



Scottish Agricultural College (SAC)

Outline Planning Document

PGCert/PGDip/MSc in Professional Agricultural Practice

Section A: Core Data and Academic Issues

1. Proposed Development Team

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2. Introduction

Professional Agricultural Practice is a postgraduate qualification designed to meet the needs of a number of professionals within the land based industries. It embraces and applies a broad discipline of business, science and technology to this sector., The qualification will include a core of carbon management, business & marketing, soil science and extension practice as well as the option to study specialist modules in topics including crop protection, crop nutrition, poultry production, habitat and species management, organic farming. The choice of option will therefore allow streaming within the programmes so that the final qualification could be in Agronomy or Extension as well as a general stream.

In view of the Scottish Government's broadening of rural development support, as shown in the Scottish Rural Development Programme, SAC believe there is also scope for creating attractive taught postgraduate provision which meets the needs of professional practitioner's CPD. This would allow people who wish to develop particular knowledge, relevant to their specific needs, to apply for single modules rather than working towards a full qualification.

he proposal is to offer a sufficiently distinct product which will be attractive to a wide range of potential professional working in the wide area of agricultural and land-based industries. Diversification of the rural economy is one of the stated aims of government, and increasingly agriculture businesses are broader than simple primary product production.

Importantly, it is proposed that the PGCert qualification, and hence the core of the taught PG Diploma/MSc, will prove to be a first qualification for new staff within the agricultural consultancy / extension area – both within SAC but also within other consultancy organisations as well as for technical advisors.

The course will be offered by distance learning on a proven distance learning platform. A cross campus and cross divisional development team will be put together. The expertise of the members will reflect the proposed content of the course

The programme will focus on professional agricultural practice primarily within a temperate European context and as such may be attractive to those outwith the UK and in particular to businesses operating across Europe. It is unlikely to be particularly attractive to International

students as visas are generally not given to International students to come to the UK to study on a distance basis.

SAC has a limited portfolio of taught postgraduate provision and hence currently has no conflicting provision within this vocational area. There is no competing provision offered on a distance learning basis within the UK targeted specifically at distance and workplace learners. However, to offer programmes of study that meet the requirements of a range of individuals and settings within the sector, modules that are integral parts of existing MSc provision will be utilised as optional modules.

3. Proposed Programme Titles

Professional Agricultural Practice (PGCert)

Professional Agricultural Practice (PgDip)

Professional Agricultural Practice (MSc)

4. Proposed Academic Level & Exit Awards

PGCert Professional Agricultural Practice (Level 11) 60 credits

PGDip Professional Agricultural Practice (Level 11) 120 credits

MSc Professional Agricultural Practice (Level 11) 180 credits

5. Programme Duration

PGCert Professional Agricultural Practice (Level 11) – normally 1 year part time study by distance learning at SAC

PGDip Professional Agricultural Practice (Level 11) - normally 2 years part -time study by distance learning at SAC

MSc Professional Agricultural Practice (Level 11) - normally 3 years part -time study by distance learning at SAC

6. Mode of attendance

Part time studies using e-learning material and study weekends. Possibilities for including periods of work experience and vocational placements will be explored. If the programme proved successful in a European context then study weekends could be held outwith the UK.

7. Proposed validating bodies

The University of Glasgow for PGCert, PGDip and MSc

8. Outline of academic aims and objectives

Practising agricultural professionals, whether they are consultants, growers, farmers and business managers, researchers or educators, require a specialist understanding of the business, technical, scientific, economic, social and environmental factors impacting upon the agricultural industry in its widest sense.

With increasing pressures on finite resources, greater consumer awareness and scrutiny of food production, competition for land use and a growing global population, the agricultural professional of the future will be required to work within a challenging environment, addressing frequently competing and often contradictory demands.

This programme aims to equip graduates with the required knowledge and skills to meet these challenges.

General Aims of the Programme

- To provide an opportunity for existing graduates in employment to add to their qualifications either for CPD purposes or as a means of changing careers and entering the professional agricultural sector.
- To facilitate knowledge transfer from SAC's research and consultancy activities.
- To provide an education programme that helps to develop appropriate graduate attributes aligned with the benchmark standards of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and of the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework, and reflecting developing expectations in the sector.
- To produce graduates with an understanding of sustainable agricultural production.
- To provide a student-centred learning environment which stimulates students to achieve their full intellectual potential and to develop independence of thought and an enquiring mind.
- To progressively develop in students a culture of life-long learning.

