

LASNTG

Local Authority Services
National Training Group
Friar's Court, Nenagh
Co. Tipperary
Phone: 052 616 6260
Email: lasntg@tipperarycoco.ie

LAWPRO

Local Authority Waters
Programme
The Lodge, Ballingarrane, Clonmel,
Co. Tipperary
Phone: 052 616 6230
Email: info@lawaters.ie

LOCAL AUTHORITY WATER QUALITY TRAINING PLAN

2026-2030

Approved
Jun 2025

Valid until
Dec 2030



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage



Cumann Lucht Bainistíochta Contae agus Cathrach
County and City Management Association

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement is expressed to all members of the Water Quality Training Plan steering group and expert contributions as follows:

TRAINING PLAN STEERING GROUP

Áine McCarthy	Senior Executive Officer, Local Authority National Services Training Group (LASNTG).
Alison Treanor	Environmental Scientist & Energy Officer, Cavan County Council
Anthony Mannix	Local Authority Support and Co-Ordination Team Manager, Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
Aoife Loughnane	Inspector – Local Authority Engagement Team, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Christine Lynch	Manager, Stranorlar Regional Training Centre
Enda Kiernan	Senior Executive Engineer, Cork County Council
Kevin Motherway	Regional Co-Ordinator, Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)
Lisa Egan	Water Scientific Policy Advisor, Dept Housing, Local Government & Heritage
Michael Boyce	Senior Executive Engineer, Kerry County Council
Michael Nugent	Local Authority Support & Coordination Team, Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
Róisín Smith	Senior Executive Engineer, Local Authority National Services Training Group (LASNTG).

EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS

Bernie O' Hanrahan	Subject Matter Expert (Private Consultant)
Donal Daly	Subject Matter Expert (Private Consultant)
Martina McGrath	Director, Feasibility Studio Ltd.

FOREWARD



Robert Burns,

**Chief Executive,
Monaghan County
Council**

Chairperson of The
Environmental
Services Training
Group

To be Approved

The delivery of Ireland's water quality objectives is contingent upon a skilled, confident and professionally supported Local Authority workforce. As recognised in the 2024 Review of Local Authority Water Functions, workforce development (specifically the provision of structured and relevant training) was identified as a critical enabler in meeting statutory and environmental responsibilities.

In response to this finding, the Environmental Services Training Group (ESTG) was requested to undertake an examination of water quality related training across the sector.

This training plan is the outcome of that process. It has been developed to provide a coherent, evidence-informed approach to strengthening water quality capacity within the Local Authority sector.

Grounded in operational realities and aligned with national policy, the plan outlines a progressive and modular set of learning pathways to support staff across a range of functions, including regulatory enforcement, scientific analysis, planning, operations, leadership, and community engagement.

It reflects a sector-wide ambition to embed professional excellence and enhance institutional capability in addressing both current and emerging water quality challenges.

The ESTG acknowledges the collaborative effort that has informed the development of this plan and is pleased to endorse its strategic direction. The implementation of which, represents a significant step forward in strengthening the capacity of the local government sector to deliver water quality outcomes, now and into the future.

Robert Burns

Chairperson
Environmental Services Training Group (ESTG)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	07
Analysis	10
Goals & Vision	16
Governance & Management	20
Participant Profile	26
Training Development	30
Delivery	38
Performance & Evaluation	44

ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS

AILG	Association of Irish Local Government
CARO	Climate Action Regional Office
CCMA	County & City Management Association
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESTG	Environmental Services Training Group
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
L & D	Learning and Development
LA	Local Authority
LASNTG	Local Authority Services National Training Group
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
LMS	Learning Management System
RBMP	River Basin Management Plan
RMCEI	Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections
SIG	Strategic Implementation Group
WFD	Water Framework Directive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030 sets out a nationally led, strategic approach to workforce development. It is designed to equip Local Authorities with the capabilities required to discharge their statutory water quality responsibilities with consistency, confidence and technical rigour. Developed in response to the 2025 Water Quality Training Needs Analysis Report and extensive sectoral consultation, the plan reflects the increasing scope, complexity and urgency of water governance in Ireland; particularly against the backdrop of the 2023 Uisce Éireann transition (which redefined the regulatory and environmental responsibilities of Local Authorities nationwide).

