

Guidelines

For the Visit to Advisory Body (VA) as Requirement for Obtaining the CECRA Certificate

(for CECRA Course Graduates)

Annex 3

Contents:

- I. Organisation and Management of Advisory Work
- II. Priority Topics and Forms and Modes of Work in the Advisory Sector
- III. Paths to Success for Farms
- IV. Paths to Success for Advisors

Tips for Visit to Advisory Body

Tips for Minuting and Processing Discussions

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Area 1: Organisation and Management of Advisory Work

Organisational Structure:

- How is the agency organised locally (organisation chart) and at the national level?
- To what extent are part-time employees, home- and teleworkers, specialists and general advisors represented at the agency?
- How are employees remunerated?
- To what extent is there cooperation with other (advisory) institutions, and with which of the latter? What are the motivations and aims of this cooperation?
- How are the advisory services funded?
- Are changes in funding to be expected, and what measures are envisaged?
- Are advisory services charged for? What experience is there of this, and what are the next steps?

Working Conditions:

- What are the key features of the advisory area (natural conditions, agricultural structure, laws, farming requirements, etc.)?
- What education do the farmers have, and what are typical attitudes?
- What facilities and technical equipment are available to advisors and educators?

Advisors:

- How many advisors are at the agency, what is their educational background, and what specialist areas are they in charge of?
- How many farms does an advisor serve?
- Are there typical career bands for advisors?
- What further-education opportunities are available to advisors, and how are these organised?
- How is cooperation organised within the agency and with the outside?
- How is the advisory and educational work of the advisors evaluated by the participants (farmers)?
- What form does the assessment of the advisors' performance take (e.g. staff appraisal interviews)?
- What conclusions are drawn from evaluations?
- How is continuing staff education carried out?

Target Groups:

- Who are the current target groups (individuals and institutions)? What is the need or demand of the individual target groups?
- Which target groups are to be addressed in future, on what grounds, and what will be the consequences arising from this?

Advisory Services Scheme:

- What is the mission statement of the agency?
- Is there a client management system, and how is this organised?
- Who compiles the agency's training-course scheme? What are the key points for compiling the said scheme?
- What must be borne in mind in future regarding training-course schemes, and for what reason?
- What documentation is offered to farms in order to comply with the requirements?

Area 2: Priority Topics and Forms and Modes of Work in the Advisory Sector

Priority Topics:

- What are the main topics currently being offered or requested?
- What innovative/new topics have been added in the past few years? What experience of these is already available, and what are the consequences arising from this?
- What future plans are envisaged, and for what reason?

Methodological Approach:

- What forms and modes of work (e.g. lectures, seminars, individual advisory sessions, advisory packages, info-letters, working groups and regulars' get-togethers) are being employed at present, and what experience of these is already available?
- Which projects are successful or less successful, and what are the consequences of this?
- What new modes/forms of work are envisaged, what are the reasons for this, and what expectations are associated with this?

Remits:

- To what extent do advisors deal with support schemes (EU or Country funding schemes), and what advantages and disadvantages are associated with this?

Documentation:

- How are the results of advisory sessions recorded / documented?
- What documents does the farmer receive?

Information Sources and Tools:

- To what extent do advisors have recourse to trial results, or are able to participate in trials?
- What data / tools are available to advisors?
- How important are model farms for the advisory sector and education? For which areas do good examples exist?
- What advisory tools are available (PC programs, documents, checklists, evaluation programs, etc.)?
- What is the situation for advisors regarding teamwork and networking?
- What training courses are offered by other institutions for rural areas?
- What form does cooperation with these institutions take?

Area 3: Paths to Success for Farms

Yardsticks of Success:

- What yardsticks do farms use when they want to measure their success (agricultural income per family or per labour unit (LU), leisure per LU, expansion of farm within a specific time period, satisfaction, utilisation of subsidies, etc.)?

Current Paths to Success:

- What measures for environmentally sound production and management are currently being implemented, and what experience already exists in this regard?
- What support is being offered by the agency for what combination of earning activities? What are the next steps in this area?
- What methods are suggested for efficient marketing, and how are cooperative projects supported? With regard to these issues, to what extent are the agency's objectives consistent with the farmers', and what conclusions can be drawn from this?
- What importance/significance does the topic of cost reduction on the farm have for advisors on the one hand, and farmers on the other? What consequences does this have for the advisory sector and for education?

Framework Conditions:

- To what extent do framework conditions hamper the further development of the farms?
- What support can be offered through advisory services and education?
- How do the ongoing legal changes affect the relationship between advisor and farmer?

Utilisation of Training-Course Provision:

- What types of services should be offered by the official advisory service to farmers to enable them to be successful?
- What significance does private consulting have for (successful) farms?
- What support networks are used by farms (machinery syndicates, relatives, etc.)?
How important is experience sharing for the success of farmers?
- Which farms are being advised in the first priority, and what is the main thrust of the advice (future-oriented farms or farms whose liquidity is threatened, exiting farms, etc.)?

Area 4: Paths to Success for Advisors

Client-orientednes:

- How is the needs analysis conducted for the advisory clients?
- How great is client demand for advisory services?
- How is client satisfaction surveyed?

Management Accounting:

- How is success (internally) measured and acknowledged/rewarded?
- What objectives exist, and how are they reviewed?
- Are cost/performance calculations used in management accounting?
- What influence does management accounting have on financial planning?

Quality Management (QM):

- What standards apply for advisory and training products?
- How competent do the advisors feel (professional and social competence)?
- How are the advisors perceived by colleagues and clients?
- What staff-management tools are used in a success-oriented manner?
- What are the consequences of an unsuccessful project?
- How much leeway is there for innovative ideas and their implementation?

Public Relations:

- How is the product catalogue set up and structured?
- How is the success of an advisor portrayed internally and externally?
- What connection is there between advisory success and the success of the advised farms?

Networking:

- How easy is personal networking in the advisory team?
- With which organisations is the advisory operation institutionally linked?

Tips for Visit to Advisory Body

Preparation

- Read through the Guidelines, highlight important issues / areas, expand on keywords where appropriate
- Commit to memory the areas to be explored
- → The Guidelines are intended for preparation of the **discussion or the visit!**
Please **do not conduct a survey** on the basis of the sheet! Please let people present and ask in addition.

Conducting discussions

- "Who is asking is leading!" Always keep sight of the thrust of the exploration.
- Asking and listening in balance: lead with clear questions, but also allow for the unexpected.
- Schedule sufficient breaks: Experience shows that too much, rather than too little, tends to be packed in- to the programmes.

Minuting

- Right after each talk, take a five-to-ten-minute break and sit down together in pairs with the question: "What was the key element?" Take brief notes for each discussion.
- Immediately jot down ideas that have sparked an interest in later additional work on a special sheet of paper and keep in a separate index. These may later serve as working documents.

Presents for the hosts

Experience shows that participants are very well hosted at the advisory agencies and offices that they visit. Little gifts from the region the participant hails from are always appreciated!