



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes leading to QQI Awards

Report of the Quality and Capacity Evaluation Panel

Stage 1

Assessment of Capacity and Approval of QA Procedures

Part 1 Details of applicant provider and its proposed education and training provision

1.1 Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Farm Advisory Services Ltd
Address:	The Granary Building, Cahir, Co. Tipperary
Date of Application:	31 January 2017
Date of resubmission of application:	N/A
Date of evaluation:	05 April 2017
Date of site visit (if applicable):	N/A
Date of recommendation to the Approvals and Reviews Committee:	10 May 2017



1.2 Profile of applicant provider

Farm Advisory Services, is a limited company, with one beneficial owner; the Chief Executive Officer. It was established in 2012 as a private training, planning and advisory service to the agricultural sector. The panel was informed that the clients of Farm Advisory Services include full-time and part-time farmers in the dairy, beef and tillage sectors. The organisation grew by addressing the shortfall in the provision of advisory, planning and training services arising from the public-sector moratorium on recruitment that was experienced by Teagasc. It currently employs 14 full-time staff, subject matter-experts, agricultural advisors, agricultural technicians and office staff. It also has access to 6 additional subject-matter experts that it engages with during peak periods. In the context of its application, it is important to establish that Teagasc has engaged directly with Farm Advisory Services to facilitate its agriculture and farming related education and training programmes, which lead to QQI awards. As a result, Farm Advisory Services has contributed to the delivery of Teagasc programmes leading to the Agriculture Level 5 and Level 6 QQI awards, at fourteen different locations throughout Ireland. Following from this engagement, Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) engaged Farm Advisory Services to facilitate the delivery of its agriculture programmes leading to QQI awards; again, this was done under the agreed quality assurance arrangements of GRETB and extended delivery by Farm Advisory Services to two further locations.

1.3 Proposed education and training provision

NFQ Level	Award Class	QQI Award / Proposed Programme Title
5	Major	Agriculture
6	Special Purpose	Farming



Part 2 The Quality and Capacity Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Mr Jack O’Herlihy	Chair	Retired Head of Development, Letterkenny Institute of Technology: areas of expertise QA and Expert Panel Evaluation
Mr Keith Brumfitt	Quality Assurance in Further Education	Education and Training Consultant to the UK Government and the European Commission
Ms Clodagh Beare	Quality Assurance in Further Education	Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB)
Mr Frank Murphy	Design, delivery and quality assurance of agriculture and farming qualifications	Curriculum Development & Standards Manager, Teagasc Kildalton College
Other attendees		
Name	Role	Organisation
Mr Walter Balfe	Observer	Head of Provider Approval, QQI
Dr Trish O’Brien	Independent Secretary	O’BRIEN / Governance Design

Part 3 Findings of the Panel

3.1 Summary Findings

Overall, the panel was of the view that the quality assurance policies and procedures and other supporting information provided by Farm Advisory Services was well-documented and structured. It also considered that the representatives of Farm Advisory Services presented well on the organisation and its objectives, and on how it currently operates and intends developing its education and training provision. The panel also noted that the representatives of Farm Advisory Services displayed significant engagement and ownership with the material they presented. The panel’s finding is that, subject to meeting the following conditions, it will recommend that the quality assurance policies and procedures of Farm Advisory Services be approved; this will enable the provider to advance to the second stage of the initial access to programme validation process. It is important to note that the quality assurance policies and procedures of Farm Advisory Services have been reviewed in the context of a traditional



delivery setting only, i.e., the scope of review did not incorporate blended or distance learning, neither of which were included in the application.

3.2 Conditions

3.2.1 Farm Advisory Services is required to carry out a pilot delivery phase prior to any expansion of its delivery

If it is successful in its application for programme validation by QQI, Farm Advisory Services indicated to the panel that it intends delivering these programmes on a pilot basis initially. The panel has set as a condition that Farm Advisory Services will adhere to this proposed approach. In setting this condition, the panel clarifies the following:

- The pilot delivery of programmes validated will take place in Cahir, Co Tipperary;
- Systematic monitoring, evaluation and review should be undertaken in parallel with the delivery of the programmes;
- A report of the findings resulting from the monitoring, evaluation and review, and any improvements identified, should be submitted to an appropriate independent quality assurance advisor for review and contribution;
- The outcomes of the pilot process, including the findings of Farm Advisory Services and of the independent quality assurance advisor selected, and an implementation plan for any improvements identified as required, should be submitted to QQI for noting purposes;
- Having adhered to this pilot process, Farm Advisory Services is then authorised to extend the scope of its provision to additional venues.