Markedly, in the context of shifting institutional responsibilities, Local Authorities continue to hold a central role in the protection and management of water quality. Their functions span a wide range of interdependent activities, inclusive of regulatory oversight, technical evaluation, spatial planning, policy alignment and stakeholder engagement.

To support the effective execution of these responsibilities and address the evolving demands of water quality governance, this training plan introduces a co-ordinated set of measures to enable progressive capacity building across the Local Authority sector. These measures are designed to support legal compliance, technical proficiency and integrated environmental governance (delivered through structured, adaptable and strategically aligned mechanisms). They include but are not limited to:

- Phased Training Implementation - the plan is anchored in a three-phase delivery model that reflects sectoral priorities and operational readiness, whereby
 - Phase 01 addresses core compliance and enforcement functions, reinforcing statutory practice and procedural consistency.
 - Phase 02 strengthens operational capability, with emphasis on diagnostic accuracy, field-based application and evidence-led enforcement.
 - Phase 03 enables the strategic integration of water quality across governance systems, supporting cross-functional alignment and catchment-based decision-making.
- Modular Training Architecture - training provision is organised through a modular system that allows content to be tailored by theme, role, function and context. This will enable structured learner progression, enhance accessibility and streamline operational consistency across the sector. A supporting classification and classification system will ensure that content development remains standardised, whilst also allowing for adaptation, innovation and reusability over time.
- Catchment Science – principles are embedded throughout the training model, to ensure that learning is spatially grounded, ecologically coherent and operationally relevant (within hydrological systems).
- Governance & Management - the plan is governed by a clearly defined management structure, with roles in oversight, content development, coordination and performance monitoring. Implementation will be guided by an annual work plan, which will define delivery priorities and sequence activities.

The Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030 sets out a focused and forward-looking agenda to strengthen technical expertise, reinforce institutional capacity and elevate local leadership, enabling Local Authorities to exercise their crucial role in protecting water resources, restoring ecological balance, and advancing environmental resilience.



INTRODUCTION



OVERVIEW

The Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030 presents a structured national response to the capacity development requirements of Ireland’s local government sector in the field of water quality. It has been formulated to ensure that Local Authorities are equipped to discharge their statutory responsibilities with technical precision, procedural consistency and strategic insight.

The development of this plan has been informed by the 2024 Review of Local Authority Water Functions, which identified training provision as a critical determinant of the sector’s ability to deliver effective environmental outcomes. In response to this finding, the Environmental Services Training Group (ESTG) was formally requested to undertake a comprehensive assessment of water quality-related training. This process led to the development of the 2025 Water Quality Training Needs Analysis (TNA), which provided a robust and evidence-based evaluation of system-level capabilities, thematic priorities and operational challenges.

Drawing upon the findings of the TNA, in addition to a detailed consultation process with institutional, regulatory and technical stakeholders, the following plan presents a cohesive and strategically aligned model for training delivery.



In developing the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030, a dedicated steering group was established to provide strategic guidance and sectoral oversight. Its role has been central in ensuring that the plan reflects the operational realities of Local Authorities, aligns with national water policy and supports the advancement of co-ordinated, high-impact water quality initiatives across the country.

- Cavan County Council
- Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)
- Cork County Council
- Dept of Housing, Local Government & Heritage
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Kerry County Council
- Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG)
- Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
- Subject Matter Expert (s)
- Stranorlar Regional Training Centre



METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive Training Needs Analysis (TNA) was carried out to guide the development of the national water quality training programme. Designed to provide a representative and evidence-based assessment of both current and emerging capacity needs across the sector; the TNA employed a robust, mixed-methods approach. This included the integration of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to capture technical, operational and strategic insights from across the water quality ecosystem.

Data collection methods comprised a national survey issued to all 31 Local Authorities, in-depth interviews with key institutional and policy stakeholders and a structured review of existing training programmes and course materials. Analysis has provided a detailed understanding of shared thematic priorities, role-specific competency requirements and structural gaps within the current training landscape, offering a clear evidence base to inform programme design and implementation.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

National Survey
31 x Local Authorities
100% Response Rate

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

10 x Stakeholder Group Interviews
Local Authority Representatives/ Regional Training
Centre(s)/ LASNTG/ LAWPRO/ Uisce Éireann/
Climate Action Regional Office/ Dept Housing, Local
Government & Heritage/ ESTG / EPA/ Subject
Matter Experts

