anti-Ransomware product (Anti-Cryptor) to protect data and the network.

The system is monitored in operation on an ongoing basis. The Director of Administration and Services has responsibility for system monitoring, liaising with contracted IT support and reporting to the ETAMC on matters of concern. Updates and improvements are undertaken expeditiously. Budget allocation, to support the centre's MIS, is a matter of high priority.

Paper-based records are stored in lockable filing cabinets. Confidential records and documents e.g., examination papers, are stored in secure fireproof cabinets. All offices are locked when not in use and head office, in Cahir, has a monitored CCTV security system in place. Access to all data collected and stored is on a 'need to know' basis.

MIS Support

An IT support technician makes a weekly visit to the centre and is also available on a 24/7 call out basis. Thus, the network infrastructure, printers, computers, routers, Wi-Fi, etc. are maintained to maximum performance. Regular review and update of hardware and software system are a priority for the organisation.

11.3 Learner Records

Farm Ed Ltd collects a wide range of personal data in its business operation. In this regard, the following are noted:

- programme application process
- learner enrolment
- learner registration with certifying body
- learner assessment records & results

While the information provided is generally treated as confidential to the centre, occasionally it is necessary to pass on personal data to other bodies e.g., QQI. It may also be necessary, on occasions, to share data with employers or funding agencies.

11.4 Data Analysis

The centre's MIS system facilitates the generation of operational reports and performance indicators that assist in ongoing self-monitoring, decision making, forward planning, review and self-evaluation.

Key performance indicators include:

- assessment grades
- assessment results
- completion and dropout rates, certification rates
- enrolment and progression rates
- learner and other stakeholder experience ratings and feedback

MIS generated reports inform:

- self-monitoring, review and evaluation of programmes and services
- information to QQI and other agencies
- internal quality management and improvement
- strategic decision making by the CEO and the various committees

11.5 Data Protection

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to ensuring that all personal data and information retained by the organisation relating to staff, learners and other individuals is protected in line with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. This commitment extends to ensuring that data is maintained in a secure fashion and that it is accurate and complete.

Farm Ed Ltd recognises its obligations under the Acts as follows:

- obtain and process information fairly
- keep information only for one or more specified and lawful purposes
- process information only in ways compatible with the purposes for which it was provided initially
- keep information safe and secure
- keep information accurate and up-to-date
- ensure that information is adequate, relevant and not excessive
- retain information no longer than is necessary for the specified purpose or purposes
- give a copy of personal data to any individual, on request

11.6 Freedom of Information

Farm Ed Ltd recognises the right of students to gain access to information held on them by the centre under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003 and complies with any reasonable requests made under the Acts.

11.7 Data Retention

In its day-to-day operations Farm Ed Ltd collects and processes a significant quantity of personal data. Once the purpose for which data was originally collected no longer exists, all personal data and information is deleted in a secure manner.

Evidence of learner assessment is retained only until all opportunities for assessment appeals have expired.

Individuals who have subscribed to the centre's mailing list may remove themselves from this list at any time.

11.8 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

The monitoring and review of commitments and obligations relating to Information and Data Management systems is ongoing and the immediate responsibility of the Director of Administration and Services. As the MIS is a mission critical resource, recommendations for update, development and improvement are a matter of high priority.

The effectiveness of the centre's MIS in data capture and information processing, to support decision-making, is ongoing and aimed at optimising its full potential. The Director can address minor system changes that emerge, immediately. On occasions where there is need for considerable investment, or where proposed change may impact significantly on the centre's current policies, procedures or related legislation, the Director presents a case to the next scheduled meeting of the ETAMC, for discussion and approval.

Method

Feedback from service users identifies strengths and areas for development of the centre's MIS system. Observation of developments in the IT sector and emerging technologies also inform MIS improvement. In addition, the analysis of system performance is a key source of feedback.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- backup failures rates
- threats from viruses, etc.
- system downtime rates
- broadband downtime rates
- staff feedback
- learner feedback
- system reports
- IT support feedback
- timelines for producing reports
- delays in producing reports

Staff Involved

Director of Administration and Services, Admin Staff, IT technician/s, Director of Training and Development, Tutors.