3.2.2 Farm Advisory Services is required to clarify and restrict its entry requirements

The panel provides the following elaboration and clarification regarding this condition:

- The panel requires that Farm Advisory Services produces a detailed policy on admission to its programmes and that it elaborates on this policy through clear procedures. This documentation should include supports in place for the admission of learners with learning or physical support requirements;



- In addition, the panel is of the view that Farm Advisory Services does not currently have the expertise or experience to extend entry to its programmes to individuals requiring the recognition of prior certified learning acquired elsewhere, or prior experiential learning. As a result, the panel requires that Farm Advisory Services restricts admission to learners who hold a relevant qualification at the level immediately below or at the same level of the qualification they are seeking to attain.

3.2.3 Farm Advisory Services is required to elaborate upon its assessment procedures

Having reviewed the documentation provided by Farm Advisory Services, and met with its representatives, the panel has identified the following areas that require elaboration in its assessment procedures:

- The policy and procedures in place for dealing with repeat assessments, including the repeat of the skills-based assessment requirements of the programmes;
- The policy and procedures in place for providing reasonable assessment supports for learners in general, and those with learning and physical support requirements;
- The criteria that will be applied by Farm Advisory Services when selecting external authenticators;
- The grounds upon which a learner can appeal an assessment result, and how appeals are managed through the governance system.

3.3 Recommendations

3.3.1 Farm Advisory Services should develop clear criteria for recruitment, promotion, and development of staff

The panel believes that Farm Advisory Services as a developing organisation would benefit from having clear criteria and processes in place for staff recruitment and promotion, and for their continuous development whilst in the employ of the organisation. The panel also recommends that detailed role specifications be developed which articulate the attributes and skills required to fulfil specific roles.



3.3.2 Farm Advisory Services should seek to benchmark itself against other providers

Currently Farm Advisory Services is working collaboratively with Teagasc and with the GRETB; both providers of agriculture and farming programmes. If Farm Advisory Services is successful in its application for validation of its own programmes in these areas, the panel recommends that it should continue to seek to benchmark itself against other providers. The utilisation of experienced external authenticators and other external expertise can aid this process.

3.3.3 Farm Advisory Services should continue to develop its governance systems

During the panel discussion with Farm Advisory Services, it was clear that the organisation has two quite distinct areas of its business that require separate governance arrangements but could report to the same overarching Board. The panel encourages Farm Advisory Services to continue thinking this construct through, as a robust governance system could strategically enable the CEO to maintain an effective overview of the organisation without having to be involved in decision-making for all management activities.

3.3.4 Farm Advisory Services should consider how to strengthen its oversight of learner assessment outcomes

The panel recommends that Farm Advisory Services should consider how it can strengthen the processes it has in place to ensure the quality and consistency of assessment outcomes. Whilst this is important in any context, it is particularly pertinent where a provider intends delivering and assessing programmes in more than one location.

3.4 Recommendation of the panel to the Approvals and Reviews Committee of QQI

The panel has identified some conditions above, which Farm Advisory Services is required to address. When Farm Advisory Services has addressed these conditions, it is required to provide this evidence to the panel. In the case of condition 3.2.1., this can be satisfied at this point by confirmation by Farm Advisory Services that it agrees to the formulation of the condition made by the panel. Conditions 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 will require the submission of documentation. If the



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panel is satisfied that its conditions have been met¹, it will recommend to the QQI Approval and Reviews Committee that it approves the draft quality assurance procedures of Farm Advisory Services. Subject to the agreement of the Approval and Reviews Committee to this recommendation, Farm Advisory Services will be eligible to proceed to Stage 2 of the initial access to programme validation process.

¹ This will be established via an incorporeal meeting of the panel on receipt of the required documentation.



