



SOUTH EAST TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

COURSE EVALUATION 2

SUPPLEMENTARY ASSESSORS' REPORT TO ACADEMIC COUNCIL

COURSE EVALUATED: **Master of Science in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems**
(Level 9; 90 Credits)

Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems
(Level 9; 60 Credits)

Certificate in Circular Bioeconomy in Agri-Food Systems (Level 9;
10 Credits; Minor Award, *linked to* Master of Science in Sustainable
Agri-Food Systems)

Certificate in Global Agri-Food Systems
(Level 9; 10 Credits; Minor Award, *linked to* Master of Science in
Sustainable Agri-Food Systems)

Certificate in Sustainable and Resilient Agri-Food Supply Chains
(Level 9; 10 Credits; Minor Award, *linked to* Master of Science in
Sustainable Agri-Food Systems)

SCHOOL: Science and Computing

DEPARTMENT: Land Sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

On 23 November 2023, an external review panel considered the proposal from the School of Science and Computing at South East Technological University to develop a Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems (Level 9; 60 Credits) and a suite of linked Minor Awards: Certificate in Circular Bioeconomy in Agri-Food Systems (Level 9; 10 Credits); Certificate in Global Agri-Food Systems (Level 9; 10 Credits); Certificate in Sustainable and Resilient Agri-Food Supply Chains (Level 9; 10 Credits). The review panel recommended the programmes for approval at that time, but the approval was conditional on the submission of a revised programme document that took account of a number of conditions and recommendations, and the approval of same by the panel. The panel also recommended that the School consider proposing a Master of Science in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems (Level 9: 90 Credits) as part of the revised programme document.

Action was required on items marked ‘Conditions’ and such action was mandatory if the programme was to be approved; action was highly recommended on items marked ‘Recommendations’.

2. ORIGINAL CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 *Original Conditions*

- 2.1.1. **The title of the postgraduate diploma should include the generic subject area i.e. the title should be Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems,** rather than the proposed Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems.
- 2.1.2. There were a number of typographical errors and inconsistencies noted in the documentation e.g. bioeconomy or bio-economy. **The documentation should be reviewed to eliminate any typographical errors and inconsistencies.** The proposed programme schedules provided were incomplete and not fully consistent with the module descriptors, particularly in the area of assessment. **The proposed programme schedules should be generated using the SETU Waterford module catalogue facility, to ensure accuracy, or, alternatively, if manually entered should be reviewed to ensure that all schedules are fully completed, including module number, status (mandatory or elective) *et cetera* and that all are fully consistent with the information in the module descriptors.**
- 2.1.3. **Greater clarity on the proposed delivery model should be provided in the document, including the proposed semester schedule for online and on-campus delivery, and the modules or elements of same to be delivered in each mode.**

- 2.1.4. **The School should review the proposed assessment schedule to ensure a balanced workload for learners, and the utilisation of the full 15-week semester. Detail on the volume and nature of assessments should be provided in all individual module descriptors so that learners are aware of what is expected.**
- 2.1.5. The proposed entry requirements are ambiguous, and juxtapose the primary entry requirements, recognition of prior learning, and a shortlisting procedure. **The School should review the entry requirements to articulate the primary entry requirements** e.g. a Level 8 degree, or equivalent, in a cognate area and list the cognate areas accepted. The classification of award (i.e. 2.2, 2.1 or First) should be included if a level other than Pass is required for entry. **Non-standard applicants may be considered under the SETU Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and procedures. In addition, applicants whose primary language is not English must meet the SETU English Language Requirements.**
- 2.1.6. **The module learning outcomes should be reviewed to ensure that they are expressed in language appropriate to NFQ Level 9. This should be done now for new modules and either now, or at the next opportunity for review, for existing modules. The programme learning outcomes should be mapped to the Level 9 Awards Standards, rather than the generic learning categories, to ensure a learner will obtain the required standard on successful completion of the programme(s).**
- 2.1.7. The Essential Reading section was not completed in all module descriptors. **The module reading lists should be reviewed to ensure that relevant essential reading material is included and that links to current Irish and European policies/projects are also given.**
- 2.1.8. The module learning outcomes appear to emphasise breadth, rather than depth, of learning and some include multiple action verbs. **The School should review the module learning outcomes to articulate the depth of learning achieved at the level and consider using only one, or at most two, action verbs per outcome.**