12 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

12.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to communicate accurate, objective, up-to-date and easily accessible information on its education and training provision to stakeholders and to the public at large. This information includes details of programmes on offer, the centres commitment to quality assurance, the self evaluation reports of programmes and services and the centre's quality assurance policies and procedures.

The provision of public information and communication is a role engaged in by all staff. Its oversight and management is the responsibility of the CEO, in liaison with the Director of Administration and Services and the Director of Training and Development.

Farm Ed uses a range of media and opportunities to deliver public information including:

- website
- social media
- newsletter
- programme brochures and marketing materials
- open days
- participation at conferences and sector events

The centre's commitment to communicate and publish information on its activities is documented under the following headings:

- Public Information
- Learner Information

12.2 Public Information

Farm Ed Ltd publishes comprehensive programme details on its website, learner handbook and programme information booklets. In addition, the following public information is available on the centre's website or in hard copy on request:

- details of validated programmes and schedules
- details of other programmes offered
- details of 'protection of enrolled learners' (PEL) arrangements
- the centre's commitment to quality assured training provision
- annual quality report
- evaluation reports on programmes and services
- re-validation reports (as they come to hand)
- learner handbook
- tutor handbook

12.3 Learner Information

Farm Ed Ltd provides comprehensive information on the portfolio of programmes offered so that interested parties can make informed decisions. Details published include:

- programme title
- award title
- certifying body
- level on National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
- award credits
- programme content
- learning outcomes

- access/entry requirements
- transfer/progression opportunities
- application process
- programme delivery modes
- assessment requirements and techniques
- learner support available
- recognition of prior learning (RPL) for access to programme
- tutor details
- fees
- PEL
- anticipated learner commitment/work load

12.4 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

Method

The monitoring and review of the centre's provision of public information and external communications is the responsibility of the Director of Administration and Services. Informal monitoring, in this regard, is ongoing as staff engage, on a day-to-day basis, with learners, clients and the public at large. In addition, formal surveys issued to stakeholder seek feedback on the centre's public information provision.

The Director can address minor changes immediately. On occasions where proposed change may impact significantly on the centre's current policies, procedures or legal obligations, the Director presents a case to the next scheduled meeting of the ETAMC, for discussion and approval of an action plan, in line with the centre's commitment to ongoing development and improvement.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- minutes of centre meetings
- feedback from learners
- feedback from staff
- feedback from other stakeholders - focus groups
- feedback from the public – focus groups
- programme review reports
- learner handbook

Staff Involved

CEO, Centre Directors, Tutors, Admin Staff.

See Appendix 3 for Learner Feedback Surveys (draft)

13 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

13.1 Policy

It is the policy of Farm Ed Ltd to monitor, review and self evaluate its quality system, its programmes of education and training and related services to ensure all commitments to stakeholders and operational objectives are met. These reflective practices acknowledge and maintain existing good practice, identify areas for development and improvement and ensure all policies and procedures are fit for purpose.

Procedures in place, in this regard, (outlined in Figure 11 below) are as follows:

- Internal Self Monitoring
- Review
- Self Evaluation

13.2 Internal Monitoring

QA procedures and programme progress are internally self-monitored on an ongoing basis in line with the centre's commitment to continuous improvement.

The responsible Programme Leader actively seeks formal and informal feedback, on an ongoing basis, from learners and tutors to assess satisfaction levels and to provide suggestions for improvement.

There is regular review and analysis of interim performance indicators, see Section 11.4. Minor operational issue or concerns identified are actioned by the Programme Leader, in consultation with the Director of Training and Development, with the aim of maximising the learning experience, maintaining quality and standards, and achieving programme objectives.

The Programme Leader regularly monitors procedures to ensure required QA documentation is completed and retained. Ongoing internal self-monitoring serves as an 'early warning system' to alert and ensure all programme objectives are met and that learners have a quality experience in line with their expectations. Any gaps and non-compliances identified are immediately actioned to ensure all the centre's commitments to stakeholders are met.

