Institute of Technology Sligo
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA SLIGEACH

PROGRAMME VALIDATION REPORT

DATE OF EVALUATION   30th May 2016

PROGRAMME EVALUATED   Bachelor of Science in Agri-Food Science L7 (abinitio)
Bachelor of Science in Agri-Food Science L8 (abinitio)

Unique Programme reference Number PRN: SG_SAGRI_B07
SG_SAGRI_H08

Panel of Assessors

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Declaration regarding any conflicts of interest:

The members of the Panel signed a form confirming that they did not have any conflict of interest.

Meeting with School Management

Attendees:
Registrar: Colin McLean
Head of School: Dr Jerry Bird
Head of Department: Dr Billy Fitzgerald
Programme Coordinators: Cait Coyle
Programme Development: Dr Uma Tiwari

The Panel chair welcomed the management team and introductions were made.

The panel asked the management team to explain the rationale behind the introduction of this programme and how this would be placed considering other Institutes such as LyIT and St Angela's already have programmes offerings in this area. The Registrar responded that within the West-Northwest cluster there was a mechanism whereby each Institution informs each other of the programmes on offer. The Head of School pointed out that although there are courses in this space they do not have a strong output of graduates and the focus of this course is firmly based on food security, traceability, quality assurance and waste management. There had been considerable

consultation with industry and the programme was critical to the regeneration of the region.

The panel enquired about the level of demand. The management team concluded that once the course was validated they would embark on a marketing campaign. The predicted intake would be 20-24 students. There is also a possibility of advanced entry into Year 2 from the Institute's current Science programmes and possibly from Further Education Colleges for students holding a cognate FETAC Level 6 qualification. The adjacent FE College will be starting an Food Science and Nutrition course in September 2016.

The panel commented on the possibility of a Level 6 offering or exit award. The management team where receptive to the suggestion of a Level 6 exit award. The programme team explained that there were 14 new modules in total in the Level 8 programme but that most of the modules common with other programmes are in Years 1 and 2.

The Head of School presented the new assessment matrix for the 30 credit work placement module. The panel was in favour of this assessment matrix rather than the initially planned Pass/Fail model. It would also give the opportunity to have students select two elective modules, to be delivered online, while on placement. Staff is allocated hours for managing placements. If a student is unable to find a placement, they have an option of shadowing a lecturer during a research project.

The panel asked about the lack of Business modules in the curriculum. They felt it was critical for graduates to possess transferable skills such as leadership and management skills. This would enable graduates to move in to production management and quality assurance more seamlessly. It is fundamental for many roles to be able to interact with people and for progression in to a leadership role. The industry currently would spend considerable time and expense to train new graduates in this area. The programme team answered that teamwork and types of communication were incorporated in the Communication module but an emphasis on team work and presentation skills would also be part of many other modules. They pointed out that this could be included as part of an online module for students while on work placement.

One panel member asked for more information on the employment opportunities for the agricultural aspect of the programme. The management team responded that subjects such as Plant and Animal Science, Livestock Management and Crop Production are important modules from the agricultural aspect and the programme would give students a good understanding of the primary production environment, which set them apart from the students from traditional agricultural scientist programmes. The panel asked about the resources and the expertise available in offering these subjects. The Head of School responded that provision was made for new resources from year two onwards as well as Teagasc providing contacts for staff and students to visit selected farms.

The Head of Department presented the new assessment matrix for the 30 credit work placement module. The panel was in favour of this assessment matrix rather than the initially planned Pass/Fail model. It would also give the opportunity to students to undertake two modules, to be delivered online, while on placement. This will be of benefit to prepare them for continuous professional development/ life-long learning in their future careers. Staff are given specific allocation of hours for managing placements. If a placement cannot be found for a student an alternative arrangement of shadowing a research student within the programmes or the student undertaking supervised project work can be arranged.

Meeting with the programme development team

Attendees:

Billy Fitzgerald	Ciaran Kearins (Teagasc)
James Moran	John Gaynor
Louise Walsh	Carmel Moran
Steve Tonry	Guy Marsden
Annmarie Duddy	Edel Costello
Lil Rudden	Aideen Considine
Margaret Savage	Michael Broaders
Padraig McGourty	Thomas Smyth
Cait Coyle	Uma Tiwari

The Panel chair welcomed the additional staff and introductions were made.