Part 4 Evaluation of the capacity of the applicant to provide quality education and training to learners

4.1 Legal and compliance requirements:

- 4.1.1(a) **Criterion:** *Is the applicant an established Legal Entity who has Education and/or Training as a Principal Function?*
- 4.1.2(a) **Criterion:** *Is the legal entity established in the European Union and does it have a substantial presence in Ireland?*
- 4.1.3(a) **Criterion:** *Are any dependencies, collaborations, obligations, parent organisations, and subsidiaries clearly specified?*
- 4.1.4(a) **Criterion:** *Are any third-party relationships and partnerships compatible with the scope of access sought?*
- 4.1.5(a) **Criterion:** *Are the applicable regulations and legislation complied with in all jurisdictions where it operates?*
- 4.1.6(a) **Criterion:** *Is the applicant in good standing in the qualifications systems and education and training systems in any countries where it operates (or where its parents or subsidiaries operate) or enrolls learners, or where it has arrangements with awarding bodies, quality assurance agencies, qualifications authorities, ministries of education and training, professional bodies and regulators.*

Findings:

Does the provider's application provide evidence that these criteria have been met?

Farm Advisory Services has addressed the criteria above in its application form, providing evidence of its legal status as a registered limited company based in Ireland without subsidiaries. It has confirmed its compliance with applicable legislation and regulations. There is no evidence to suggest that Farm Advisory Services is not in good standing in its dealing with parties related to education and training in Ireland. Its primary relationships nationally are with Teagasc, and GRETB; in both cases, it contributes to the delivery of their agriculture programmes.

Where criteria are not met, please identify and state the reason(s) why.

The panel is satisfied that these criteria have been met.



4.2 Resource, governance and structural requirements:

- 4.2.1(a) **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a sufficient resource base and is it stable and in good financial standing?*
- 4.2.2(a) **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a reasonable business case for sustainable provision?*
- 4.2.3(a) **Criterion:** *Are fit-for-purpose governance, management and decision making structures in place?*
- 4.2.4(a) **Criterion:** *Are there arrangements in place for providing required information to QQI?*

Findings:

Does the provider's application provide evidence that these criteria have been met?

Farm Advisory Services was founded in 2012 and is funded from private resources. It submitted financial statements, an up-to-date tax clearance certificate, and accounts, in support of its claim of financial stability. The organisation has confirmed that it has sufficient resources to deliver the programmes it is proposing to provide, it has also provided a reasonable business case for the market available to engage with its proposed programmes. Farm Advisory Services has proposed a governance structure for the oversight of its quality management. The panel has made some recommendations with regards to the governance of Farm Advisory Services.

In terms of its IT systems, Farm Advisory Services is operating an MS Excel based system capable of providing reports to inform decision-making. The provider's application states that it maintains operational data for current use and historical review and that it is network-based and allows secure remote access. The MIS system is currently generating reports to provide information to QQI and other agencies. There is no evidence to suggest that Farm Advisory Services would not be capable of providing required information to QQI.

Where criteria are not met, please identify and state the reason(s) why.

As stated in its recommendations, the panel encourages Farm Advisory Services to review its governance arrangements, but is satisfied overall that these criteria have been met.

4.3 Programme development and provision requirements:

- 4.3.1(a) **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have experience and a track record in providing education and training programmes?*
- 4.3.2(a) **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have a fit-for-purpose and stable complement of education and training staff?*



- 4.3.3(a) **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have the capacity to comply with the standard conditions for validation specified in Section 45(3) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act (2012) (the Act)?*
- 4.3.4(a) **Criterion:** *Does the applicant have the fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and resources to meet the requirements of the provision proposed in place?*
- 4.3.5(a) **Criterion:** *Are there access, transfer and progression arrangements that meet QQI's criteria for approval in place?*
- 4.3.6(a) **Criterion:** *Are structures and resources to underpin fair and consistent assessment of learners in place?*
- 4.3.7(a) **Criterion:** *Are arrangements for the protection of enrolled learners to meet the statutory obligations in place (where applicable)?*

Findings:***Does the provider's application provide evidence that these criteria have been met?***

The experience of Farm Advisory Services in delivering programmes on behalf of Teagasc and GRETB provides clear evidence of a relevant track-record. It has also developed a full-time and part-time staff base appropriate to the delivery and administration of these programmes. At its centre in Cahir, Co Tipperary, Farm Advisory Services has access to a farm owned by the Chief Executive, which plays a crucial role in enabling it to carry out skills-based training and assessments.