DOCUMENT & POLICY REVIEW

Water Quality Reports - Attendance /Expression of Interest / Cost
Water Quality Training Folio - Training Materials
EPA – Local Authority Environmental Enforcement
Performance Report 2023
Water Framework Directive (WFD) & River Basin
Management Plan
Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts, 1977 and 1990.
Prosecution for Water Quality
Nitrates Action Programme/Good Agricultural Practice
(GAP) Regulations

POLICY CONTEXT

The EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) provides the overarching legislative foundation for water protection across Europe. It requires all member states to protect, enhance and restore all bodies of water to achieve at least good ecological status. The Directive applies to rivers, lakes, groundwater, transitional and coastal waters and is implemented through national legislation and River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs).

In Ireland, the current national strategy is articulated in the Water Action Plan 2024: A River Basin Management Plan for Ireland. This plan outlines the suite of measures necessary to protect and improve water quality and ensure that freshwater resources are sustainably managed. It emphasises a catchment-based approach, with a guiding principle of applying the "right measure in the right place" to deliver targeted, evidence-based interventions. A key feature of the plan is its focus on prioritisation and multi-stakeholder collaboration, aimed at achieving measurable outcomes for Ireland's water environment.

The active involvement of Local Authorities is essential in this regard, whereby Local Authorities play a central role in implementing the Water Action Plan and meeting Water Framework Directive objectives. Their responsibilities include:

- Conducting catchment assessments to identify local pressures and prioritise interventions.
- Implementing the National Agricultural Inspection Programme and the National Inspection Programme for Domestic Wastewater Treatment Systems
- Enforcing environmental legislation related to water quality.
- Collaborating with stakeholders to deliver coordinated actions.

To ensure consistency and alignment across regions, dedicated governance structures were established during the second cycle RBMP (2018–2021) which included five Local Authority Regional Management Committees, supported by Regional Operational Committees; these bodies bring together public agencies to coordinate the delivery of WFD measures and ensure a unified, regionally coherent approach.

Monitoring of Local Authority performance is undertaken by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through its National Enforcement Priorities. These form part of the Local Authority Performance Framework, which tracks environmental compliance and progress in achieving water quality outcomes.

This policy landscape provides a critical foundation for the design and delivery of effective water quality training programmes. Accordingly, a clear understanding of the EU Water Framework Directive, Ireland's River Basin Management Plan and associated Local Authority responsibilities is integral in ensuring that training content is relevant, targeted and aligned with national priorities.

PRIMARY RESEARCH - SUMMARY FINDINGS



CAPACITY BUILDING

- Local Authorities operate in a regulatory landscape marked by increasing legislative complexity, necessitating continual upskilling.
- To be effective, Water Quality training must address both statutory compliance and operational proficiency, aligning legal requirements with real-world application.
- The sector currently faces potential risks associated with high staff turnover and weak succession pipelines.
- Cross-disciplinary competence is needed due to growing interlinkages with climate action, spatial planning and community development.
- RMCEI-aligned training is viewed as a cornerstone of local environmental inspection capability.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE	• Senior leadership plays a decisive role in prioritising water quality considerations within Local Authority mandates. • Due to competing demands, water quality training is often deferred /deprioritised, this has the potential to compromise enforcement capacity and knowledge continuity. • Mechanisms to reinforce and apply training (post-delivery) are deemed as limited, potentially undermining knowledge retention. • Strategic engagement is essential to embed water quality objectives into broader corporate planning, budgeting and workforce development strategies.
LEARNER-CENTRIC DESIGN & ACCESSIBILITY	• An all-encompassing (one-size-fits-all) course model is viewed as sub-optimal ; as learner preferences, job roles and operational contexts vary significantly. • Enforcement and technical staff require immersive, accredited and scenario-based formats (e.g. applied learning, simulations, casework). • Field and maintenance personnel benefit from short, applied and accessible formats rooted in operational practice. • Training content and format would benefit from being adaptive.
POLICY & REGULATORY ALIGNMENT	• The training system must keep pace with dynamic changes in national and EU water quality policy (e.g., WFD, RBMPs...). • A core expectation is that training content remains up-to-date and anticipatory—reflecting current legislation and preparing staff for forthcoming changes. • Training must operationalise complex legal frameworks—supporting interpretation, implementation and documentation practices aligned with regulatory enforcement.
INNOVATION & SYSTEM RESILIENCE	• There is strong sectoral appetite for innovation in training design, delivery and evaluation. Stakeholders espouse new methodologies such as digital simulations, peer-to-peer learning, immersive field training etc. • The current model lacks agility; whereby training lifecycles are short, with little revalidation or reuse, leading to a potential underutilisation of intellectual property. • Embedding mechanisms for continuous improvement, feedback and co-development is essential to maintain relevance and drive adoption.
CATCHMENT SCIENCE	• Catchment Science, as the principal mechanism through which water quality standards are delivered, was universally recognised by stakeholders as a core training priority and a foundational pillar of effective water management. • Local Authority training demand reflected this, with 93.55% of respondents identifying a need for training in catchment management and 83.87% highlighting catchment assessment and catchment science. • This underscores the sustained importance and continued demand across the sector on this topic.