Should internal monitoring alert to issues that might impact significantly on current policy and procedures, the responsible Director updates the next scheduled meeting of the PDRC, the QAAC or the ETAMC. The matter is discussed and approval is sought for an action plan for update, development and improvement.

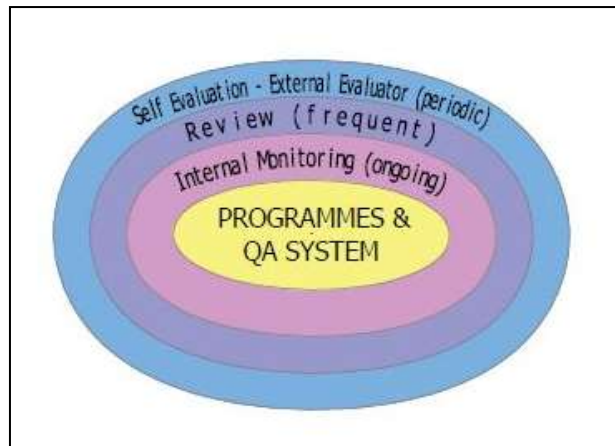


Figure 11: Monitoring, Review & Evaluation

13.3 Review

During pre-commencement planning the programme team schedules mid-programme and end-of-programme learner surveys. These are issued on schedule and reviewed by the Programme Leader. Tutors are also canvassed for informal feedback, on an ongoing basis, by the Programme Leader; programme progress, attendance, content, assessment, relevant QA processes, etc. Mid programme team meetings and end of programme review team meetings are also held, during which feedback from all stakeholders is considered.

End of programme performance indicators are analysed and benchmarked against other similar programme performances. Matters arising during mid-term surveys provide an opportunity to assess programme related risks early on. Areas of concern identified trigger appropriate intervention to ensure the achievement of all programme objectives. End-of-programme surveys acknowledge programme strengths and areas for development and improvement. They provide an agenda for development and improvement before the next scheduled iteration of the programme.

Learners are given the opportunity to provide feedback on:

- programme content
- delivery modes
- teaching and learning
- programme resources
- assessment
- information to learners
- learner supports
- accommodations around diversity and extenuating circumstances

Programme review is a team exercise that encourages reflective practice. It may result in some changes to delivery strategies, content and assessment scheduling before the next iteration. Any amendments made are always in line with the validated programme. All related documentation is updated and communicated to the relevant stakeholders. Programme review promotes accountability to stakeholders, gauges success against objectives and provides an agenda for development and improvement. All recommendations from programme reviews are presented to the PDRC for approval and reported on to the ETAMC.

13.4 Self Evaluation

Programmes and services offered by Farm Ed Ltd and its QA system are periodically formally self-evaluated (every 3 to 5 years), as required by the 2012 Act. This ensures the continued relevance of programmes, the effectiveness of the learning environment and the alignment of the centre's QA system against documented quality commitments and documented guidelines.

A thorough evaluation of this nature focuses on measuring the impact a programme has on learners and other stakeholders over time; employers, collaborative partners, Higher Education providers, the Agricultural Sector, etc. Good practice is acknowledged and maintained. Justifiable conclusions are drawn up and areas for development and improvement are identified and addressed.

The centre engages an independent external SME to peer review each self-evaluation undertaken. This appointee is recommended by the PDRC for engagement by the ETAMC.

Method

The PDRC establishes a working group to facilitate each self-evaluation. Membership of this group aims to include centre staff, representatives of employers and past learners, sector representatives, an Independent Evaluator, pedagogical and quality assurance expert/s.

The External Evaluator must be in a position to compare the quality of the target programme with that of similar programmes elsewhere, provide an informed view on the overall success of the programme on the basis of available data and contribute to the programme's development and improvement.

Surveys are prepared and issued to all stakeholders including past learners (learner tracking surveys). Focus groups of stakeholders are scheduled. External experts are engaged and performance indicators are analysed to inform the process. Telephone interviews of stakeholders may be undertaken. Programme reviews conducted in the period under consideration, are considered and also inform each self-evaluation.