Access, transfer and progression arrangements are included in the provider's Draft QA Manual and how it deals with Recognition of Prior Learning was discussed. The panel was not satisfied that the admissions policy, procedures and requirements of Farm Advisory Services were sufficiently detailed or that its proposed admissions requirements were appropriately restrictive. This has led to a condition being placed by the panel.

The panel meeting spent some time focussing on assessment arrangements currently in place and planned by Farm Advisory Services. Whilst it was clear that Farm Advisory Services had given some detailed thought to the internal and external quality assurance of this area, the panel has included a condition regarding the elaboration of a number of the provider's assessment procedures.

The provider's intentions in terms of meeting its obligations for the protection of enrolled learners were not discussed at the panel meeting, however, it is clear from its application form that it intends establishing refund arrangements.

Where criteria are not met, please identify and state the reason(s) why.

Criteria 4.3.5 (a) and 4.3.6 (a) are both subject to conditions placed by the panel. These points feature again below, in sections 3 (programmes of education and training) and 6 (assessment of learners). As a result of these findings, these criteria have not been met at this time.



4.4 Evaluation of capacity to provide the proposed education and training provision - Overall finding:

The panel is confident in the expertise and experience of Farm Advisory Services in the delivery of agriculture and farming programmes; this was very much in evidence during the panel's meeting with the provider. The panel was also impressed with the content and structure of the policies and procedures submitted. The panel is satisfied that Farm Advisory Services, subject to addressing conditions articulated in Part 6, has sufficient capacity to deem it ready to move to Stage II of the process for initial access to programme validation.



Part 5 Evaluation of draft QA Procedures submitted by Farm Advisory Services

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Farm Advisory Services' quality assurance procedures against QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016). This section of the report follows the structure and referencing of the guidelines.

1 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY

Panel findings

Farm Advisory Services is a developing organisation with two quite distinct service areas. It provides farm planning and advisory services to a very comprehensive client base and it also delivers agriculture and farming programmes. Whilst a governance structure for its education and training services was proposed, it appears that an overall corporate governance structure has not yet been developed. The Chief Executive is currently proposing to be a member of all the committees overseeing its education and training provision. The panel also noted that a number of the same people are on all committees, but acknowledges that this is difficult to avoid in a relatively small organisation. The provider informed the panel that it intends including external representation on certain committees to assist in keeping decision-making at the appropriate level and separating the development and approval roles; a key requirement of QQI.

The panel considers that Farm Advisory Services would strategically benefit as an organisation if it were to take a more comprehensive approach to its governance. It also believes that this would protect its education and training services from any undue influence from its planning and advisory services. In this respect, it recommends that it looks at some form of overarching Board governance, into which two tracks of governance over its planning and advisory services, and its education and training services would report. This would provide the CEO with the information and guidance he requires to direct the organisation. It would also provide those managing the organisation with the space they require to fulfil their functions on a more explicitly devolved basis.

2 DOCUMENTED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel findings

QQI's *Core Statutory QA Guidelines* associate the 'documented approach to quality assurance' with decisions made by the provider regarding how procedures are developed; the types of information they



will contain; and how appropriate they are to their environment and context. The guidelines also expect a comprehensive approach to documentation, with responsibilities and accountability clearly identified.

The panel was impressed with the presentation and structure of the quality assurance policies and procedures submitted by Farm Advisory Services. It also considered that, save for the matters identified in the conditions and recommendations, they were appropriately comprehensive and detailed. The panel also noted that the representatives of Farm Advisory Services who attended the panel meeting, had clearly engaged in some detail with the formulation of the quality assurance policies and procedures and displayed significant ownership of the documentation. Farm Advisory Services stated that in developing the documentation it had a better sense of itself as an organisation delivering quality programmes and sharing the associated accountability and responsibilities.

The areas within the submitted policies and procedures requiring attention were noted during the discussion and are specified in the conditions and recommendations. Other observations, whilst not elevated to conditions or recommendations, are also referenced throughout Part 5 for the consideration of the provider.

3 PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Panel findings:

The procedures provided by Farm Advisory Services clearly identify how proposals for new programme development will be managed by the proposed governance structure; those attending the panel meeting also understood how new programme proposals would be initiated and managed through their decision-making structures. Farm Advisory Services has access to reasonably significant and experienced full-time and part-time subject-matter experts who will be utilised for programme development purposes. The programme development process is managed by a Programme Development Group and overseen by the Director of Education and Training. Farm Advisory Services also provided evidence in its documentation and during the panel meeting that it is clear on the requirements, processes and benefits associated with programme monitoring and periodic review.

