



**RURAL  
FEMMES**  
ERASMUS+ PROGRAM

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**HINCKS CENTRE**

# INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS REPORT

Southern Region,  
IRELAND

INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 1  
Activity 3. Individual Analysis

Dr Aisling Conway Lenihan and Dr Niall O'Leary

Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence, Cork Institute of Technology

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## Executive Summary

The RuralFemmes project aims to design, implement and evaluate a training programme for women working in rural areas. Training provision for rural people across Ireland is dominated by Teagasc (the agricultural & food development authority of Ireland), Macra Na Feirme (a rural youth association for those under 35) and the IFA (Irish Farmers Association). In addition to these national organisations, there are regional organisations such as SECAD and the West Cork Development Partnership. Teagasc offer a range of training options, often in collaboration with other education institutions. A government programme (Skillnet) support sector specific training in collaboration with Macra na Feirme and the IFA amongst others. Much of this Skillnet content is relevant to rural women. However, training designed specifically for rural women is rare with the ACORNs female entrepreneurship program being one example.

Three rounds of primary research were conducted for this report. A questionnaire completed by 40 rural women, a Focus Group with 6 participants and a Think Tank with 7 experts in the Tourism, Entrepreneurship and Agriculture. The main difficulties faced by rural women accessing training were found to be distance, caring responsibilities (children and elderly relatives) and low confidence. A blended training course structure that would be suited to mitigating these challenges was found to be 60% face-to-face on weekends, 40% online and comprise of small modules (1 ECTS each). Course promotion should be inclusive and appealing to those currently with lower levels of confidence (not appear daunting/difficult) while at the same time being motivational.

Networking and socialising were identified as a key motivator of participation so experiential learning and group projects are recommended. The content of the course should aim to raise participant confidence and help participants towards taking on greater leadership roles, be it in their family, their family business, their career, their community or, starting their own enterprise. In addition to core transversal skills, the training should include office software (e.g. ECDL), social media, regulations, diversification, communication, financial, and entrepreneurial competencies. Accreditation should be optional and assessments should not be overly burdensome. Accreditation of existing skills was also identified as a way to support confidence building. There is a clear need for a bespoke training programme for rural women and now more than ever, given the current economic climate. In particular, there appears to be a gap in Ireland with regards training provision for women aged 35 – 60 not considering starting a business currently

## 1. Introduction

Women play a major role in civil society and in the economic growth of rural areas: they are a driving force for rural area's maintenance, conservation and development, both in cultural and socioeconomic terms. They not only contribute to the preservation of traditions but they also represent a considerable proportion of the workforce in the labour market and strengthen the countryside in the face of a constant process of depopulation. Despite their crucial contribution, rural women still face numerous economic, social, cultural and educational challenges. In this context, the RuralFemmes project seeks the empowerment and support of women. This European project will do this by designing, implementing and evaluating a training and coaching programme addressed to rural woman workers, based on their own identified needs. The project will:

- 1) Identify and analyse the main needs and challenges focused on the field of training, faced by working women in rural areas.
- 2) Create and implement a training programme based on the analyses carried out at the regional level, in a way that responds to the needs and challenges identified by both the final beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders.
- 3) Form regional support groups (Think Tanks), composed of relevant stakeholders and women' representatives in each partner country.
- 4) Formulate and propose recommendations that can improve policies related to fostering education and training for rural women and achieving gender equality.

This report will specifically address points 1, 2 and 4 above and inform the design of a training programme for women working in rural areas.

The project partner in Ireland are the Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence and the Department of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), both part of Cork Institute of Technology (CIT). The Hincks Centre is dedicated to excellence in entrepreneurship and in particular contributes expertise in areas such as best practice development in entrepreneurship through research, education and training. The Hincks Centre is a highly experienced partner in



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European projects and was recently the recipient of the Atlantic award for sustainability for its leadership of the Interreg co-funded COOL Route project; a project addressing entrepreneurship development, in rural and remote coastal areas. CIT operates Ireland's largest and most successful public incubator. The Rubicon Centre supports approximately 100 entrepreneurs at any one time and a wide range of training and specially tailored courses are available addressing topics such as female entrepreneurship STEM, ICTs, business and financing development etc.

The TEL department is an academic department with a brief to support learning online. The department's staff has long been involved in a wide range of national and international projects with a focus on the use of technology to support and enhance teaching and learning across multiple fields. In particular, the team maintains an interest in research related to emerging technologies and their application in education such as Virtual Reality, Game-Based Learning and Authentic Online Assessment. Since its creation in 2015, the department has supported the design and development of 13 online programmes. Its flagship programme is a Master of Arts in E-Learning Design and Development, which embodies the department's ethos of combining cutting edge technology with effective pedagogy. The department is focused ultimately on the enhancement of learning and teaching through technology. Its work and activities are intended to enrich and support not only its own institute, but the educational community as a whole.

## 2. Region Overview

There are three NUTS 2 regions in the Republic of Ireland: the Northern and Western; Eastern and Midland; and, Southern regions. This analysis is based on the Southern region. The Southern region includes nine counties; Clare, Tipperary, Limerick, Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford, Cork, Kerry (CSO, 2018a). The Southern Region of Ireland consists of the following Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs);

### **South-East SPA**

Carlow, Tipperary, Waterford City and County, Wexford,



Kilkenny

**South-West SPA**

Cork City and County, Kerry

**Mid-West SPA**

Clare, Limerick City and County, Tipperary

The density in the Southern region is approximately 54 persons per km<sup>2</sup> in a region of 29,590km<sup>2</sup> (Southern Regional Assembly, 2018). Large Industry, major public services, health care and Third Level Education services are mainly centred in the Cork Metropolitan Area (Ireland's second largest city). The Southern region is home to two Universities (University College Cork, University College Limerick) and five Institutes of Technology (Limerick IT, Cork IT, Tralee IT, Waterford IT and Carlow IT). It has been recently announced, that the Institute of Technology Tralee and Cork Institute of Technology will merge to become Munster Technological University (MTU) – the second technological university in the state. Approximately 400 international corporations have a presence in Southern Region (IDA, 2020), in sectors such as ICT and Pharmaceuticals. The region's most prominent indigenous industries include Agriculture, Tourism, Food Processing, Fishing, Aquaculture and Brewing.

### 2.1 Economic Position

The Irish economy has been performing quite strongly but due to the open nature of the economy, is exposed to external factors that can negatively affect economic growth. In this section, the strong performance of the Irish economy up to 2019 will be shown and how the COVID19 pandemic is negatively impacting Irish economic indicators in 2020. Real GDP grew by 5.5% between 2018 and 2019 and totalled approximately €339,243 million in 2019 (CSO, 2020a). Real GDP per Capita was approximately €57,960 for the Irish economy in 2018 (Eurostat, 2020a). The Southern region has the second highest GDP per capita in the EU in 2018 after Luxembourg. A contributing factor in the Southern region is potentially higher labour market participation rates, lower unemployment rates and a higher proportion of the working age population (Eurostat, 2020b). The Irish economy was almost at full employment and was recording labour shortages in certain sectors before COVID 19. The unemployment



rate (15-74) for the Southern region was 4.9% in Quarter 4, 2019, which is slightly above the national unemployment rate of 4.5%. In the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector in Ireland, of those employed in this economic sector, approximately 13.38% are female compared to 86.53% that are male (CSO, 2020b).

COVID19 is having a very strong negative impact on both the Irish economy and the global economy. The US and UK, Ireland's top two trading partners have recorded the highest number of deaths due to COVID19 as of May 2020. According to the European Commission Spring Economic Forecast 2020, Ireland's GDP will contract by 7.9% (Euro Area – 7.75%) in 2020 but will return to growth in 2021 and grow by 6.1% (Euro Area – 6.25%). Ireland's unemployment rate is estimated to rise to 7.4% (Euro Area – 9%) in 2020 from almost full employment in 2019 (European Commission, 2020). As the extent of the COVID19 pandemic has not been fully realised and taking account of how quickly the economy can return to full capacity, these estimates are subject to revisions.