REVIEW

A targeted review of existing Water Quality training provision was conducted to identify system-level trends shaping course development and delivery. Findings offer a strategic lens on current provision and insights into future opportunities to support a responsive and scalable national water quality training model.



COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Subject to the duration of the proposed course, the process of procurement, research and course development lasts approximately 12-24 weeks.



COURSE BURN RATE

Narrow target audiences have the potential to limit the lifespan of a course. Additionally, legislative updates can make course content obsolete quickly.



HIGH DEMAND

Training demand is outpacing delivery capacity. Courses are oversubscribed by up to 500% in some instances.



CATCHMENT SCIENCE

Existing course provision in the field of Catchment Science was deemed highly relevant scoring 87% on survey responses and noted as a quality benchmark during interviews. However, course duration was queried.



STANDARDISATION

There exists a lack of standardisation and operational protocols pertaining to course updates, course materials, classification systems, facilitation protocols and learning validation.



LONG FORMAT OFFERING

Short-format courses are unavailable, which has the potential to create gaps whilst broader training programmes are under development.



SCOPE DELINEATION

Due to its interdisciplinary scope and the absence of a classification model - water quality training lacks clear definition. This creates ambiguity and was a recurrent theme during the review process.



THRESHOLD LIMITATIONS

Reliance on regional minimum enrolment thresholds can delay training delivery. As a result critically important topics may be overlooked if they lack broad-based demand (despite localised necessity).



ACCREDITATION

There exists limited course accreditation.



GOALS & VISION

MISSION & VISION

The mission and vision of the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030 articulate a clear, forward-looking commitment to strengthening the sector’s capabilities.

They provide the foundation for a dynamic national training programme, designed to build the expertise and leadership required to address complex water quality and environmental challenges. Informed by the principles of Catchment Science and aligned with Ireland’s environmental and public service goals, the plan sets a strategic course for developing a skilled, integrated and future-ready Local Authority workforce.



VISION

“A future in which all Local Authorities operate with a shared standard of excellence in water quality governance—supported by a national training programme that is structured, scalable and grounded in Catchment Science”.