The panel has placed a condition on Farm Advisory Services admissions requirements, policies and procedures. It is of the view that the provider is not currently sufficiently expert or experienced in the recognition of prior certified or experiential learning to admit learners on this basis. As a result, the panel is requiring that a clear admissions policy is developed which enables admission based on the learner having acquired a relevant qualification below or at the same level of the National Framework of Qualifications to that of the qualification they wish to pursue.

**4 STAFF RECRUITMENT, MANAGEMENT, AND DEVELOPMENT****Panel findings:**

The panel noted the policies and procedures submitted by Farm Advisory Services to support its staff recruitment, management, and development. The panel recommends that the organisation consider in further detail role specifications to support its recruitment and promotion activities. These specifications should consider not only the responsibilities to be undertaken but also the associated attributes and skills required. Whilst acknowledging the staff development opportunities described in its quality assurance policies and procedures, the panel considers that Farm Advisory Services should develop a more systematic approach to supporting continuous professional development.

The Farm Advisory Services representatives that attended the panel meeting spoke of a collegial approach to developing the organisation's quality assurance policies and procedures. It appears evident that the opportunity was taken in developing this documentation, to encourage collaboration and joint-discussion regarding the on-going development of Farm Advisory Services. That collegial approach was also evident in the good-natured engagement of the organisation's representatives during the panel meeting.

5 TEACHING AND LEARNING**Panel findings:**

It was evident to the panel that Farm Advisory Services has extensive expertise and experience in delivering agriculture and farming programmes to learners. The representatives attending the panel meeting also conveyed a clear interest in providing a suitable and quality assured teaching and learning environment. The panel did note an absence in this material, however, of the pedagogic approach adopted by Farm Advisory Services and to a clear description of how a student-centred approach to learning is implemented. This is something that the provider may benefit from articulating further for itself and for its learners.

The proposal of Farm Advisory Services to deliver the programmes it intends seeking validation for on a pilot basis initially, and to review the teaching and learning experience prior to expanding that delivery, is supported and endorsed by the panel. Farm Advisory Services has a farm in Cahir owned by its Chief Executive and available to it to undertake the delivery and assessment of the practical and skills-based aspects of its agriculture and farming programmes.



The control over this environment is particularly important in the context of the health and safety concerns. If the provider is at the point whereby it is expanding its delivery model regionally and requires the utilisation of other farming facilities, the implementation of its described quality assurance procedures for selecting these farms, and delivering from them, will be critical.

The provider's quality assurance procedures emphasise the role of the Programme Leader, in collaboration with the Director of Training and Development, in monitoring programme delivery.

6 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Panel findings:

The panel noted the assessment policies and procedures submitted by Farm Advisory Services which are seeking to address the quality of theoretical and skills-based assessment. It is envisaged that the Programme Development Group will design the assessments associated with the programme and its modules in parallel with its design. The intention of Farm Advisory Services to include the external authenticator at an early stage of its assessment design was endorsed by the panel. The provider also clarified for the panel that all learners will be assessed individually against each skill requirement, and that a separation will be kept between the demonstrator and assessor of skills training.

Significant attention is given in the provider's quality assurance policies and procedures to the quality of assessment results, and the roles of the internal verifier and external authenticator. They also describe how the consistency of assessment taking place in more than one location can be assured; this includes the assignment of a lead tutor who will be responsible for assessment across all locations and a lead assessor for skills demonstrations. Should Farm Advisory Services be successful in attaining programme validation, the panel has placed a condition on the expansion of its provision pending the completion of a pilot delivery process. However, it is critically important that the provider continues to consider how it can safeguard the quality of delivery and assessment that is taking place across distance and time. It is important to note that the experience of Farm Advisory Services in setting examination papers, engaging with internal verification processes and undertaking other assessment related tasks



for both Teagasc and GRETB, significantly influenced the assessment procedures submitted by Farm Advisory Services.