Key stages in a Self-Evaluation:

- agree methodology and timelines with the external evaluator
- engage stakeholders
- analyse feedback
- document and justify conclusion
- document recommendations and action plan
- publish findings

All recommendations from a programme's self-evaluations are presented to the PDRC for approval and reported on to the ETAMC, prior to submission to QQI and publication. A Self-Evaluation Report and Action Plan for development and improvement are also prepared and published on the centre's website.

13.4.1 External Evaluator

Each External Evaluator appointed, by the ETAMC, must be independent of the target programme and be in a position to:

- offer objective comparisons with similar programmes available elsewhere
- offer support, recognition and positive suggestions for improvement and development.

Criteria for appointment include:

- expertise in education, training or industry/service sector in the broad subject area of the programme being evaluated
- experience in national and/or international certification systems
- experience in one or more of the following:
 - programme design
 - programme delivery
 - programme evaluation
 - cross moderation of standards
 - external verification of standards

auditing/monitoring of quality systems

Before commencing their role, an External Evaluator is briefed on the centre's quality assurance system and details of the target programme. The Programme Leader assists the External Evaluator throughout the process.

13.5 Monitoring Evidence of Implementation

Monitoring Procedures

The outcomes of ongoing monitoring are normally addressed at operational level by the Programme Leader in liaison with the Director of Training and Development. The responsible Director presents matters of greater significance to the ETAMC, the PDRC or the QAAC for consideration and approval.

Programme Review and Evaluations

All programme reviews and programme self evaluations are considered by the PDRC. Where there is significant policy change proposed or investment required the responsible Director presents a case to the ETAMC for consideration.

Evidence for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and related procedures includes:

- working group membership
- certification rates period on period
- grade rates period on period
- stakeholder feedback
- summary of stakeholder feedback
- stakeholder satisfaction ratings
- programme reviews
- complaints
- assessment appeals
- assessment appeals upheld
- sector feedback
- self-evaluation report, recommendations, action plan
- agenda, minutes of related meetings

Staff Involved

Director of Training and Development, Tutors, Director of Quality and Assessment, Director of Administration and Services, Programme Leaders, Stakeholder Representatives, External Experts, External Evaluator.

14 OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

14.1 Policy

This Policy area does not apply to Farm Ed Ltd currently, as the centre does not plan to engage other parties in the delivery of any of its programmes.

QA policies and procedures will be updated if circumstance change .

14.2 Peer relationships with the broader education and training community

14.3 External Partnerships and Second Providers

14.4 Expert Panellists, examiners, and authenticators

Appointment of Independent External Expertise to Governance Committees

See Section 2.11

Role and Criteria for Appointment of External Authenticator/Moderator (Assessment)

See Section 9.3.1 and 9.3.2

Role and Criteria for Appointment of External Evaluator (Self Evaluation)

See Section 13.6

15 Protection of Enrolled Learners

15.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd is committed to ensuring appropriate Protection of Enrolled Learners arrangements are in place.

In this regard, Learner Protection insurance is currently in place with O'Driscoll O'Neill Insurance, 17/18 Herbert Place, Dublin 2, to cover legal obligations to refund student fees.

16 COVID-19 CONTINGENCY PLAN

16.1 Policy

Farm Ed Ltd, in addressing the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, commits to protect the health, safety and welfare of staff and learners while making every effort to ensure learner expectations are met and programme objectives and standards are achieved.

The centre aims to take a risk based approach by assessing the broader hazards and impacts, within the framework of prevailing public health and government guidelines. Farm Ed commits to suspend or partly suspend operations, in line with the current guidelines, and will only recommence programme delivery when it is safe to do so.

Programme delivery will, at all times, be underpinned by the following principles:

- Ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of the facilities community, including staff, learners and their families and the wider community to the greatest degree possible.
- Engaging with stakeholders within the facility and beyond to build confidence within the community about returning to learning.
- Ensuring all hygiene guidelines are actioned and adhered to.
- Maintaining channels of communications with learners and staff on the current status of Covid-19 contingency arrangements at the centre.

REFERENCES

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QQI Core Validation Policy and Criteria for Education and Training Programmes
Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes Leading to QQI Awards – Application Guide
European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF)
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