9. Relation to SAC Mission and Education Objectives

Ensuring sustainable agricultural practise is central to our vision:

"To be a dynamic and innovative academic community that benefits the rural economy"

And our aims:

- To be excellent in research and education that benefits the rural economy nationally and internationally.
- To be effective in translating the outcomes of our research into practice.
- To develop the knowledge and skills of our students to their optimum level.

The proposed programme supports the following elements of the Academic Strategic Business Plan:

- Develop and grow our programmes of postgraduate education.
- Recruit student numbers in line with targets set.
- Provide the highest quality education and training programmes in an environment focussed on continual quality improvement.
- Ensure appropriate levels of participation in our education programmes from non-traditional entrants and in new geographical regions.

10. Compatibility with existing portfolio of programmes

The Professional Agricultural Practice programme fits into a distinct niche in the SAC programme portfolio and will lead to a level of qualification widely regarded as reflecting career and professional progression. The development of the programme to Masters Level represents an opportunity to further enhance SAC's reputation as a provider of higher level education. SAC currently offers no similar or comparable qualification in agricultural subject areas.

11. Proposed outline curriculum and planned inclusion of transferable / interpersonal / cognitive / graduate skills

An indicative outline curriculum is given in the tables that follow. Note that these are broadly anticipated subject areas. The content of the programme will be developed through consultation with the relevant industries.

Year 1 – PGCert Professional Agricultural Practice

Module	SCQF Credits	SCQF Level	Comments
Extension Methodology	15	11	New Module
Soils and Nutrient Cycling	15	11	Existing Organic PG Module
Carbon Management	15	10	4 th Year Agriculture BSc Module
Agricultural and 'Food' Policy and business environment	15	11	Existing RBM PG Module

Year 2 – PGDip Professional Agricultural Practice

4 modules to be taken from the following:

Module	SCQF Credits	SCQF Level	Comments
Integrated Crop/Farm Management	15	11	New Module
Advanced Extension (inc KTE)	15	11	New Module
Marketing	15	11	Existing RBM MSc Module
Issues in Organic Farming	15	11	Existing Organic PG Module
Habitat and Species Management	15	11	Existing CM PG Module
Poultry Production Systems	15	11	Existing Poultry PG Module
FACTS*	15	11	Equivalent to existing CPD Delivery
Agronomy**	15	11	Equivalent to existing CPD Delivery
Safety and Legislation for Agronomists**	15	11	Equivalent to existing CPD Delivery
Any relevant DL MSc Module	15	11	Existing PG DL Module

* Additional Fee rates would be charged

+ Completion of the Agronomy and the Safety & Legislation for Agronomists modules will lead to BASIS qualification.

Year 3 – MSc Professional Agricultural Practice

Module	SCQF Credits	Module No.	SCQF Level	Comments
Project	60		11	

12. Major electives / specialisms within programme

The inclusion of electives is considered to be appropriate to meet the diverse requirements

of agricultural professionals. If the programme does include streams then parameters will need to be set to stipulate what electives are taken within a stream. A wildcard elective option is also included to permit a student to undertake any other SAC MSc 15 credit (SCQF) module at SCQF level 11 to allow further specialisation as required.

13. Proposed use of existing SAC modules

Existing SAC taught modules and materials from commercial programmes are being utilised where they meet the needs of the programme in some cases with appropriate modification in respect of SCQF level and mode of delivery.

14. Participating teaching groups

It is anticipated that the programme will be supported primarily by the Life Sciences and Social and Environmental Sciences Teaching Groups. However both Research and Consultancy Divisions will have important input to both the development and the delivery of the programme.

15. Proposed collaborative arrangements with other institutions and “programme ownership” arrangements.

It is anticipated that recognition for individual modules will be sought from, in particular, the BASIS Professional Register, FACTS and the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants (BIAC). No formal collaborative arrangements with other institutions are immediately planned and ownership of the programme will remain with SAC. However we may be imaginative in how the programme is delivered with respect to residential weekends, locale of students and opportunities for utilising resources at other (research) institutions, commercial farming enterprises and supply industry organisations both within the UK and northern Europe

16. Anticipated employment opportunities

Initial discussions for these awards arose primarily as a result of approaches from industry, representative of UK and the wider European markets, seeking suitably trained and qualified graduates.

Potential employment opportunities for skilled agricultural professionals are broad and diverse and include; directly within the production sectors, the services industries as well as the consultancy and extension sector. Limited recruitment within these sectors within the past twenty years has created an “ageing” workforce with little new blood coming on. This is aggravated by increasingly stringent environmental and legislative conditions being levied upon the production industries resulting in increasing demand for suitably qualified new entrants.