During its meeting the panel identified several areas in the assessment policies and procedures of Farm Advisory Services which could be more comprehensive. It has placed a condition on those areas being addressed. The condition states the importance of the provider clearly articulating for itself, and for learners, the provisions in place for repeating assessments (particularly skills-based assessments), and the assessment supports that can be provided for learners with physical support requirements (again, particularly in terms of skills-based assessments). The panel requires Farm Advisory Services to articulate the criteria it will apply to identifying external authenticators; a crucial role that will significantly contribute to the credibility of the organisation. The provider is also required to identify the grounds upon which learners can apply to appeal the outcome of an assessment. Finally, the panel has recommended that Farm Advisory Services should consider how it can strengthen the oversight processes it has in place to ensure the quality and consistency of assessment outcomes.

7 SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS

Panel findings:

During the panel meeting with Farm Advisory Services, its representatives emphasised the commitment of the organisation to supporting learners participating on its programmes. A Programme Leader is appointed for each programme and is the first point of contact if a learner requires programme, pastoral or other guidance support.

The representatives of Farm Advisory Services described a proactive approach to the provision of supports to learners; particularly in terms of programme-related supports. The panel considers that the limit of these supports must also be evident to learners and this includes its condition regarding clarity around the repeat of assessments. Whilst not discussed during the meeting, the panel noted during its own discussion the importance of engaging qualified counselling supports when required; the provision of counselling supports was clear in the procedures submitted, but their source was not stated.

**8 INFORMATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT****Panel findings:**

Farm Advisory Services describes its management information systems as a mission critical corporate asset. It is an MS Excel based system that provides reports to inform decision-making. It maintains operational data for current use and historical review. The system is network-based and secure remote access is enabled. The Director of Administration and Services has responsibility for monitoring the system and reporting issues or concerns arising. An IT technician visits the premises routinely and is available on an on-call basis. The procedures of Farm Advisory Services also indicate how paper-based records are stored and confidential records maintained.

The utilisation of data for quality monitoring and review purposes is articulated in the procedures and was described by the representatives of Farm Advisory Services during the panel meeting. The data derived through reports is used to monitor learner progression and to identify where additional supports may be required. It appears that data is also being used by the organisation to inform its strategic decision-making and to assist in benchmarking itself against other organisations.

In terms of confidentiality of information, the panel had some observations which were raised during the panel's own deliberations rather than with the provider. It noted that PPS numbers are being requested on some forms and that student feedback forms appear not to be anonymised i.e., they request the learner's name. There is also a reference to data being shared with employers on occasion, although the circumstances that would warrant learner data being provided to a third-party by the organisation, rather than directly by the individual, are not clear. The panel suggests that Farm Advisory Services should consider the appropriateness of these practices.

**9 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION****Panel findings:**

Farm Advisory Services provides assurances in its quality assurance policies and procedures that it will provide comprehensive information for learners regarding its programmes and in a range of formats i.e., web, learner handbook and programme information booklets. Included in the role of Director of Administration and Services is the monitoring of this information provision. Farm Advisory Services also undertakes to publish quality assurance evaluation reports and revalidation reports as they become available.

10 OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING**Panel findings:**

Farm Advisory Services is currently delivering agriculture and farming programmes on behalf of both Teagasc and GRETB. It has not disclosed that it is engaged with any other external parties.

The importance of the role of the external authenticator was emphasised during the panel meeting and was also acknowledged by Farm Advisory Services as a very important contributor to the quality and credibility of the organisation. As part of its condition on assessment, the panel requires that Farm Advisory Services documents the criteria that it will have regard to when appointing an external authenticator.

11 SELF-EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW**Panel findings:**

Farm Advisory Services includes self-evaluation, monitoring and review in its self-evaluation and quality assurance procedures. Its quality assurance procedures address how programmes will be monitored and reviewed and self-evaluation reports produced; these will in turn lead to the identification of areas for improvement.



Sector Specific QA Guidelines for Independent / Private Providers

The following is the panel findings following evaluation the draft quality assurance procedures against QQI's Sector Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016). This section of the report follows the structure and referencing of those guidelines.

1. OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING (part 9)

Panel findings:

The findings of the panel relating to section 10 above of the *Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines* are of equal relevance to this reference to the sector-specific quality assurance guidelines for independent providers. Those findings are reproduced below:

Farm Advisory Services is currently delivering agriculture and farming programmes on behalf of both Teagasc and GRETB. It has not disclosed that it is engaged with any other external parties.