## 2.2 Current training provision relevant to rural women in Ireland

Most training provision in Ireland is not inherently gendered in its design and promotion. Exceptions include projects such as the Women's Rural Entrepreneurship Network (WREN) delivered by the Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence, The Rubicon Centre, Ballyhoura development and SECAD (Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurial Excellence, 2020). The WREN project promoted entrepreneurial skills among women in rural areas of Cork and Limerick. Another exception is the ACORNS programme funded by The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine that supports early-stage female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland and runs over six months part-time annually (ACORNS, 2020). Community associations, such as the Irish Country Women's Association (Irish Countrywomen's Association, 2020) and Irish Men's Sheds Association (Irish Mens Sheds Association, 2020) also regularly provide training, courses and learning to its members.



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Nationally, continuous training provision in agriculture is dominated by three organisations. Teagasc, Macra Na Feirme and the Irish Farmers Association (IFA). In the area of further education (in contrast to higher education) only 11% of Teagasc training recipients were women compared to 51% of further recipients being women nationally.

'Female participation in agricultural higher education is observed to be greater, in the range of 40% for some university degree programmes. By contrast, female participation in veterinary education in Ireland is much higher and can range from 70% to 80%' (Teagasc, 2018).

Despite reasonable or even excellent female participation rates in higher level education, women's participation in lower level agricultural training is low (Teagasc, 2018). Teagasc also advises and holds workshops on agri-tourism from the perspective of farm diversification (Heneghan et al., 2016). Macra Na Feirme is a rural youth association, which released a report in April 2019 assessing the potential for an Accredited Continuing Professional Development Framework in Agriculture (Macra Agricultural Skillnet, 2019), which was positive but has not been implemented as of writing.

Skillnet Ireland is a business support agency who advance enterprise-led workforce development (Skillnet Ireland, 2020). Skillnet primarily aims its services to employers to support the training of their employees (as opposed to directly to trainees). The name Skillnet relates to how it structures its activities into networks. Activities are delivered through sector specific and multi sector networks (Skillnets). There are several Skillnets of relevance to rural women: National-organic-training-skillnet; XLVets Skillnet; Macra Agriculture Skillnet (Macra Na Feirme supported); Farm Business Skillnet (Irish Farmers Association supported); Restaurant & Hospitality Skillnet; Rural enterprise Skillnet; and various regional Skillnets, such as, it@cork Skillnet, which provides training for enterprises in the technology sector in the South West of Ireland.

In summary, there is a strong state supported training and skill development infrastructure through Teagasc and Skillnet at a national level and through regional development organisations such as SECAD, which collaborate with a range of regional and specialist organisations. However, with the ending of the WREN project, there is a potential absence of training aimed specifically at rural women in Ireland. Macra na Feirme caters to those up to 35 years of age, while the ICA is popular for those over 60, Acorns cater to those with a clear business idea (classic entrepreneurial meaning). There thus appears to be a gap with regards training for women aged 35 – 60, not currently considering starting a business.

### 3. Methodology

To inform the creation of the RuralFemmes training programme, three forms of primary research were carried out in each partner country to create a well-rounded assessment. Questionnaires, Focus Groups and creation and consultation with a Think Tank. Initially questionnaires were carried out. Subsequently, those indicating that they would like to participate in a Focus Group were contacted by the researchers. Think Tanks were the final form of primary research and were selected by the researchers because of their expert knowledge and relevant experience.

#### 3.1 Questionnaires

The objective of the questionnaire was to gather baseline information and context, to inform the design of a training program for rural women. The content of the questionnaire was drafted by CIT referring to the project proposal with contributions from the project partners. The questionnaire was implemented in the online platform Typeform (Typeform, 2020) and was completed by forty respondents (women living in rural areas) in the Southern region of Ireland. They were recruited through the researchers networks (convenience sampling). Respondents included those working in a range of sectors including agriculture and tourism. Data was exported from Typeform and analysis was conducted in Microsoft Excel.



### 3.2 Focus Group

The objective of the Focus Group was to gain a deeper understanding of the specific needs and skills required by women living in rural communities. CIT drafted the Focus Group guidelines, and these were agreed with RuralFemmes partners. Six participants were identified for the Focus Group as they indicated their interest in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire (pre-discussion form) prior to the Focus Group, which 5 of the 6 participants completed. The form had 10 questions, one question was a tick box exercise for valued competencies, four questions were skill ranking exercises and five questions were open questions for comments and additional suggestions. The average time taken to complete the form was 8 minutes and this formed the basis of the discussion. Due to COVID19, the Focus Groups were held online using Microsoft Teams. As the participants were working, scheduling was performed using a doodle poll. There were three Focus Groups, with 3, 2 and 1 participant(s) (total of 6). Following agreement by all participants, the online focus groups sessions were recorded for later analysis and summary. Pre-discussion form analysis was performed using Microsoft excel and thematic analysis of the Focus Group was performed based on notes taken by the researchers during the Focus Group and by reviewing the recordings.

### 3.3 Think Tank

The objective of the Think Tank was to gain insights from a range of experts and stakeholders to inform the project goals including designing the most appropriate training programme for rural women. The guidelines for the Think Tank were drafted by INITIA and agreed by all partners. Seven experts were selected by the researchers based on their relevant experience, involvement in rural development, tourism, entrepreneurship and policy relevant to rural women. The seven Think Tank participants are had expertise in: (1) agriculture & rural youth training; (2) tourism & hospitality; (3) enterprise and business; (4) agriculture advisory services and education; (5) rural development; (6) entrepreneurship education; and, (7) agriculture accounting and finance. Collaboration was conducted through an online questionnaire (pre-



discussion form) and online meetings. All participants completed the pre-discussion form consisting of 13 open questions and 1 ranking exercise. The average time taken to complete the form was 45 minutes. Pre-discussion form thematic analysis was completed by Microsoft Forms and Microsoft Excel.

As the participants were working, scheduling for meetings was performed using a doodle poll and two sessions were scheduled with three and four participants respectively. Following agreement by all participants, the online Think Tank sessions were recorded for later analysis and summary. The Think Tank guidelines formed the agenda for the discussions and the results of the Think Tank pre-discussion form and Focus Groups (if completed) were presented by the researchers for comment. Thematic analysis was performed based on notes taken by the researchers during the Think Tank meetings and by analysis of the recordings.

## 4 Findings

This section reports the primary research findings of this study and is structured as follows: first we describe the sample of rural women and their situation based on the questionnaire (4.1-4.3). Then, using Questionnaire, Focus Group and Think Tank, the difficulties rural women face (4.4) are assessed and what training formats are accessible to rural women (4.5-4.9). Following this, novel training content is explored (4.10-4.11) and how it should be promoted (4.12) relying on the in depth discussions of the Focus Group and Think Tank. Finally, the policy implications (4.13) and primary research findings are summarised (4.14).

### 4.1 Demographic Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

This section reports the demographic findings of the questionnaire only including, age category, monthly household income after tax and deductions, marital status and highest level of education attained. Figure 1 shows 35% of the respondents were between 25 and 34 years and 3% of respondents were over 60 years of age. Not all respondents reported monthly household income but of those who did, 31% of respondents had an income between €1,561 and €2,000 and 10% of respondents had an income between €3,001 and €4,700. 62% of the



respondents were single or never married, 31% were married and 8% were divorced, widowed or separated. 82.5% of all respondents have attained a third level qualification, 12.5% have a secondary qualification and 5% have a Training/Apprenticeship qualification.

