

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

10 March 2020

Agenda Item 7

INSTITUTIONAL RE-APPROVAL: COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND
RURAL ENTERPRISE (CAFRE)

COVER SHEET

To receive the report for the Institutional Re-approval of CAFRE and to endorse the recommendation for continuing approval and Recognition under Ordinance XXVIII.

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

INSTITUTIONAL RE-APPROVAL REPORT: COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL ENTERPRISE

1. INTRODUCTION

On 26 September 2019 the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) submitted an IA2 Form requesting that they be considered for institutional re-approval as a collaborative partner of the University. An Institutional Re-approval Document (IRD), with supporting documentation, was received on 9 January 2020. Based on an initial assessment of the relationship with CAFRE over the current period of approval, Quality Enhancement (QE) recommended that a desk-based review be undertaken. The Deputy-Vice Chancellor (Academic) approved this recommendation.

The report details the findings from the desk-based review.

2. BACKGROUND

CAFRE is a Division of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) within the Food and Farming Group (FFG). The College has three campuses at Greenmount (Antrim), Loughry (Cookstown) and Enniskillen. The partnership with Ulster University was formally established with Enniskillen Campus in 1995 with the development of the Hons degree in Equine Management.

The College is led by a Director, supported by the CAFRE Governance Group and College Management Team. CAFRE is responsible for the competence development of those entering, and those already working in the agri-food industry, and achieves this through a range of lifelong learning programmes.

CAFRE employs approximately 396 people across five key discipline areas of agriculture, equine, food, horticulture and agri - business delivering Further and Higher Education; industry training and industry support; and development programmes. In the 2018/19 academic year CAFRE had 387 students studying on 4 Foundation degrees, 2 BSc Hons programmes and an HLA, all approved by Ulster University.

3. CAFRE MISSION AND AIM

CAFRE's mission is:

“To be a knowledge centric organisation delivering high quality education, knowledge and technology transfer programmes to those entering, and those working in, the Northern Ireland agri-food industry, to support its sustainable growth”.

The aim of the College is to develop the competencies and values of people entering and working in the agri-food industry and to provide them with the capability to contribute to the sustained economic growth of the industry and the development of rural society.

4. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

DAERA is managed by the Departmental Board (DB) which comprises the Permanent Secretary of the Department and five Deputy Secretaries representing Central Services and Contingency Planning Group, Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group, Rural Affairs, Forestry Service and Estates Transformation Group, Food and Farming Group and Veterinary Service and Animal Health Group.

The management structure of CAFRE comprises a College Management Team (CMT) which consists of the College Director, two Heads of Service and eleven Heads of Branches.

The CMT has management responsibility for the College and for the co-ordination and management of CAFRE people development programmes across all the campuses to achieve the aims, objectives and targets specified in the College Business Plan. It meets once per month during the academic year. The remit of the CMT is to:

- Develop, implement and evaluate strategic and annual business plans for the College;
- Monitor the achievement of business plan targets;
- Implement corporate governance standards across CAFRE;
- Control and monitor CAFRE financial expenditure;
- Receive reports and take forward required actions from other CAFRE committees/ teams;
- Provide technical support to DAERA and other Government Departments;
- Work with the external College Advisory Group.

A copy of the 2019/20 Business Plan was provided in the supporting documentation which accompanied the IRD.

5. COLLEGE FINANCE

The College's financial allocation is devolved from DAERA's core Departmental budget. Funding is allocated to CAFRE on a block basis and is not linked to student numbers.

Expenditure and income are monitored monthly using reports from the Government accounting system and reviewed and managed by the CMT and College accountant at monthly meetings.

At year end the College submits a financial statement in accordance with the Government Financial Reporting Manual, which contributes to the DAERA Annual Report and Accounts. As part of a government department the College is subject to Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) financial monitoring and controls including

regular audits by DAERA's Internal Audit Unit and NI Audit Office (NIAO). The outcomes of audits have been favourable and have not raised issues of significant concern.

Resources are allocated and monitored by CAFRE's Governance Group (CGG) which includes the College Director (Chairman), the Head of Education Service, the Head of Development Services, the Head of College Services and the College Accountant. Staff submit bids, supported by business cases/ economic appraisals, to their Head of Branch. Bids are approved and prioritised on a campus basis.