Further market research will seek to quantify likely annual job demand within the domestic and wider European markets.

Section B: Resource Issues

1. Perceived market niche / target group:

The perceived market niche is for the development of technically competent agricultural professionals operating within commercial environments. Principally this provision will target those in the workplace as distance learners who are currently excluded from personal and professional development leading to academic award at this level. SAC is well placed to address this provision, drawing on its distinct blend of education, research and consultancy expertise, combined with our longstanding experience in extension work and knowledge transfer & exchange and our successful track record in delivering on-line distance learning programmes e.g. Organic Farming, Applied Poultry Science.

Consequently it is anticipated that the provision will be attractive both to individuals and to businesses wishing to engage with an appropriate and relevant staff CPD programme. Additionally it is expected to be a useful qualification for conversion from less agriculturally focussed, but relevant, undergraduate programmes.

2. Competition

There would appear to be no other distance learning courses directly competing within this market although there is some taught campus-based provision, notably at Harper Adams University College. Market research should help to address why there is currently no existing provision, but it should be noted that competing institutions, unlike SAC, have not addressed the distance learning market per se.

3. Expected source & level of funding

It is anticipated that this provision will primarily rely on commercial fee income (i.e. non-core SFC) for funding support. Commercial sponsorship and student bursaries from organisations and industry will be sought.

4. Forecast demand (expected intake numbers in first 5 years)

Forecasting demand is very difficult; however no equivalent distance learning provision exists allowing this programme to exploit the work-based learning market and to develop relationships with commercial businesses across a large geographic area.

An industry survey will provide factual evidence and costing models will determine commercial breakeven levels. However it is considered realistic to anticipate 15-20 candidates per year.

5. Fee sharing / core funding arrangements

There are no fee sharing arrangements anticipated with these programmes

6. Maximum / minimum intake level to run programme

There is no theoretical maximum intake to year 1 however in reality numbers are perhaps likely to be constrained at MSc level by the availability of supervisors for student projects. This will be explored and quantified through validation.

The minimum intake to run the programme will be determined by a full cost analysis.

Predicted income

Fee rates are currently £2500 per year for years 1 (PGCert) and 2 (PGDip) and £1800 for year 3 (MSc). However those modules which provide professional accreditation will be priced at a higher rate.

7. Staff Time: Contact Teaching

Indicative contact teaching time is as follows:

	<u>Hours</u>
PGCert	160
PGDip	160
MSc	160
Total	480

8. Staff Time: Supervision / management / administration time

Anticipated staff time requirements will be quantified utilising similar, existing distance learning delivered MSc provision as the basis.

9. Proposed major visits / tours / overseas placements

A short UK study tour will form an integral part of the course at the end of Year 1. Funding would be determined according to the guidelines existing at the time however it would be anticipated that the cost of such events would be borne by the candidates.

10. Requirement for obligatory split / small classes

No requirement due to the nature of the delivery.

11. New staff requirements

It is not anticipated that new staff members will be required; rather that support will be available from both the Learning Division Teaching Groups and from colleagues in Research and Consulting Divisions. However, utilisation within the group is high and therefore a new staff member may be required and/or consideration may be given to reducing activities in other areas.

12. Staff retraining needs

Some staff development may be required in developing e-learning materials and in supporting staff new to the distance learning teaching environment.

13. Support staff time

Around 5 days of support staff time would be required for helping arrange study weekends.

The technical development of the e-learning material will take, from past experience, c. 50 staff days per year for two years. To be provided by SAC staff and the SAC FL team.

Classroom requirements

Classroom use will be restricted to study weekends when space is typically readily available.

14. Use of IT & library facilities / new purchases

Where appropriate, e-books would be obtained for the Library. Students will require access to Moodle.

15. Estimates for New Equipment requirements

It is not anticipated that new equipment will be required.

16. Other start-up costs / special advertising costs

It is anticipated that initial marketing of the programmes must be financed, although for a there may be scope for issuing press releases to reduce the need for paid advertising space. Use will be made of web-enabled technologies to promote and raise awareness, particularly through trade and industry associations, societies etc. to specifically target businesses and commercial enterprises. It is anticipated that electronic means will be widely used to promote this provision.

17. Other recurrent requirements

Limited and largely relating to staff T&S for study weekends. This will be fully quantified.