The importance of the role of the external authenticator was emphasised during the panel meeting and was also acknowledged by Farm Advisory Services as a very important contributor to the quality and credibility of the organisation. As part of its condition on assessment, the panel requires that Farm Advisory Services documents the criteria that it will have regard to when appointing an external authenticator.

Evaluation of draft QA Procedures - Overall panel findings

The Quality and Capacity Panel was impressed by the presentation and structure of the quality assurance policies and procedures submitted by Farm Advisory Services. It was also evident that the representatives of Farm Advisory Services that attended the panel meeting have extensive experience, expertise and qualifications in their field, and that the opportunity has been taken by the provider to develop its quality assurance procedures collaboratively and with a view to developing the organisation. The panel's finding is that, subject to meeting the following conditions, it will recommend that the quality assurance policies and procedures of Farm Advisory Services be approved; therefore, enabling the provider to advance to the second stage of the initial access to programme validation process.



Part 6 Conditions and Recommendations

6.1 Conditions

6.1.1 Farm Advisory Services is required to carry out a pilot delivery phase prior to any expansion of its delivery

If it is successful in its application for programme validation by QQI, Farm Advisory Services indicated to the panel that it intends delivering these programmes on a pilot basis initially. The panel has set as a condition that Farm Advisory Services will adhere to this proposed approach. In setting this condition, the panel clarifies the following:

- The pilot delivery of programmes validated will take place in Cahir, Co Tipperary in a traditional delivery setting;
- Systematic monitoring, evaluation and review should be undertaken in parallel with the delivery of the programmes;
- A report of the findings resulting from the monitoring, evaluation and review, and any improvements identified, should be submitted to an appropriate independent quality assurance advisor for review and contribution;
- The outcomes of the pilot process, including the findings of Farm Advisory Services and the independent quality assurance advisor selected, and an implementation plan for any improvements identified as required, should be submitted to QQI, for noting purposes;
- Having adhered to this pilot process, Farm Advisory Services is then authorised to extend the scope of its provision to additional venues.

6.1.2 Farm Advisory Services is required to clarify and restrict its entry requirements

The panel provides the following elaboration and clarification regarding this condition:

- The panel requires that Farm Advisory Services produces a detailed policy on admission to its programmes and that it elaborates on this policy through clear procedures. This documentation should include supports in place for the admission of learners with learning or physical support requirements;
- In addition, the panel is of the view that Farm Advisory Services does not currently have the expertise or experience to extend entry to its programmes to individuals requiring the recognition of prior certified learning acquired elsewhere, or prior experiential



learning. As a result, the panel requires that Farm Advisory Services restricts admission to learners who hold a relevant qualification at the level immediately below or at the same level of the qualification they are seeking to attain.

6.1.3 Farm Advisory Services is required to elaborate upon its assessment procedures

Having reviewed the documentation provided by Farm Advisory Services, and met with its representatives, the panel has identified the following areas that require elaboration in its assessment procedures:

- The policy and procedures in place for dealing with repeat assessments, including the repeat of skills-based assessment requirements of the programmes;
- The policy and procedures in place for providing reasonable assessment supports for learners in general, and those with learning and physical support requirements;
- The criteria that will be applied by Farm Advisory Services when selecting external authenticators;
- The grounds upon which a learner can appeal an assessment result, and how appeals are managed through the governance system.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Farm Advisory Services should develop clear criteria for recruitment, promotion, and development of staff

The panel believes that Farm Advisory Services as a developing organisation would benefit from having clear criteria and processes in place for staff recruitment and promotion, and for their continuous development whilst in the employ of the organisation. The panel also recommends that detailed role specifications be developed which articulate the attributes and skills required to fulfil specific roles.

6.2.2 Farm Advisory Services should seek to benchmark itself against other providers

Currently Farm Advisory Services is working collaboratively with Teagasc and with the GRETB; both providers of agriculture and farming programmes. If Farm Advisory Services is successful in its application for validation of its own programmes in these areas, the panel recommends



that it should continue to seek to benchmark itself against other providers. The utilisation of experienced external authenticators and other external expertise can aid this process.