6. STANDARDS ASSURANCE AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT

There are currently 371 students (2019/20 academic year) studying on 7 programmes approved by Ulster University. All the programmes reside within the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences. The University and CAFRE have compatible and complementary higher education objectives. The Faculty Partnership Manager (FPM) reports that 'CAFRE have a clear understanding and commitment to the principles outlined in 'Five & Fifty', Ulster's Five-Year Strategic Plan - Fiftieth Year Strategic Vision, 2016-2034'

An external examiner is in place for all programmes approved by Ulster University which are delivered and assessed at CAFRE. The FPM monitors the academic standard and quality of all Ulster approved programmes offered within the College.

External examiners confirm that the moderation and assessment processes in place within the College operate effectively to ensure the standard of the award on offer. Course Directors respond to the external examiner report and share the report, and the course team response, with students at Staff/ Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) meetings and via the virtual learning environment.

Responsibility for quality is devolved to course level and is the responsibility of Course Teams in conjunction with CAFRE's Quality Team. Quality related matters are reported on, and managed through, the Further Education and the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Committees (LTCs) which in turn reports to the EMT.

The LTCs provide a substantive end of year report on the delivery of education, training and student achievement to the EMT along with appropriate recommendations for implementation during the next academic year. This is scrutinised by the EMT and forms the basis of a summary report to the CMT on the quality of CAFRE educational provisions together with recommendations on staffing requirements, resource deployment and staff development.

CAFRE's quality assurance procedures are specified in their Quality Manual. As part of their IRD submission they provided a copy of their Quality Assurance Manual.

The quality cycle which is followed by all CAFRE's HE courses involves the review of each education programme and the completion of a Self-evaluation Report (SER) by the Course Team and signed by the Course Director and Head of Branch. The SER highlights areas of good practice and identifies an action plan to address weaknesses and issues raised by students, External Examiners and the FPM. The SERs are

considered by the LTC and a report is produced for consideration and approval by EMT and the CMT. The actions from the SER report establish the key areas to be addressed by course teams in the next academic year.

SSSC meetings are held at least once per semester. The minutes of these meetings feed into Course Committee (CC) meetings. A copy of the minutes of the SSSC and CC meetings are sent on an ongoing basis to the FPM. No area of concern has been identified.

The FPM reports that 'semester to semester and year on year, CAFRE ensure a well-developed and replicable preparations for Course Committee, SSSC, programme review and preparation for Boards of Examiners meetings. Their respect for Ulster QA processes is excellent and this means that as FPM I have a very effective and productive relationship with all teams and Course Directors. Student progression and attrition metrics are very much attended to and broadly speaking are good across programmes.'

CAFRE engages fully with the University Continuous Assurance of Quality Enhancement (CAQE) process and the former annual course review. They were not required to produce any Action Plans to address issues identified during the 2018/19 annual review. The Faculty CAQE report for CAFRE noted that 'no concerns were noted and programmes should continue as planned on the re-validation cycle'.

The HE Co-ordinator at CAFRE attends, and actively participates in, meetings of the Collaborative Partnership Forum (CPF). An HE Co-ordinators report is provided for each meeting of the CPF. The FPM reports that interactions with the HE Co-ordinator are excellent and commends the College for the quality assurance processes in place.

7. STUDENT SUPPORT AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

All full-time students apply for admission onto programmes at CAFRE through UCAS. Part-time students apply directly to the College and are processed using the same procedures and standards as that for full-time applicants. Unsuccessful applicants may ask for feedback on their application and why it was unsuccessful.

CAFRE complies fully with equal opportunities legislation. Learners are given an opportunity to declare medical conditions/ learning needs at application and registration and at any time thereafter. Details of declarations are recorded on the College MIS and forwarded to the Student Support Office for follow-up action. Approximately 9% of CAFRE students disclose a learning need/ medical condition and approximately 7% apply for additional support.

All students undertake a comprehensive induction programme. Course specific induction is supported by additional information about the campus, staff, location of classes and college life. BSc students receive refresher induction after they return from placement in preparation for level 6 studies. Student feedback rates highly the induction provided

Each student is allocated an Advisor of Studies who is the first point of contact for raising academic or welfare/pastoral issues. Students can discuss issues with the

Student Support Office by appointment. INSPIRE, a confidential counselling service, provides confidential advice and guidance and follow-up individual counselling sessions off campus.