2.2 *Original Recommendations*

- 2.2.1. In discussion with the panel, the School team provided a detailed and informed rationale of the need for the programmes, and how the programmes align to the SETU Strategic Plan. **The rationale for the programmes, as stated in the document, should be revised to incorporate the more detailed and informed rationale outlined at the panel meeting and also to articulate how the proposed programmes align to the University's Strategic Plan.**
- 2.2.2. The postgraduate diploma is proposed for both full- and part-time learners who are currently unemployed, seeking employment or in employment. The programme, as proposed, is structured in full-time mode with 30 credits required to be completed in each semester. **The School should clarify the target learner cohort(s) for the programme and consider how best to structure the programme to meet the needs of their identified cohort(s). If the programme is to be offered to learners who are in full-time employment, the School should consider delivering the programme over three, rather than two, semesters, which would spread the workload for the learners and still meet the funding requirement to complete the programme within one academic year.** A 30-credit workload per semester, as proposed, could be overly demanding for learners who also have full-time work commitments, whereas requiring 20 credits over three semesters would help to balance the workload for learners. **If the School decides not to implement a more balanced workload structure, then the experiences of the learners who are in full-time employment should be sought on a regular basis and the workload/framework model reviewed periodically to ensure that those in full-time employment can meet the time commitment required to successfully complete the programme.**
- 2.2.3. In discussion with the panel, the School team outlined a number of themes running through the postgraduate diploma programme; these themes, however, were not captured in the proposal document. **The School should articulate the themes in, and vision for, the programme and outline how the individual modules integrate with other modules on the programme and contribute to the programme themes and vision.**
- 2.2.4. **The School should consider how Irish and European policy in the area is integrated into the programmes and articulate the links with the relevant policies in both the discussion in the main document and in the module descriptors. The regulatory framework regarding the reuse of wastes back in the system should also be included in the programme as this regulation could potentially block certain pathways for reuse and recovery.**
- 2.2.5. There appears to be a large volume of assessment proposed, with individual module

learning outcomes being assessed multiple times by different pieces of assessment. **The School should consider the volume of assessment and streamline same to remove overassessment of students. Greater detail on the nature of the assessment proposed should also be included on the individual module descriptors. In addition, the School should outline the proposed repeat and remediation opportunities for learners, particularly given that many learners will be in full-time employment and accessing much of the programme delivery online.**

- 2.2.6. **The School should consider where more solution-focused, systems thinking and systems innovation approaches could be incorporated in the new modules.** In the ‘Circular bio-economy in agri-food systems’ module, for instance, rather than considering only how to recycle food waste the learners should be encouraged to think systematically about strategies for reducing food waste in order to minimise the amount of waste to be recycled with particular reference to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications *National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap 2023-2025*. **Assessments, where possible, should encourage learners to both critique solutions and propose their own solutions to address issues within agri-food systems.**
- 2.2.7. Given the ongoing European policy development in the area, the graduates of this programme will have a role in advocating with the general public on the introduction of policies, and in enabling people to consider the value of the policies and the need for change to implement same. **The School should consider where the necessary advocacy skills are developed on the programme(s).**
- 2.2.8. **The programme(s) should be strongly linked to research-led activity, particularly new and upcoming developments both nationally and across Europe.** The students need to be familiar not only with current policy but also be aware of new research, case studies and developments in the area which will shape thinking and have an impact going forward.
- 2.2.9. The contact hours proposed for the programme(s) appear high, particularly given the programme(s) do not require laboratory work. **The School should consider if the contact hours are appropriate to the level and nature of the programme(s) and if the high contact hours proposed would allow sufficient time for student self-directed learning.** A maximum of 36 hours contact for the 10-credit modules would facilitate a better balance between delivered and self-directed learning.
- 2.2.10. **The School should consider if the title Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Sustainable Agri-Food and Biobased Systems would better reflect the content of the proposed postgraduate diploma.**
- 2.2.11. **The School should consider proposing the Master of Science in Sustainable Agri-**

Food Systems (or Master of Science in Sustainable Agri-Food and Biobased Systems, if the previous recommendation is adopted) as part of the current application, rather than resubmitting a new application at some stage in the future.