6.2.3 Farm Advisory Services should continue to develop its governance systems

During the panel discussion with Farm Advisory Services, it was clear that the organisation has two quite distinct areas of its business that require separate governance arrangements but could report to the same overarching Board. The panel encourages Farm Advisory Services to continue thinking this construct through, as a robust governance system could strategically enable the CEO to maintain an effective overview of the organisation without having to be involved in decision-making for all management activities.

6.2.4 Farm Advisory Services should consider how to strengthen its oversight of learner assessment outcomes

The panel recommends that Farm Advisory Services should consider how it can strengthen the processes it has in place to ensure the quality and consistency of assessment outcomes. Whilst this is important in any context, it is particularly pertinent where a provider intends delivering and assessing programmes in more than one location.

Part 7 Proposed Approved Scope of Provision for this provider

The panel has identified some conditions above, which Farm Advisory Services is required to address. When Farm Advisory Services has addressed these conditions, it is required to provide this evidence to the panel. In the case of condition 6.2.1., this can be satisfied at this point by confirmation by Farm Advisory Services that it agrees to the formulation of the condition made by the panel. Conditions 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 will require the submission of documentation. If the panel is satisfied that its conditions have been met², it will recommend to the QQI Approval and Reviews Committee that it approves the draft quality assurance procedures of Farm Advisory Services. Subject to the agreement of the Approval and Reviews Committee to this recommendation, Farm Advisory Services will be eligible to proceed to Stage 2 of the initial

² This will be established via an incorporeal meeting of the panel on receipt of the required documentation.



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access to programme validation process. In the event of this progression, the approved scope is for the development of programmes leading to the awards named in section 1.3 above. The provider's policies and procedures were reviewed only in the context of delivering these programmes in a traditional setting i.e., recommended approval will not enable the provider to offer these programmes through blended or distance delivery modes.

Part 8 Approval by Chair of the Panel

This report of the Quality and Capacity Panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the recommendation to approve the draft quality assurance procedures of Farm Advisory Services Ltd.

The panel notes and approves the revisions made by Farm Advisory Services Ltd. In response to the conditions set out in section 6.1 above

Name:

Jack O' Herlihy
Chair, Quality and Capacity Panel

Date: 27/04/2017



Annexe 1: Documentation provided to the Panel in the course of the Evaluation

The following documentation was submitted by FAS:

- Application form for initial programme validation leading to QQI awards, including
 - Application form
 - Evidence of type of legal entity
 - Organisation chart
 - Documentation on collaboration and partnerships
 - Documentation relevant to financial viability and resources
 - Public liability insurance details
 - Current tax clearance certificate
 - Statutory declaration

- Self-evaluation report of Quality Assurance Procedures (dated 31 January 2017)
- Draft Quality Assurance Manual (marked “Draft, January 2017”)

Annexe 2: Provider staff met in the course of the Evaluation

Name	Role/Position
Mr Pat Burke	CEO
Dr Noreen Begley	Director of Training & Development
Ms Caroline Ryan	Director of Administration & Services



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Annexe 3: Confirmation by Provider of Acceptance of Panel Conditions

From: Pat Burke (Farm Advisory Services Ltd) [mailto:pat@farmadvisory.ie]
Sent: Friday 21 April 2017 12:15
To: Walter Balfe <wbalfe@qqi.ie>
Cc: Antoinette Beatty <abeatty@qqi.ie>; 'Caroline Ryan' <caroline@farmadvisory.ie>
Subject: RE: Updated QA Manual

Walter,

Please find attached revised version of our QA Manual.

With regard to the changes we have made upon reflection of the panels conditions and recommendations please note the following:

1. Farm Advisory Services Ltd. accepts the conditions and scope of provision as set by the panel.
2. The admissions Section in Chapter 4 of the original Manual is now presented as a separate Chapter 5 – Programme Admissions. The content has been updated accordingly.
3. Repeat Assessments have been addressed in Section 8.6
4. Criteria for the appointment of EA's have been revised and is addressed in Section 9.3.2
5. Learner Appeals is addressed in Section 9.5 and has been significantly revised.

Thank you once again for all your help,

Regards,

Pat Burke,
Farm Advisory Services Ltd,
The Granary Building,
Cahir,
Co. Tipperary.

Tel: 052-7442900
Mobile: 087-3157304

Email: pat@farmadvisory.ie