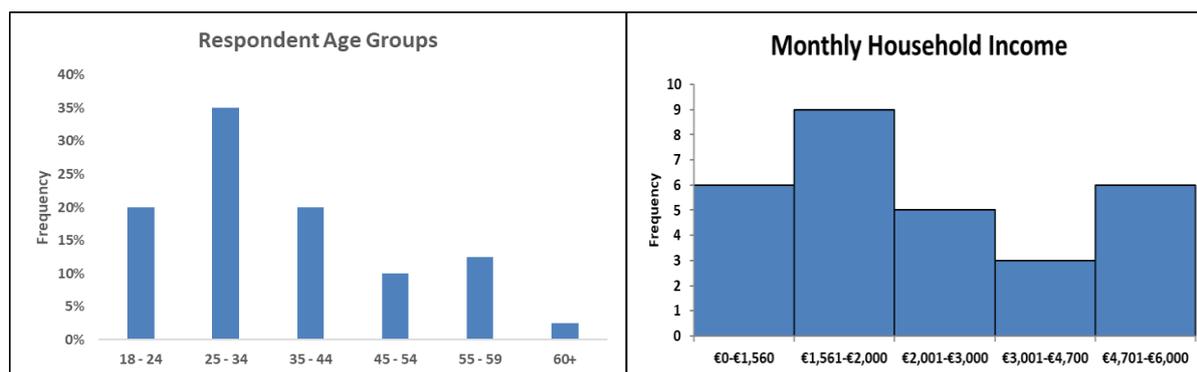


Figure 1 Respondent Age Categories and Monthly Household Income

## 4.2. Employment

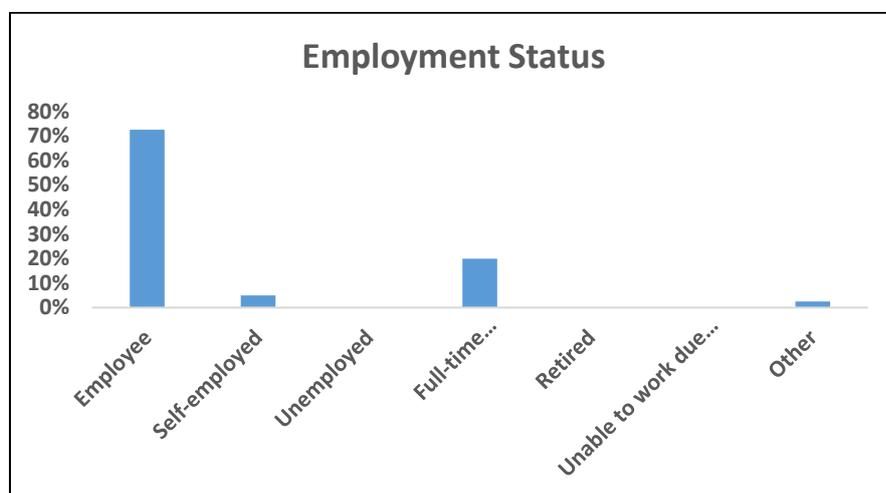


Figure 2 Respondents Employment Status

Figure 2 shows that 73% of respondents were employed, 20% were full-time students and 5% of respondents were self-employed. 59% of those who are employed or self-employed are in their current role more than 2 years whereas 5% of respondents are in their current role less than 6 months. Of those who are working, 70% of respondents work in Agricultural related

work (Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries). The second highest job category is Industry, trade and service (11%) followed by Education (8%).

### 4.3. Voluntary Activities

In Figure 3, 57.5% of respondents are engaged in voluntary work with the majority working for between 2 and 4 hours per week without pay. Some respondents are engaged in voluntary activity in more than one organisation and selected a number of options. In descending order of prominence, these were ‘A social or charitable organisation’, ‘A sporting organisation’, ‘Family Farm/business’, ‘In your community’ and ‘A religious group or church’.

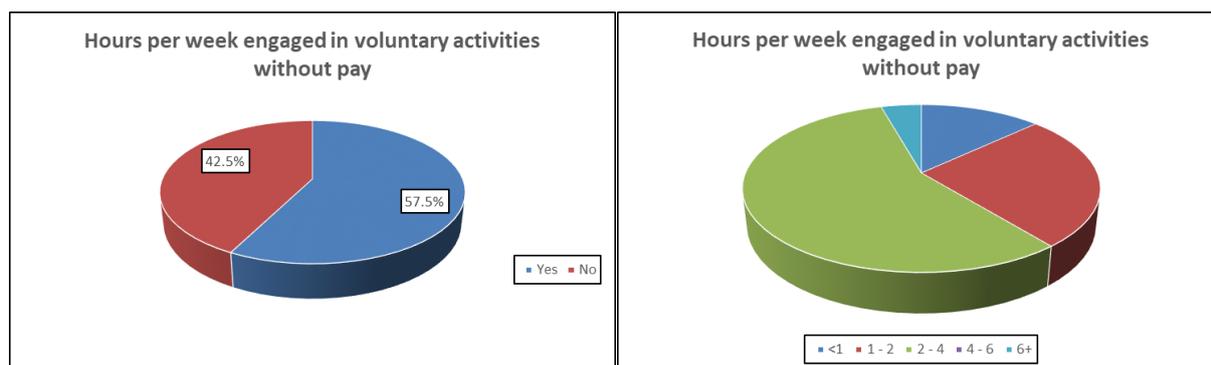


Figure 3 Voluntary activity and hours worked per week without pay

### 4.4. Difficulties faced by women in rural Ireland accessing training

The Focus Groups and Think Tank discussions identified a wide range of challenges faced by rural women accessing training. Here we highlight issues, which were highlighted in both. Difficulties included accessing available training, the value of training being unclear, and disruption to their routine entailed with participating. Child and elderly relative care responsibilities were identified in the Focus Group as being a barrier to participating in training while 6 out of 7 Think Tank participants cited children, childcare or household duties in their pre-discussion form.

Five Think Tank participants mentioned the related or synonymous challenges of geography, distances, travelling or commuting. This was echoed in the Focus Group discussion. Four Think

Participants mentioned low self-esteem or confidence as an issue. The Focus Group discussion also identified a potential lack of confidence among some rural women. Related to this, the Focus Group discussed observing that rural women may tend to have a lower valuation/recognition of their own contributions, which in turn may lead to a lower prioritisation in investing in themselves (e.g. training). In summary, caring or household responsibilities, geography and confidence / low self-esteem were identified as major challenges preventing rural women accessing training.

#### 4.5. Attendance at Educational and Training Events

Figure 4 illustrates the number of questionnaire respondents who attended training or educational events in the last 12 months (March 2019 – March 2020), 72.5% reported attending a workshop, farm open day or another training/educational event. Some respondents attended more than one type of event (multiple responses were selected) so raw numbers are reported in the second pie chart.

