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## INTRODUCTION

Creating an inclusive learning environment for all is at the heart of the University College Cork's mission statement (UCC Strategic Plan, 2017-2022).

This Pilot Project is the first of its kind in UCC in which a group of 16 farmers from West Cork were awarded exemptions for 40 credits of a 60 credit Diploma Programme and completed the remaining 20 credits in a blended learning fashion suited to their needs.

Through their participation in the Carbery Greener Dairy Farms Project (CGDF), the farmers had achieved learning, competencies, experience and skills that were mapped through an RPL process against the Learning Outcomes of UCC's Diploma in Environmental Science and Social Policy (NFQ Level 7 Special Purpose Award).

This Poster describes the process and method that was established by a team at Adult Continuing Education, ACE at UCC.

## THE WEST CORK FARMERS



## OBJECTIVES

The RPL project had a dual purpose in that it set out to:

- > create a mechanism or pathway that would allow the farmers to be considered as a group and;
- > award exemptions to them based on the non-certified learning they acquired on the CGDF Project which was established by Teagasc in 2012.

Research by Goggin, O'Leary, and Sheridan (2017) of RPL across the Irish FET sector alludes to "a sense that RPL processes would be more amenable to a cohort approach as it can be very time consuming to process claims from individuals" (p. 27).

## DIPLOMA IN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND SOCIAL POLICY

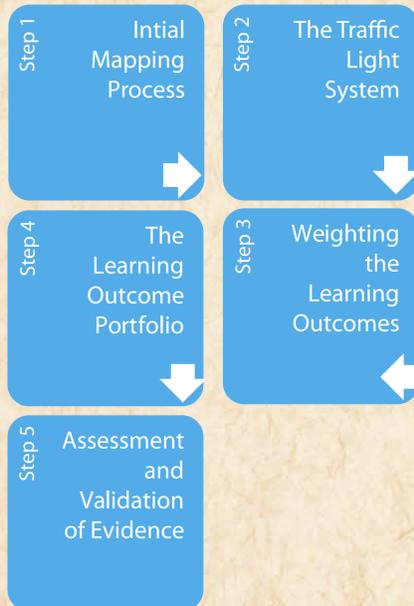
This NFQ Level 7 Special Purpose Award offers an interdisciplinary approach to the environment and issues related, either directly or indirectly, to our use of it. The course is designed to give a broad knowledge and experience of the key concepts of environmental science, sustainable development, social policy and economics that shape the world we live in. Full details can be found at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-denvsp/>

## CARBERY GREENER DAIRY FARMS PROJECT

The Carbery group is a major international manufacturer of quality nutritional ingredients, flavours and natural cheeses, headquartered in Cork, Ireland. The Greener Dairy Farms Project was developed by Carbery as Ireland's first model for best practice in sustainable dairy farming. CGDF is an innovative, dairy efficiency programme designed in collaboration with Teagasc to measure, monitor and optimise resource allocation and best sustainable practice on farms. The overall aim of the project was to identify as many practical means by which West Cork farmers, who supply dairy ingredients to Carbery, could improve their sustainability in the hope that it would lead to long term reductions in green-house gas emissions as well as improve the financial gains of the farmers in a measurable way.

## METHODOLOGY

An RPL Process involves the identification of learning and the recording of this learning in a form suitable for assessment. A 5 Step Method was developed to achieve this objective.



Step 1: An "Initial Mapping Process" of the Learning Outcomes (LOs) for each module on the Diploma in Environmental Science and Social Policy against the learning achieved by the farmers on the Greener Dairy Farms Project was completed.

Step 2: Next a **Traffic Light Colour Coded System** of **Red**, **Orange** and **Green** was applied as a way of visually representing the work completed by the farmers against the learning outcomes of each module. **Red** indicated that the learning outcome was **not achieved** by the farmers. **Orange** indicated that the learning outcome was **partly achieved**. **Green** indicated that the learning outcome was deemed to have been **fully achieved** by the farmers.

Step 3: This step involved assigning a percentage weighting to the learning outcomes which took into consideration their relative importance to the overall module.

Step 4: A Learning Outcome portfolio was produced which documented the evidence of achievement by the farmers.

Step 5: This step involved the assessment and validation of the evidence provided in the portfolio according to the criteria of the University's RPL Policy. This was achieved through a systematic review of the learning outcome portfolio which was conducted independently by a number of people.



## IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

- This is the first time that UCC has approved a group RPL portfolio and as a result of its success, the University's Academic Standards and Development Board (ADSC) is currently reviewing the RPL Policy.
- The project has incentivised farmers in West Cork to consolidate their learning from the Greener Dairy Farms initiative by completing the Diploma in Environmental Science and Social Policy at UCC.
- Through the RPL process, UCC has been able to highlight and validate the tremendous work that the farmers have completed in making their farms both more sustainable and profitable.
- Key achievements in their farming careers are now certified in an NFQ Level 7 programme.
- By developing a transparent and strong RPL methodology, the academic standards and rigour of the Diploma course has been maintained.
- Overall, this project has achieved access, success and inclusion in the University sector for 18 West Cork Farmers.

## GRADUATION



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## REFERENCES

Goggin, D., O'Leary, P., & Sheridan, I. (2017). *Recognition of prior learning in Irish further education and training (FET)*. Cork Institute of Technology.

University College Cork RPL Policy (2010). UCC Policy Document.

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