Throughout their studies students have access to a range of staff depending upon the assistance required. This includes the Module Managers, the Year Manager who acts as an individual tutor, the Programme Manager, Residential Support Staff, the Accommodation Manager, Careers Advisors, the Administration team and the Student Support Officer.

CAFRE obtains student feedback through a number of channels including module and course reviews, the Students' Representative Council (SRC), SSCC meetings and through the Learner Voice Survey, which is an on-line confidential survey open to all students for a three-week period in early February. The survey provides impartial feedback on the learner experience while studying at CAFRE and highlights areas for improvement. In 2018/19 the results showed a student satisfaction rating of 95% against a target of 95%.

In their IRD CAFRE provided information on their academic appeals, disciplinary and complaints procedures. However, the Complaints Policy does not inform students that, after exhausting CAFRE's internal complaints process, they have a final right of appeal to the University. Currently students are advised that they have a final right of appeal to the Permanent Secretary at DEARA.

When transcripts are received from Ulster University, they are scanned by staff in the Education Administration team to facilitate safe permanent retention in electronic format. There is restricted password protected access on the NICS Records Management System.

The SRC is democratically elected to represent and serve the student body. It takes a leading role in the development of the social and recreational life at each campus, acts as a link between students and staff and fosters co-operation with other campuses/ colleges. It also offers guidance and allocates finance to the clubs and societies. Each campus has an SRC with an elected Student President, Treasurer and Secretary and committee members drawn from each year of all full-time courses.

The FPM states 'CAFRE employ a very effective Student Representatives Council approach to Staff-Student relationships and this greatly increases the effectiveness and representativeness of their SSCC processes'. He also reports that 'for Foundation Degree students CAFRE offer great opportunities in work-based learning, where the students directly benefit from the links that CAFRE have with industry, some of whom are world leaders in their field'.

Careers Fairs are organised each year at Enniskillen Campus (Equine), Loughry Campus (Agriculture & Food) and Greenmount Campus (Horticulture) to provide an opportunity for students to liaise with prospective employers and find out more about the wide range of careers that are available to them. This event also gives students an opportunity to apply for work placements and graduate posts.

Both the external examiners and the FPM confirm that the student support mechanisms in place within CAFRE are excellent. The FPM reports that 'due, in part at least, to the relative small size of each campus, the pastoral support offered to students is especially noteworthy'.

8. ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

CAFRE have administrative offices based at each of its campus responsible for providing generic administrative support to the courses offered at that campus. Student enrolments, registrations and the collection of fees are managed by an admissions team based at each campus.

Information provided by students is printed, checked and signed off by students confirming its accuracy. Returning students are also required to check and update the information held on the CAFRE Education Management Information System (MIS). Student records can only be updated by campus administration staff. Teaching staff have access to relevant student information via a web browser but cannot access or change the information held on the MIS. Data handling procedures comply with Civil Service guidelines and GDPR on data protection and files are deleted according to established procedures.

Teaching and admissions staff at CAFRE engaged fully with the introduction of the University's new Online Admissions (OLA) process which started in the 2019/20 academic year.

9. STAFF RESOURCES

The College has a total of 396 staff of which 140 are employed as lecturers and technologists with a further 49 staff employed as senior lecturers/ technologists. All lecturing staff have a minimum of a pass degree in their specialist area, and most hold a postgraduate qualification and have relevant industrial experience.

Permanent staff are recruited through an independent external recruitment process in accordance with NICS recruitment policy. Induction for new staff follows NICS procedures. This is augmented by a CAFRE specific staff induction programme.

Staff development with the College adheres to the NICS Performance Management Framework (PMF). Line managers evaluate staff performance against a Personal Performance Agreement (PPA). This agreement is agreed at the start of the year, monitored throughout the year and evaluated at the year end. From the PPA staff development needs are identified and met.

The FPM reports that 'staff teaching teams have wide and deep experience in their respective industries and this is coupled with a real commitment to teaching that is student-focussed and respective of Ulster Learning and Teaching principles and practices. CAFRE have attended all activities provided by CHERP on the emerging Ulster ICDF and have also sought to engage with Ulster colleagues particularly in the areas of Assessment and in how they can improve the digital capabilities of their students'. THE FPM receives the CV of all new teaching staff.