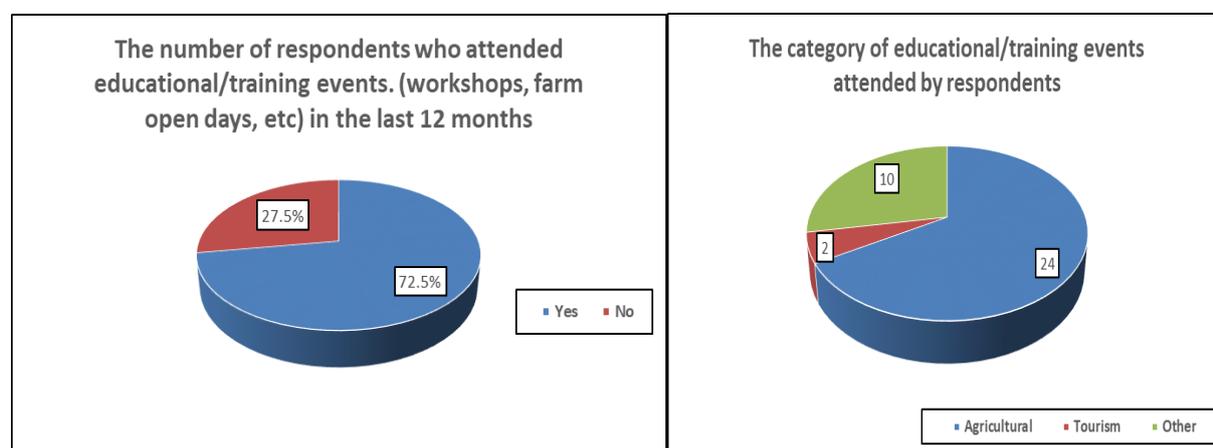


Figure 4 The number of respondents who attended various types of training events in the last 12 months

Agricultural educational and training events were the most popular form of events attended by respondents (24), whereas only two respondents attended tourism educational/training events. Other types of events attended by respondents (10) varied from accountancy, HR, Banking, Marketing, GDPR, cooking to Leadership training.

In summary, a majority of respondents had attended training in the previous 12 months and a majority of the training attended related to agriculture.

#### 4.6. Work-related reasons for undertaking a training or education programme

As questionnaire respondents could select multiple options, raw data is reported in Figure 5. Respondents undertook training or education courses primarily to acquire new skills (28/40). The second reason for undertaking such courses was to improve career prospects (26/40) and excel at their job (26/40). The least identified reason for was to create their own business.



Figure 5 The number of respondents who undertake a training or education programme for work-related reasons

#### 4.7. Important features of training programme

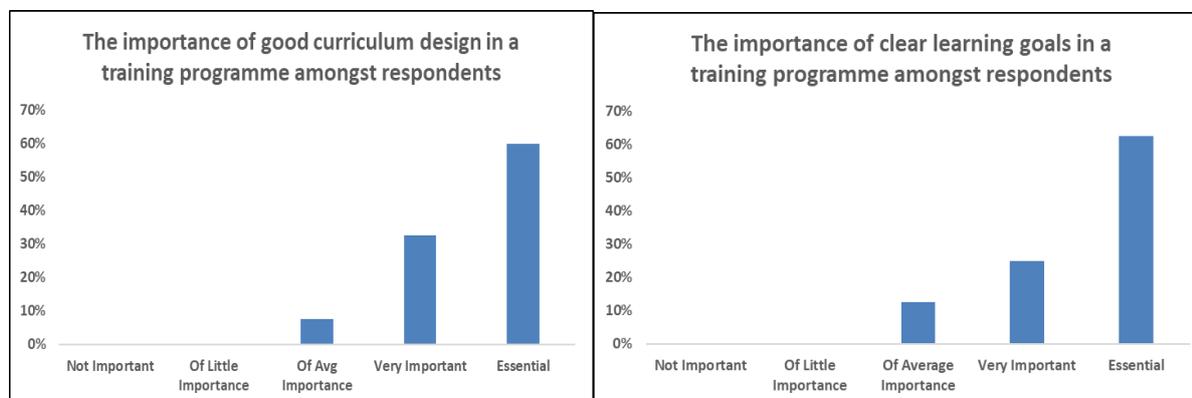


Figure 6 The importance of good curriculum design and clear learning goals in a training programme

Questionnaire respondents were asked to rank how important certain features are in the design of a training programme in seven questions (Q2 – Q8) in the questionnaire. The top two features selected as essential by the Irish respondents were clear learning goals (63%) and good curriculum design (60%) (Figure 6). The other features deemed as essential by respondents in descending order were Employment (48%), Workplace Relevance (44%), Accreditation (40%), Duration of Programme (20%) and Peer Learning Opportunities (18%). Employment/ workplace relevance were identified as key to course content with accreditation and peer learning identified as a desirable course attribute.

The Focus Group identified the following desirable course attributes:

1. Content should be short or medium term needs driven and be motivating, inspirational or support aspirational goals such as building a family legacy. Broad topics (e.g. transversal skills) with vague or unclear applications were identified as being less appealing.
2. Introduction courses should assume no background knowledge and intermediate courses should clearly communicate the required prior knowledge.
3. Social aspects, such as, trainer engagement (especially for distance learning), networking, mentoring and inclusion of role models in the training was identified as a major potential draw, in particular, in light of the isolation some rural women may experience.
4. The training should be low cost, flexible and accessible (convenience) cognisant of rural women's commitments. Learning units should be a small to medium commitment with

assessments should not be too burdensome and optional. Linked to assessment, accreditation should be an option for participants.

The Think Tank identified that accrediting existing knowledge and skills may be important and a way to address low valuations of current skills and contributions (self-confidence/ self-efficacy). Building upon existing skills rather than developing completely new skills was deemed a potential focus. Furthermore, experiential learning should be prioritised, which links to the Focus Groups identification of material with clear short to medium term utility. One to one mentoring, skills assessment (SWOT) with a focus on strengths and opportunities was also recommended. The questionnaires, Focus Groups and Think Tank all highlighted the importance of accreditation, which might be optional to minimise participant’s initial commitment. In summary, clear learning goals, good curriculum design, peer learning and accreditation were found to be important aspects of a training course. The content and delivery should also be of high career relevance.

#### 4.8. Preferred Mode of Delivery and potential difficulties accessing Training Programme

The preferred mode of delivery of the training programme for questionnaire respondents was mostly face-to-face with some online support and resources (38%), whereas the least preferred mode of delivery is fully online as selected by 3% of respondents (Figure 7).

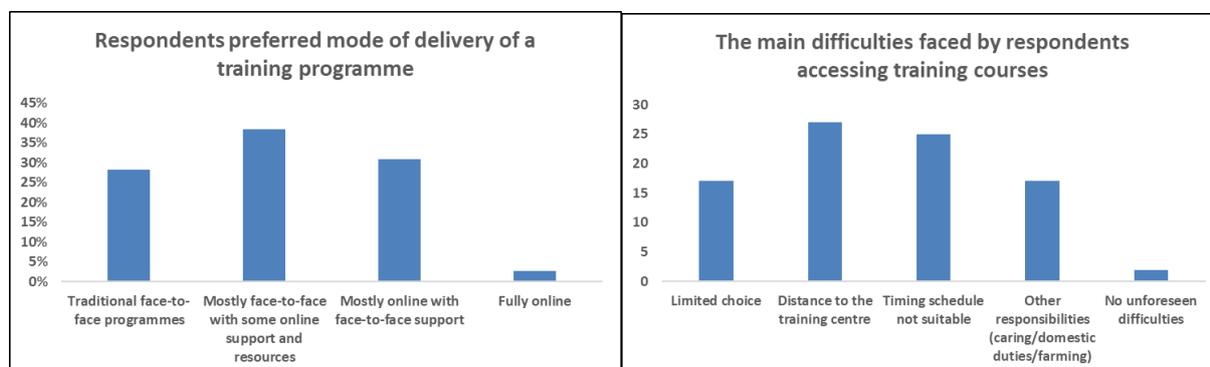


Figure 7 Respondents most preferred mode of delivery and difficulties accessing training programme



The second most preferred mode of delivery is mostly online with some face-to-face support. Respondents had the option to select multiple possible difficulties to accessing training so the raw numbers are reported in Figure 7. Distance to the training centre was selected as the main difficulty. Timing of the training programme, limited choice of training in their area and other caring/domestic responsibilities were selected by respondents as challenges in accessing training programmes. Through the Focus Groups and Think Tank discussions, it became apparent that women aged 35 – 60 not currently interested in starting a business could be the target group for this training programme. A consensus emerged from the Focus Group and Think Tank that 60% face to face and 40% online was an appropriate blended delivery mix for this group. Face-to-face sessions are recommended to take place at weekends, where childcare provision and proximity to childcare provision could be considered. For the agriculture and tourism content, face-to-face content, potentially in sector relevant contexts was deemed valuable. In summary, 60% face to face weekend content and 40% online is likely to be an appropriate blended delivery mix to meet rural women's needs.