The proposal of a related Masters programme would require the addition of 30 credit module(s) in research, which may be already offered on other Masters programmes in the School, and would be more efficient to include now, rather than seeking to submit the programmes for amendment in the near future, when a cohort of students are registered on the programme.

2.2.12. **Given the programme will be delivered in a hybrid model, the School should review the assessment types proposed with a view to incorporating a variety of assessment methods which would enhance engagement among students e.g. learner-directed or instructor-directed online discussion boards.**

2.2.13. **The following are recommendations on individual modules:**

Module Title	Recommendation
Statistics and Data Analysis	The databases employed and the assessment of this module should be relevant to the particular cohort.
Project Management and Marketing	The examples used and the assessment of this module should be relevant to the particular cohort.
Sustainable and resilient agri-food supply chains	The module learning outcomes are very broad. The module learning outcomes should be reconsidered with a view to refocusing and perhaps reducing the number of outcomes (e.g. digitalisation of the food chain, as well as LCA are very large topics if learners are expected to study in any depth)

3. REVISED PROGRAMME SUBMISSION JANUARY 2024

The revised submission received in January 2024 was reviewed by the members of the original validation panel who were available to undertake a desk review of the documentation, and a panel meeting was held on 6 March 2024:

- Majella O’Shea, Education Policy Consultant (Chair)
- Patrick Barrett, Agricultural Inspector, Research Division Bioeconomy, Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (contributed via desk review)
- David Giles, Student Representative, University College Cork
- Prof. Kevin McDonnell, Professor Crop Science & Biosystems Engineering, University College Dublin
- Dr Colette Moloney, Assistant Registrar, South East Technological University

The panel welcomes the revised submission and commends the School on a substantially enhanced and clearly presented proposal and response document. Having considered the revised submission, the panel **recommends approval of the Master of Science in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems (Level 9; 90 Credits); the Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Sustainable Agri-Food Systems (Level 9; 60 Credits) and a suite of linked Minor Awards: Certificate in Circular Bioeconomy in Agri-Food Systems (Level 9; 10 Credits); Certificate in Global Agri-Food Systems (Level 9; 10 Credits); Certificate in Sustainable and Resilient Agri-Food Supply Chains (Level 9; 10 Credits)** until the next School Review in the School of Science and Computing. **Approval is conditional on the submission of a revised programme document that takes account of the condition and recommendations outlined below; and the submission of a summary document describing the responses and actions of the School to address the condition and recommendations made by the review panel.**

The following are the panel’s condition and recommendations. Areas for attention have been emboldened in the text for convenience of reference. Action is required on the item marked ‘Condition’ and such action is mandatory if the programme is to be approved.

3.1 *Condition*

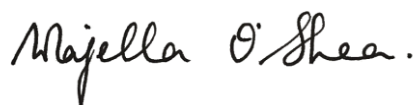
- 3.1.1. It is evident from the response that the School undertook a comprehensive review of the programme document to eliminate typographical errors and inconsistencies. However, there is still ambiguity re the nature of the contact hours and delivery proposed for the module ‘Food, Health and Nutrition’. **The nature of the activity described as ‘Online**

Research’ in the module descriptor for ‘Food, Health and Nutrition’ should be clarified as there appears to be 12 hours of lecturer contact associated with same in the programme schedule.

3.2 *Recommendations*

- 3.2.1. While the School expressed their confidence that the proposed learner cohort, which might include learners in full-time employment, would be able to complete the programme in the one academic year, **the panel recommends that the School should keep the workload and duration of the programme under review. When the programme is running, the School should seek feedback from learners on the programme re the workload and the feasibility of completing same in one academic year for those in employment, and seek to develop a programme schedule which would allow learners to complete the programme on a part-time basis, if necessary.**
- 3.2.2. Although it is not explicitly stated in the document, the School described the programme as being solution-focused in discussion with the panel at the original review meeting. As the programme is rolled out, **the School should review to ensure that this outcome is being delivered, informed by learner feedback.**
- 3.2.3. The School provided a more detailed assessment schedule in the revised document which appears to utilise the full 15-week semester. **The School, however, should keep the balance and volume of assessment under review as the programme is delivered, and seek student opinion on same.**

Signed:



Majella O'Shea (Chair)

Date:

8 March 2024