The panel expressed their approval with the involvement of Teagasc and asked about the strategy for implementing the agricultural modules. The Teagasc spokesperson explained that they had been involved and consulted during the development phase of the programme. Their role would be to provide a link to the primary producers as it is crucial for the graduates to understand the link back to the producers. Teagasc involvement would evolve with time. The programme team highlighted the expertise already available among Institute staff.

The panel asked if the graduates would have expertise in HACCP and Unit Operation as it was not visible in the programme modules. The programme team explained that these concepts are covered in modules such as Microbiology, Food Processing, Food Science and Food Legislation.

The question of statistics in modules was raised by the panel as it seemed absent from the approved course schedule. The programme team explained that it was introduced in the module Research Methods, but they would be open to include it further as part of the Research Methods' workshops. The Information Technology modules introduce students to MS Access and MS Excel for data management, and descriptive analysis.

Students also get an opportunity to apply this in a laboratory setting as part of the Analytical Techniques and Food Science modules.

The requirement for more emphasis on business and management in the programme was brought up again. The programme team highlighted the Project Management module in Semester 8 and Agri-Business and Economics in semester 7. The panel suggested it was important to include business subjects earlier in the Programme, ideally prior to the Work Placement. They felt that the Introduction to Marketing module could be replaced with a comprehensive Business Management and Leadership module. It was decided that the programme team would reflect on how this could be achieved.

The panel discussed the work placement module and expressed the need for employers to have a better understanding of what learning outcomes students should achieve while on placement. The provision of a comprehensive guideline document for employers was recommended

The panel was pleased to see a large percentage of CA in the assessment matrix but queried the external examiners role. The Head of Department explained that a larger percentage of CA has been introduced since the last Programmatic Review and that all 100% CA modules are reviewed by the external examiners.

One panel member queried the need for the module Diversity of Life and what contribution it made to programme. The programme team defended the inclusion of this module by explaining the importance of understanding how life forms interact and their evolutionary relationships. It could also become relevant if the food industry go down the route of introducing lower life forms as a food source.

The panel asked about the lack of practical components showing in the approved course schedule. The programme team reassured the panel that most modules have a 50% Practical element integrated in to the continuous assessment. They acknowledged that this should be manually updated in the Approved Course Schedule to show the percentage of marks for the Practical element.

The panel asked about the Research Project and what areas the student could choose. The programme team said students had to decide on a project based in the Agri-Food area. The staff would decide and formulate a project with each student and assign the appropriate lecturer. The projects could be influenced and designed based on current trends in employment and active research projects in the Institute.

It was suggested to the programme team to include further references to technology as this is an integral part of food production now and in the future. Students are introduced to new and emerging technologies as part of the Food Science module but the panel believed it should be more explicitly stated.
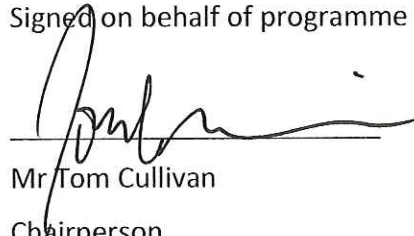
Summary of Findings
The Panel recommends to Academic Council that it approve the Programme.

Panel Recommendations

1. That advances in technology applied to the agri-food industry be explicit in the strategic aims and objectives of the programme.
2. That business, leadership management skills and statistics have an early and visible presence in the curriculum.
3. The Panel recommend that the Institute considers the inclusion of a Level 6 exit award, if feasible.
4. That procedural documents for the conduct of work placement be reviewed as to make them of optimum guidance to the host employers.
5. The percentage of the practical element in modules to be updated and made explicit in the approved course schedule for the benefit of students.

Signed on behalf of programme validation Panel

Mr Tom Cullivan

Chairperson

Date: 30 May 2016

Ms Annica Rasmark

Recording Secretary

Date: 30 May 2016