#### 4.9. Internet Connectivity

In Figure 8, 41% of questionnaire respondents have a mobile broadband connection, whereas 59% of respondents have a fixed/cable/optical fibre broadband connection. No respondents in this research reported no internet at home, which is likely an artefact of the questionnaire being online. Though internet connectivity has improved in Ireland in the last 10 years, not all women in rural areas in Ireland will have access to an internet connection in the area they reside. In 2010, 28% of Irish households did not have internet access and this has decreased to 9% in 2019. The two main reasons why households did not have an internet connection was did they do not need the internet (52%) and lack of skills (48%) (CSO, 2019).

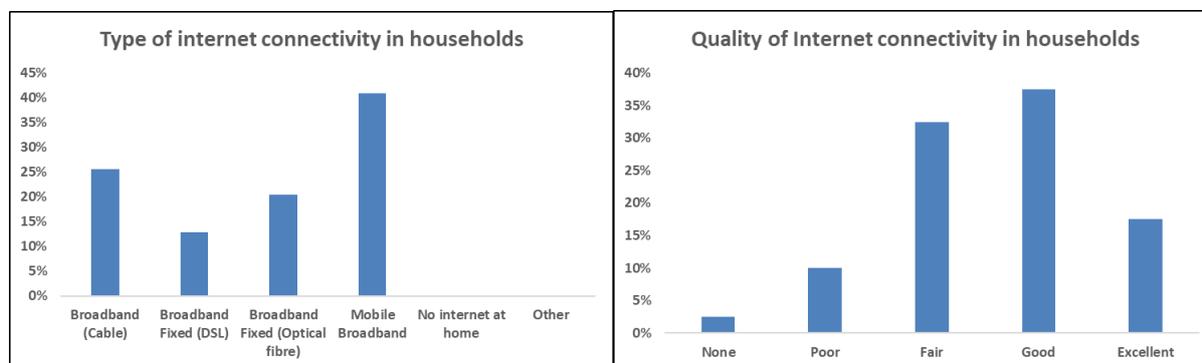


Figure 8 Type and quality of internet in Households

Of those who have an internet connection, only 10% of respondents rated their connection as poor (Figure 8). Facilitating students to download all material at once or providing it on a USB stick to study at home without needing a reliable internet connection could be a mechanism to mitigate this. In summary, mobile broadband was the most common type of internet connectivity in households and 10% of households rated their internet connection as poor.

#### 4.10. Training Programme contents, transversal skills and key competences

Figure 10 illustrates the Focus Group preferences of the European Commission (EC) competencies for lifelong learning while Figure 11 illustrates Think Tank's ranking of the same competencies (European Commission, 2018). A potential difference between the Focus Group and the Think Tank was the importance of meta skills or interpersonal skills. The Focus Group discussion indicated content with a clear short-term application would be most appealing. However, the Think Tank prioritised general capability, confidence and self-management. This is not to say the Focus Group did not value these as seen in Figure 10. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to promote the short-term benefits to increase appeal and participation while also designing the training with a strong focus on the later content, with more medium to long-term benefits. In Figure 10, Focus Group participants identify entrepreneurship, interpersonal and digital skills as their top three competencies, whereas in Figure 11, Think Tank participants rank interpersonal, literacy and digital skills as the most important competencies.



Figure 9 Focus Group preferred Competencies to be included in Training Course

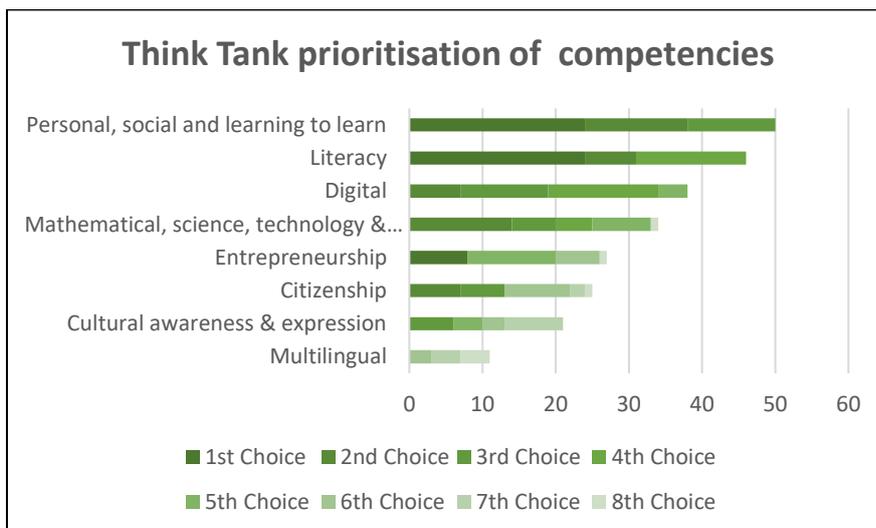


Figure 10 Think Tank ranking of competency prioritisation

A Think Tank participant highlighted the need for ‘technical training but also training that allows them to grow as individuals’. The ability to clearly define ideas and communicate them was seen as fundamental to women taking on greater leadership roles and advocating for change within family businesses. This could be described as aiding rural women to ‘tell their stories’ and bring others on a journey. To build these skills, a focus on socialisation and experiential learning was recommended by the Think Tank. 15-minute group projects to develop an idea with rotating roles where each participant reports back for the group at least

once was suggested. Multiple Think Tank participants identified emotional intelligence as important to help participants to understand themselves and those important in their life. Relative to undergraduate students, participants aged 30-60 are less likely to move or change business or profession. Therefore, content should be relevant to their current context. This contrasts to undergraduate content where participants could end up in a wider range of potential roles. In summary, digital and interpersonal skills emerged as being the most important competencies. Related to this, the content areas of highest priority were agriculture, digitalisation and finance.

#### 4.11. Training Programme contents. Specific technical competences: sustainable agriculture, digitalisation, entrepreneurship and tourism

Questionnaire respondents ranked each competency (Agriculture, Entrepreneurship, Digitalisation, Finance and Tourism) in order of importance. The most important was Agriculture followed by Technology and Digitalisation, Financials and Accounting, Entrepreneurship/Business and Tourism/Hospitality. In Figure 9, Agriculture was ranked essential by 45% of respondents and 18% ranked it as very important. Digitalisation was ranked as essential by 20% of questionnaire respondents and 33% ranked it as very important.

