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DEVELOPING EQUAL CAREER SUPPORT MEASURES

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP SKILLS TRAINING FOR FEMALE STAFF

TEAGASC, Ireland

The Gender-SMART project is a community composed of seven European Research Performing & Funding Organisations, operating in the broadly framed field of research in food, agricultural and life sciences, committed to advancing gender equality.

This fact sheet illustrates one of the twelve experience-based good practices collected by the project to encourage and steer change in Gender-SMART Partner Institutions.

Results are meaningful and scalable to reach out to a larger number of beneficiaries.

AREA



Developing Equal
Career Support
Measures

Re-Shaping Gender
in Decision Making

CATEGORY



Empowering
Leadership and
Career supports
for women

PARTNER



TEAGASC, Ireland



Agriculture and Food Development Authority

FOCAL PERSONS



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Main Description

At the start of Gender-SMART, Teagasc had poor representation of women in senior (12%) and/or high-profile positions and there has been low participation for female staff to apply for higher level positions. Research shows that women can have lower levels of confidence to put themselves forward; therefore, structures and supports are needed to empower women.

Arising from the inputs gained in a number of Teagasc and consortium led Gender-SMART workshops, Teagasc decided to launch a self-leadership development programme for female staff only. The Gender-SMART Core Team designed the programme gaining support from the senior management as well as the Teagasc governing authority (board). Teagasc collaborated with the organisation Kingston Training who are reputable executive coaches and who focus in particular on female executive development.

Design of Training Solution

Be-spoke

- ✓ Programme completely tailored for Teagasc needs
- ✓ Focus was on self-leadership not strategic leadership

Deal with specific challenges

- ✓ Reality of how women and men work and network differently within an organisation was dealt with
- ✓ Participants given career strategies and tools

Empowering

- ✓ A critical theme of the programme is empowering participants to act
- ✓ Set career goals and put plans in place

ETHOS - everyone is a leader, no matter where they are in the organisation

Leading From Within

The main objectives of the programme were to:

- ✓ Create a network for female staff
- ✓ Build confidence
- ✓ Create awareness around career development goals
- ✓ Provide tools for female staff to develop their career journey



The overall expected outcome was to reach a higher number of female staff applying for roles, increase the number of female role models in Teagasc and ultimately to improve gender in decision making.



The programme has been a resounding success, with many staff quoted as saying 'this personal development programme was a game changer for me'.

Since the programme was implemented, the ratio of females in mid to senior positions is incrementally improving. In 2018 only 12% of mid-senior level positions were held by women, in 2022 this now stands at 24%. This improvement is not just benefiting women, but it is also benefiting the whole organisation as there is now more diversity in decision making.

Participants reference the programme 24 months after attending it and publicly attribute their recent career success to the learnings, insights and supports they gained from the Teagasc Leading from Within programme.

Background

Teagasc is the Irish agriculture and food development authority. It was established in September 1988 under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988. It is a semi-state organisation with approximately 1,200 employees and an annual operating budget of approximately €160m. Teagasc provides integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities.

Teagasc has a research portfolio of over 450 internally and externally funded research projects undertaking research in agriculture, food, environmental science, agri-food economics, rural development, horticulture and other related disciplines. Teagasc collaborates with stakeholders nationally and internationally in the conduct of its research.

Teagasc has approximately 42,000 farmer clients who pay an annual fee for advisory services. Teagasc also provides a range of agricultural education courses to approximately 3,500 students annually, delivered through agricultural colleges and in collaboration with Higher Education Institutes. Teagasc delivers its programmes and activities through its research, advisory, education and support staff and an infrastructure of seven research centres, seven agricultural colleges and 52 advisory offices across Ireland.



TEAGASC Gender Equality Plan

VISIT PAGE



Specifics of the measure

The requirement and training needs for such an initiative were identified as part of the Gender-SMART workshops in 2019. The training specification, content and learning outcomes led to the procurement of a suitable expert trainer. Learning and skills outcomes were agreed along with the title and brand for this four day face-to-face interactive training programme. Female staff at all levels were selected for attending the programme and over 80 women participated in the programme and networking events up to the point of the COVID pandemic. The course was opened up for expressions of interest again in late 2021, and there were 50 more staff attending the programme in May and July of 2022.

Each of the 2019-2020 training cohorts set up a support circle after the programme and this led to a more formal lean-in circle methodology being set up by the Gender-SMART team in mid 2021. Through the lean-in circles participants are now supporting each other through mentoring, supporting and peer-to-peer learning. Teagasc currently has three active lean-in circles of female colleagues, and this gender initiative was shared with all Teagasc staff as part of our International Women's Days event in 2022.

Since 8th March 2022, a number of female staff have asked to attend the training programme and to join a lean-in circle. A space on our learning management system has been designed to host all of the circle information and material so that

each of the groups can share unique and insightful information that is pertinent to female colleagues.

The Gender-SMART Core Team and task force has called on the participant network of the Leading from Within Programme to help input into our GEP, to help with running gender and diversity events and also to lead on some of the GEP actions.

As a consequence of this programme, female staff have been provided with skills and tools to set their career goals, identify their unique selling point, and operate successfully in a sector that is quite male oriented. As a result of this practice, a powerful network of female staff has been developed. It has and will continue to hugely influence career decisions made by the participants: a number of women have applied for and been successful at getting promoted since doing the programme.

The key stakeholders involved in this practice were the senior, middle and line managers at Teagasc who supported and encouraged staff to attend the programme. The staff training unit supported the running of the programme. The programme was critically assessed by the pilot participants and the career development/pathway of all participants was tracked centrally by the HR department. The programme was edited after the pilot programme and some changes made to the duration and content.

Although during the pandemic it was decided not to run the programme through a virtual format as a huge part of the benefits is the person interactions, the programme has already been scaled up again, with 50 female staff due to attend the programme in mid-2022.

In 2020, Teagasc received an award for this programme from the Irish Institute of Training and Development in the category of Best Diversity and Inclusion Participative Initiative.



The approach and content of the Teagasc Leading from Within Programme and spin off networking events is very applicable to many beneficiaries and scalable for other Gender-SMART consortium organisations.



Lessons learned

- ✓ It was critical to get good buy in from the start for the need for such a programme. The evidence and need identified at our workshops significantly helped in this regard.
- ✓ The potential trainers following our procurement process were interviewed/had to present before Teagasc selected them. It is critical that the style, the values and beliefs of the trainer from a gender equality perspective are aligned to the goals of the organisation.
- ✓ The programme encompassed pre-work including self-reflection and a discussion with a staff members line manager. The programme also included an assignment and presentation on the last day. These practical elements were very important to the learning.
- ✓ The follow up networking that was supported and nurtured by the Core Team ensured the longevity of the learning and future skills development.
- ✓ The programme was not run virtually as one of the benefits is the person interaction. We believe this was the correct decision.
- ✓ Line managers of the participants were supposed to have a conversation with their staff before and after attendance at the programme – this good practice was not consistently adopted by all managers. Greater communication is needed to get better buy in.
- ✓ For the adoption of this practice, it needs to be clearly understood within an organisation why this programme has been designed and offered to female staff (only). There needs to be understanding at top level management, and full support. Ideally some senior managers should open the programme on day one which endorses the commitment from the top of the organisation.
- ✓ A resource needs to be assigned to orchestrate the follow up, networking events, etc.