10. LEARNING RESOURCES

CAFRE has extensive specialist teaching and learning resources across each of its three campuses. Residential accommodation for students is provided on each campus. The key learning resource facilities provided at each campus are summarised below:

Enniskillen Campus

Enniskillen Campus specialises in the delivery of equine studies and is a BHS approved centre.

The library is a member of a consortium of Northern Ireland Civil Service libraries including Greenmount, Loughry campuses and Dundonald House. There is a shared online catalogue system allowing students to access material from any of the sites including the texts required on the programmes.

Virtual access to all the texts is available to learners 24 hours per day through the Moodle VLE and Knovel Database. 94% of the course texts are also available as hard copies which may be borrowed from the library.

A laboratory facility is available for the delivery of modules and for students undertaking dissertations. Equipment includes an oven, weighing scales, microscopes and an array of freeze-dried models and limbs.

Enniskillen campus, like the campuses at Loughry and Greenmount, is equipped with an extensive range of IT facilities for students. The campuses have IT suites and IT facilities in the library and in other teaching rooms. The IT suite and teaching rooms are all networked and the system provides secure file storage, Internet access, colour and/or monochrome laser printing and a document scanning and photocopying facility in the library. Each teaching room is equipped with a desktop computer, projector and speakers. The majority of teaching rooms are also equipped with an Apple TV for screen mirroring which lecturing staff use to deliver lectures via an Apple iPad. Tablet computers (Android/Apple) are available for student use and for interactive learning taking notes/ photographs/ videos when outside.

CAFRE makes extensive use of Moodle which is a virtual learning environment (VLE). It is a web-based system that features course management. It allows student and staff to interact and access course materials online.

Loughry Campus

Specialist facilities are in place at Loughry campus for the delivery and assessment of food and nutrition education. The library is a member of a consortium of Northern Ireland Civil Service libraries including Greenmount, Enniskillen campuses and Dundonald House. There is a shared online catalogue system allowing students to access material from any of the sites including the texts required on this course.

Virtual access to all the texts for this course is available to learners 24 hours per day through the Moodle VLE and Knovel Database. 94% of the course texts are also available as hard copies which may be borrowed from the library.

The library has an allocated annual budget to purchase materials. The budget for 2019/20 is £50,000.

The laboratories and teaching facilities at Loughry include science laboratories, a Food Technology Centre, a Food Innovation Centre and a Food Packaging Centre.

Greenmount Campus

The Greenmount campus a CAFRE specialises in agriculture and horticulture education, training and technology transfer programmes.

The library is a member of a consortium of Northern Ireland Civil Service libraries including Loughry, Enniskillen campuses and Dundonald House. There is a shared online catalogue system allowing students to access material from any of the sites including the required texts. Virtual access to all the texts for this course is available to learners 24 hours per day through the Moodle VLE and Knovel Database.

Facilities available at Greenmount include the Amenity Horticultural Centre, a Horticulture Development Centre, a Dairy Centre, and Beef and Sheep Centre.

Greenmount campus has two teaching laboratories and three research laboratories for use in student project work

The FPM confirms that institutional support in place for students at all CAFRE campuses, in terms of library, ICT and learning support is impressive. Teaching laboratories are well-equipped. Industrial preparation facilities are, in many cases world-class. Facilities are kept under review with a commitment from senior management to maintain existing resources to a high standard and to invest in advances within the industry.

11. PUBLISHED INFORMATION

The primary source of information for prospective and current students is the CAFRE website. Online information is quality assured by the relevant Head of Education and signed off by the Head of Education Services.

Publicity material specific to Ulster University is approved by the CAFRE Marketing Team before being forwarded to the FPM for final approval. The FPM has confirmed that he has sight of draft marketing material prior to it going live.

11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The review of documentation provided by CAFRE, together with the University's ongoing monitoring and review processes, provide broad confidence that, at an institutional level, the College has effective policies and procedures in place to meet the University's standards assurance and quality management requirements.

The University is satisfied that CAFRE has the capacity to retain responsibility for the aspects of delivery, monitoring and management of programmes devolved to them.

The College is asked to review the Complaints Policy to ensure that students are made aware that they have a final right of appeal to the University.

RECOMMENDATION: that a Memorandum of Recognition be signed for a period of 5 years (2019/20 – 2023/24).