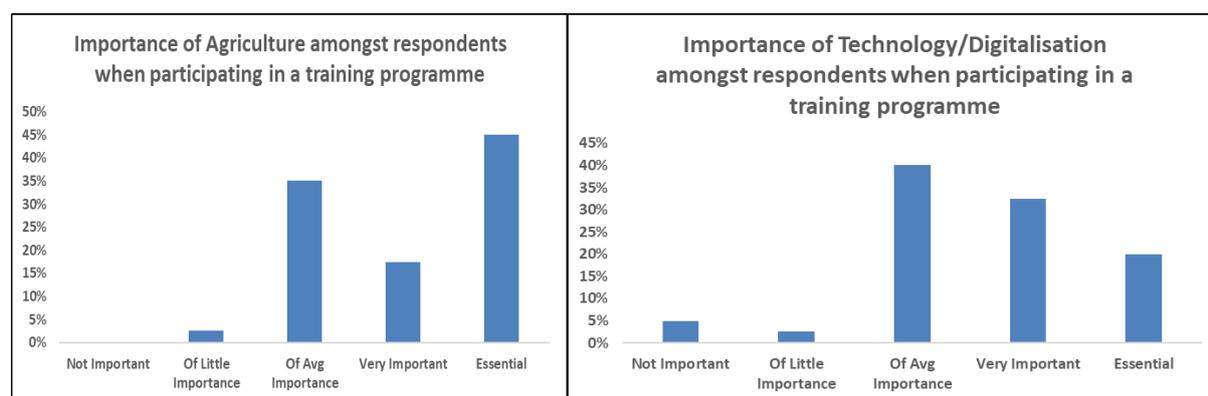


Figure 11 The most important competencies amongst respondents when participating in a training programme

The Focus Group were asked to rank the relative importance of suggested training content within sustainable agriculture and food processing with health and safety, marketing and diversification ranking highest, as illustrated, in Figure 12.

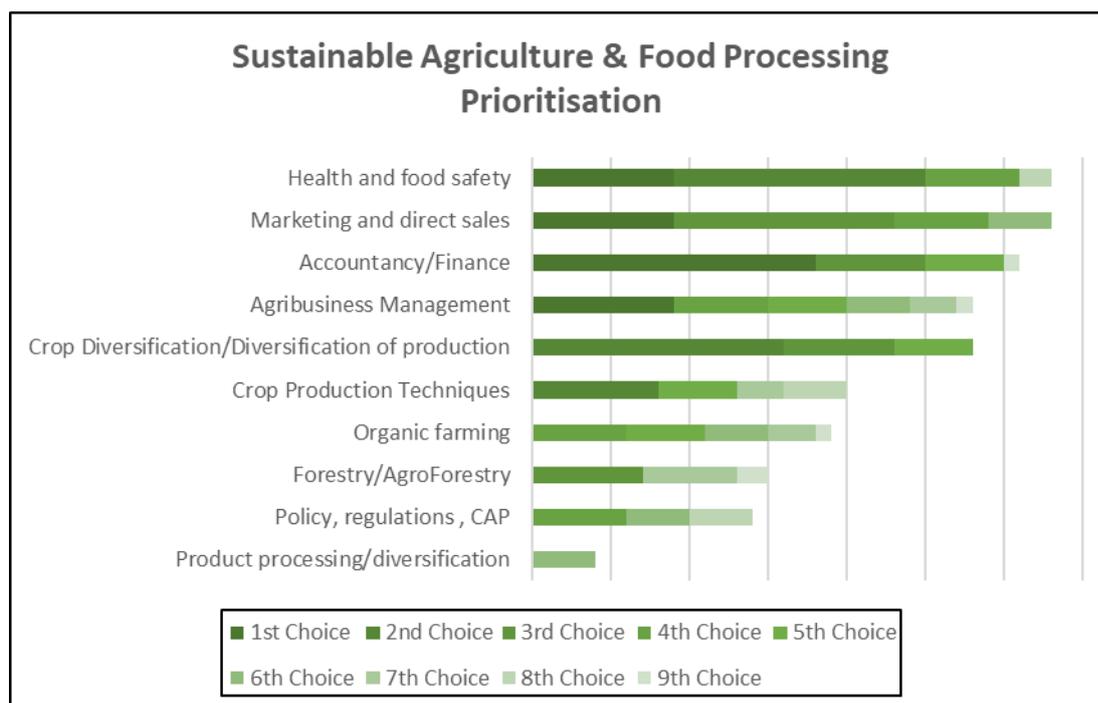


Figure 12. Focus Group participants ranked the importance of Agricultural skills.

Focus Group participants identified communication and networking within the agri-sector as potential important skills. The Focus Group discussion identified that available diversification training was too specific and so only to those with firm ideas. A broad overview of diversification options would thus be of value. Women who marry into family farms were identified as potentially being under served. Training regarding agriculture legislation, taxation and subsidies were identified as potential topics of interest to these women.

The Think Tank identified adding value to products and services as a key skill, a related but distinct framing compared to the Focus Group, which prioritised direct marketing and sales. Sustainability also ranked highly among the Think Tank participants but was less mentioned by the Focus Group who were more interested in compliance with regulations, health and



safety, and grants than direct engagement with sustainability. The bio economy or the circular economy was raised by one Think Tank member but was not mentioned by other participants.

The Focus Groups mooted two training streams. The first might be aimed at those expanding current operations (e.g. dairy) who may wish to become more familiar with policies and supports. The second would be for those wishing to develop novel enterprises (diversify) who may be more interested in direct marketing and different forms of regulations, such as, food processing and agri-tourism. In summary, within agriculture, health and safety, marketing and direct sales were highlighted as being high priority topics.

#### **Within Digitalisation/ Technology, what content was important?**

The Focus Group were asked to rank the relative importance of training content within digitalisation and technology. Intermediate skills, with specific applications (e.g. ECDL) and social media were deemed a high priority. Basic skills like using a laptop or browsing the internet were a low priority (Figure 13). Focus group discussion indicated that social media, social media marketing and eventually web site creation would be of interest. Business to business marketing was also mentioned in terms of social media marketing. In summary, work related software and webpages, novel opportunities (and risks) and social media were identified as priority topics.

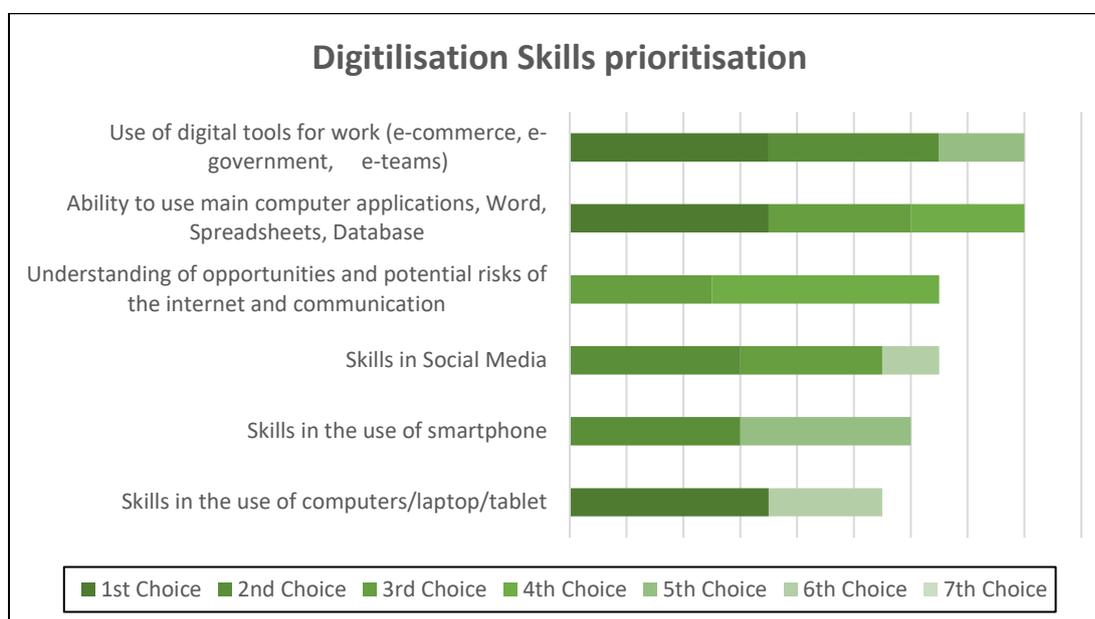


Figure 13 Focus Group participants ranked the importance of technology and digital skills

### Within Entrepreneurship/Business, what content was important?

The Focus Group were asked to rank the relative importance of training content within entrepreneurship and business with skills relating to starting novel enterprises ranking highest was finance as illustrated in Figure 14. In the Focus Group, insurance, legal issues – risk assessments arose as general concerns. In particular, it was felt, that diversifying the farm might put the farm at risk. Communication and negotiating skills for interacting with external stakeholders and family members may be helpful to support rural women lead change within family businesses. The Think Tank identified entrepreneurship in the broader sense of converting ideas into value as being a key focus area (in comparison to the narrow sense of creating enterprises). Specifically, financial literacy, funding, entrepreneurial mindset, communication skills, marketing, budgeting, self-filing of taxes and employment law were identified as useful content areas. In summary, novel project financing, planning and regulatory knowledge were specific content topics of interest. The Think Tank, however,

discussed the value of a broader definition of entrepreneurship beyond just novel enterprise to include turning ideas into value in a range of contexts.

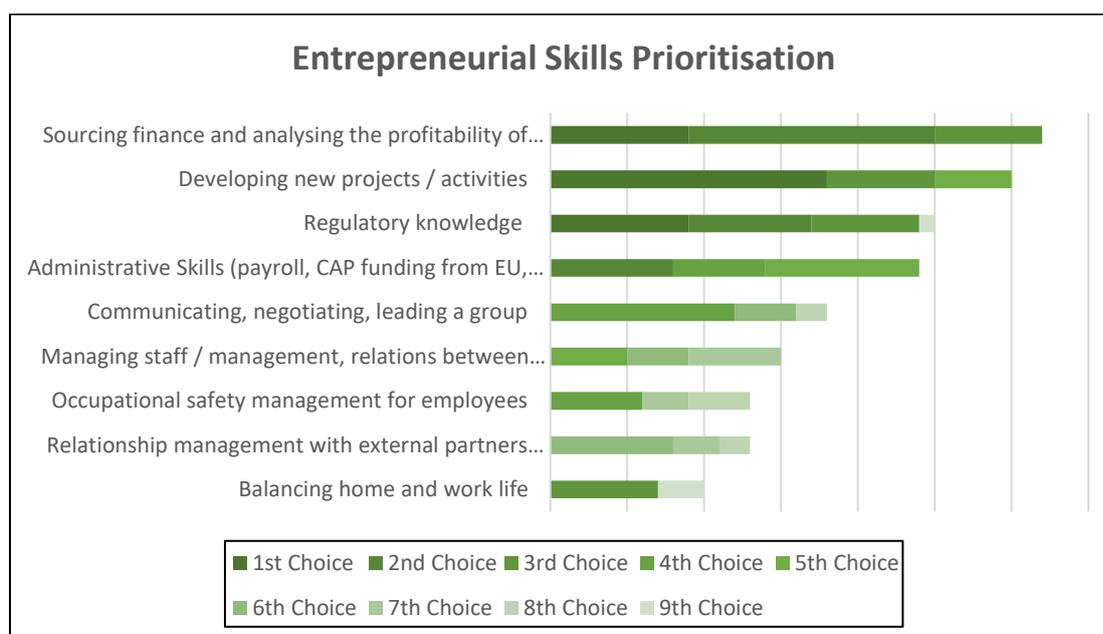


Figure 14 Four focus group respondents ranked the following content in Entrepreneurship / Business

### Within Tourism/Hospitality, what content was important?

In Figure 15, the Focus Group participants were asked to rank the relative importance of training content within tourism and hospitality. The most prominent knowledge desired in tourism by the Focus Group participants was the regulations and liabilities associated with welcoming guests onto farms. The theme of adding value through tourism arose, along with customer service, marketing, networking, food tourism – food stories and experience creation. One member of the Think Tank who works in hospitality industry highlighted the importance of Emotional Intelligence in tourism. Overall, questionnaire and focus group participants indicated a lower level of knowledge of tourism indicating less advanced content would be of use relative to agriculture. In summary, in tourism was relatively novel to most participants and so relatively introductory/less advanced content is required. Regulations,

starting an accommodation or food business, web content, adding value and emotional intelligence were identified as being important for tourism and hospitality. Overall, digital and regulatory knowledge arose as strong themes across agriculture, digitalisation, entrepreneurship and business, tourism and hospitality.



Figure 15 Focus Group participants ranked the importance of content within the domain of Tourism and Hospitality

#### 4.12. Promoting the course

Discussions in the Focus Group and Think Tank indicated that promotion of the course could be done in a number of ways. One Think Tank member indicated that networking is a large draw citing a successful empowering women course coinciding with international women's day. Promotion in the lifestyle section of the main farming newspaper in Ireland was identified as a good approach to reach the target demographic. Use of Facebook and other social media was also discussed. Linking with other organisations and training programs was also deemed likely to be useful in promoting the course. Potential linkages mentioned, included the Irish Farmer's Association family committee, and Macra na Feirme Skillsnet. In summary, farming media, social media and existing training providers are likely to be effective in promoting a training course to rural women.

#### 4.13. Policy

Discussions on policy focused on reducing barriers to women attending training, such as, funding or grants. Childcare or travel grants for rural women attending training were suggested. Promoting women to leadership positions was also recommended and using training as a mechanism to achieve this was endorsed by several Think Tank participants. Concern about legal liabilities and insurance costs were thought to discourage rural women from investigating potential entrepreneurial activities. Policy initiatives that addressed such concerns, may thus be beneficial. In summary, policy focused on reducing barriers to women attending training courses and policies that promoted entrepreneurship amongst rural women were identified as important.

#### 4.14. Primary Research Findings Summary

The following table shows an overview of the main findings obtained from the primary research actions:

<p><b>Socioeconomic and cultural situation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 35% of questionnaire respondents were aged 25-34</li> <li>• Key challenges included practical challenges to accessing existing training such caring responsibilities and geography.</li> <li>• In addition to practical issues, low self-esteem and confidence were also cited as barriers to engaging with training opportunities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Training experience</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 72.5% of questionnaire respondents had attended some form of training in the previous 12 months.</li> <li>• Most of this training related to agriculture</li> <li>• Attaining new skills and improving their job performance and career prospects were key motivators.</li> <li>• The Focus Group indicated that training needed to have a specific tangible short and medium term benefit to the learner.</li> <li>• Mostly face to face training with some online content was the most popular format.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Requested training contents</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key competencies identified were digital, entrepreneurial and interpersonal skills, especially communication (literacy) and learning to learn</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Questionnaire respondents ranked Agriculture as the most important competency followed by Digitalisation, Entrepreneurship, Finance and Tourism</li><li>• Health and Safety, direct marketing, and finance ranked high within agriculture.</li><li>• Within Technology and Digitalisation, office (e.g. ECDL) and other work related applications were a high priority</li><li>• Networking was deemed likely to be an important aspect of the course to highlight when promoting it to potential participants.</li></ul>
<b>Policy recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The key policy issue was to promote more women to leadership roles to act as role models for other women.</li><li>• Policies addressing the practical barriers to rural women attending training such distances and caring responsibilities would also be advantageous.</li></ul>

The typical respondent to the questionnaire was, single, employed, aged 25-34 and had a monthly household income of between €1,561 and €2,000. Common challenges faced by rural women identified included: recognition of current contributions, self-esteem, lack of female leadership role models, care responsibilities, distance and accessibility of training. 72.5% of questionnaire respondents had attended training in the previous 12 months with agriculture related training accounting for two thirds of this. Career, work performance and skill acquisition were common motivators for attending training among questionnaire respondents with good curriculum design and clear learning goals deemed important. The focus group highlighted networking and engagement with trainers as being important while the Think Tank participants identified accrediting existing knowledge and skills. Blended learning, 60% face to face and 40% online training was identified as an appropriate balance of convenience from online and the networking benefits of face-to-face learning. The structure of training should be 'bite size' or modular to minimise the commitment entailed in each unit of learning so that it would be less daunting or discouraging. These modules should be from introductory (no assumed knowledge to) to intermediate content with links to more advanced

content beyond the training. Key transversal skills around, communication, motivation, confidence, entrepreneurial mindset and networking emerged. Interpersonal and digitalisation skills were ranked as the most important competencies. Digital and regulatory knowledge arose as strong themes across the key competencies of agriculture, digitalisation, entrepreneurship and business, tourism and hospitality. Other important topics to note were, health and safety and marketing (agricultural topics), finance and planning (entrepreneurship/business) and emotional intelligence (tourism/hospitality). Social media and existing training providers are likely to be effective in promoting a training course. Finally, policy aimed at removing barriers to women attending training courses and promoting entrepreneurship amongst rural women was identified as important.

## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

This section summarises the conclusions of this report and details seven recommendations of this study.

### 5.1 Conclusions

This report informs the design of a training programme for women living in rural areas based on their own identified needs. It also identifies the main needs and challenges of women working in rural areas accessing training. Given the current economic climate and the deteriorating labour market, this training course will serve a gap identified in the market. The Irish economy had recorded almost full employment (4% unemployment rate) pre COVID19 and the unemployment rate is likely to double, before the end of 2020.

The Irish government financially supports Macra na Feirme, Teagasc and Skillnet, who collaborate with a range of regional and specialist organisations, to provide training courses in Ireland. However, there is an absence of training programmes aimed specifically at women working in rural areas in Ireland with the exception of a programme to support new enterprise development. There also appears to be a gap in training provision for women aged 35 – 60 for training programmes in rural areas that are not explicitly focused on supporting new

enterprises. A training course addressing this age cohort of women not currently considering starting an enterprise would likely be a novel offering in Ireland and could potentially meet a major unmet need. Caring or household responsibilities, geography and confidence / low self-esteem were identified as major challenges preventing rural women accessing training.

### 5.2 Content Recommendations

Transversal skills that should be prioritised, based on the focus group and think tank, were communication, motivation, confidence, entrepreneurial mindset and networking emerged. Interpersonal and digitalisation skills were ranked as the most important competencies in the Focus Groups and Think Tank. The most important was technical areas were Agriculture followed by Technology and Digitalisation, Financials and Accounting, Entrepreneurship/Business and Tourism/Hospitality.

Health and Safety, direct marketing, and finance ranked highest within agriculture for specific content. Within Technology and Digitalisation, office (e.g. ECDL) and other work related applications were a high priority. Within Entrepreneurship, finance and financial appraisal of new ventures were ranked highest priority. Within Tourism, regulations relating to setting up a tourism business and in particular, tourism activities for farms. The key findings of this report are the training should include self-confidence/esteem building, office software (ECDL), social media, regulations, diversification, communication, financial, and entrepreneurial competencies.

### 5.3 Structure and delivery recommendations

Based on the 3 forms of research – questionnaire, focus group and think tank, we make the following recommendations. A blended training course structure that would be suited to mitigating challenges by rural women was found to be 60% face-to-face on weekends, 40% online. Networking and socialising were identified as a key aspect so experiential learning and group projects are recommended formats. Small modules (1 ECTS each - 25 hours learner time) were recommended as the minimum unit of commitment of learner time. Learners

could thus do one ECTS on a topic or do several ECTS covering a range of topics or focusing in a particular area. The small unit of commitment was thought important so that the commitment would not be daunting and the multiple small courses would allow for selection of the most relevant content for each learner. Assessments should not be overly burdensome, while accreditation should be an option. Accreditation of existing skills was also identified as a way to support confidence building. The content of the course should aim to raise their confidence and help participants towards taking on greater leadership roles, be it in their family, their family business, their career, their community or, their own enterprise.

Based on the first Focus Group discussion, a draft training programme outline was developed. Participants of the subsequent Focus Group and Think Tanks could then comment and make suggestions, which were incorporated into the draft training programme outline. The proposed training programme is presented in Figure 16 and the recommendations are detailed below Figure 16.

- 1) Each unit (approximately 1 ECTS – 25 hours of learner time) will be referred to as a course. Completing multiple courses will indicate progression through the ‘training’.
- 2) Two levels of content are proposed – introductory and intermediate. Intermediate courses having assumed prior knowledge, while each introductory course would have no assumed prior knowledge.
- 3) An award may be made upon completion of 5/10 courses or 5/10 ECTS.
- 4) The award could be made based partially on training provided by an external provider (e.g. online ECDL course).
- 5) Interpersonal skills and self-development were identified as important by the Think Tanks, it is envisaged that completing some of these will be encouraged or required as part of achieving an award.
- 6) Creating connections between participants in different countries is also suggested through collaborative projects or exchanges.
- 7) The training design will be done so that participants can easily continue training / education with other providers supporting life-long learning.



Competencies	Themes	Introductory topics			Intermediate content (some assumed knowledge)			Further learning outside	
Entrepreneurship: enterprise and mindset	<b>Core interpersonal skills / Mindset</b>	Skills inventory & Learning to learn	Wellbeing, health & motivation	Self leadership /EI	Goal setting & Time Management	Presentation - Sharing their stories Leadership roles			
	<b>Business</b>	Social & economic Entrepreneurship	CV and Interviews	Business budgeting for beginners	Budgeting a development	Financing a company / diversification	Next steps	Continuous professional development	
Agriculture	<b>Misc Ag</b>	Intro to Ag & Rural Policy	Agro Ecology	Into to Circular economy	Adding value	Sustainability and Organic	Cap and policy	Green Cert	
	<b>Diversification</b>	High level introduction. Asset and capability inventory	Case studies / networking	Opportunity assessment	Business plan	First steps report	Presentation	Marca / IFA skillnet	
Digitilisation	<b>Web, IT &amp; marketing</b>	Social media	Marketing	ECDL	Web design	Marketing project	Innovation in ag and tourism		
Tourism	<b>Tourism</b>	Intro to Rural Tourism	Hospitality	Accommodation provision	Customer service	Creating 'Experiences'	Tourism online (AirBnB, etc)	Further learning outside the program	

Figure 16 Proposal of training course content for rural women in Ireland

#### 5.4 Methodology success and limitations

The research methodology employed in this study used a surveys, focus groups with potential beneficiaries and expert in consultation in a format similar to a focus group (Think Tank). The questionnaire in Ireland was modest in size and dominated by women in agriculture, an artefact of the networks used to recruit respondents. Only one of the 40 respondents for example, said agriculture was of little importance to her when participating in training, with 17 saying it was of average important, 17 saying it was very important or essential. Therefore, rural women not in or not interested in agriculture are not represented in the questionnaire findings. As the focus group recruitment relied on the questionnaire participants it was evident that the focus groups were also dominated by those in agriculture. The Think Tank in contrast was more balanced with regional development agencies, chambers of commerce, education and tourism represented.

Obstacles encountered included the Covid 19 pandemic but this was overcome by moving online which in some respects facilitated broader engagement with the focus group and think tank. Only one person asked to join the focus group cited poor internet when declining to participate.

Lessons learned include that more effort should have been taken to recruit rural women for questionnaire and focus group not involved in agriculture directly to supplement the convenience sample.

Engagement from target group. Recruitment difficulty for the questionnaire and focus group was not unusual so rural women were not more or less motivated to participate than a typical research cohort. During the focus group, a biased sample of those willing to engage more, the participants were eager and positive about the need and desire for a training programme aimed at rural women.

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