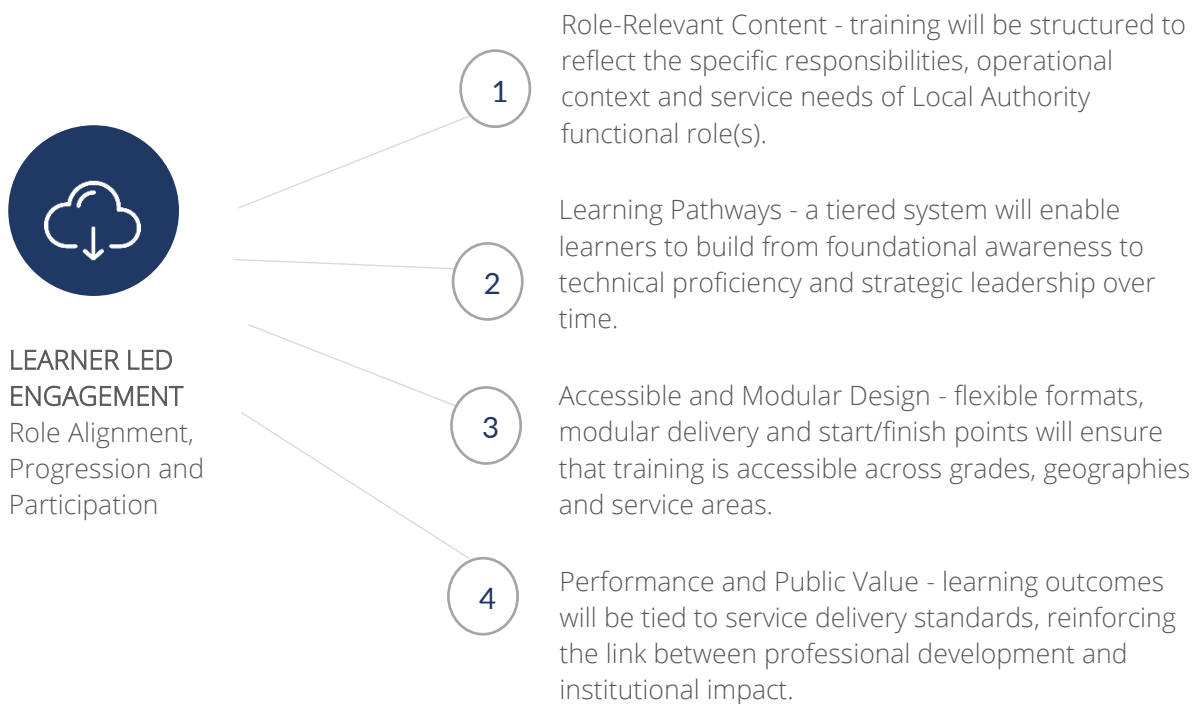
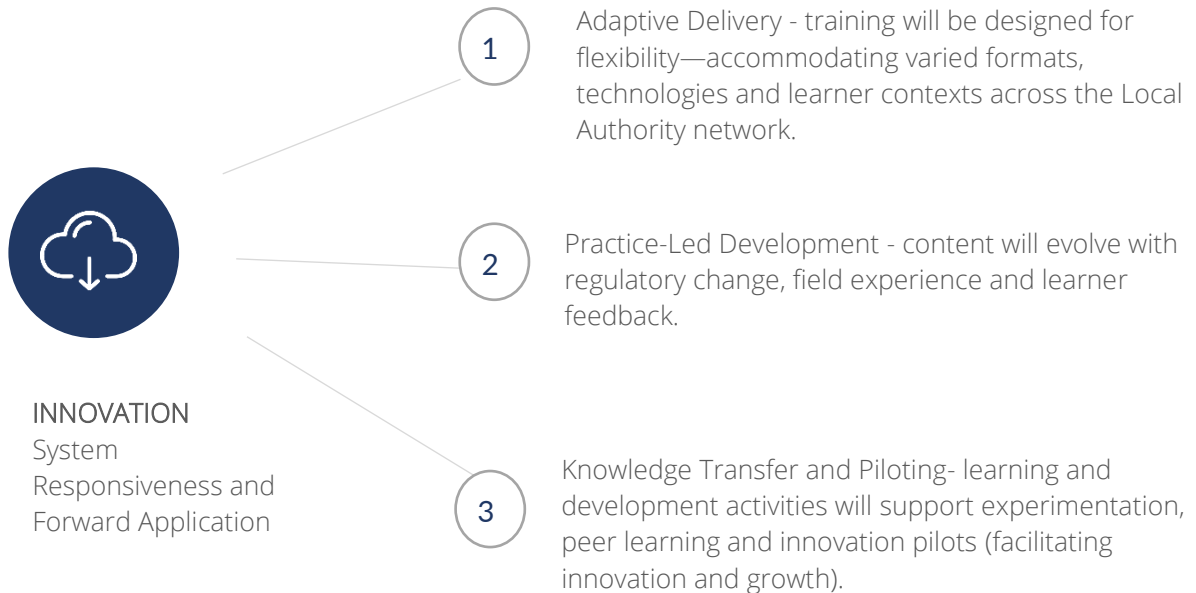
MISSION

To establish a nationally co-ordinated, locally responsive training system that strengthens the capacity of Local Authorities to deliver their water quality responsibilities with technical integrity, regulatory confidence and strategic alignment.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

To realise the vision of a future-ready Local Authority workforce, the plan is anchored in a set of clear, measurable goals and objectives. These aim to drive consistent standards, address identified capacity gaps and support the effective delivery of water quality responsibilities across Ireland's 31 Local Authorities.



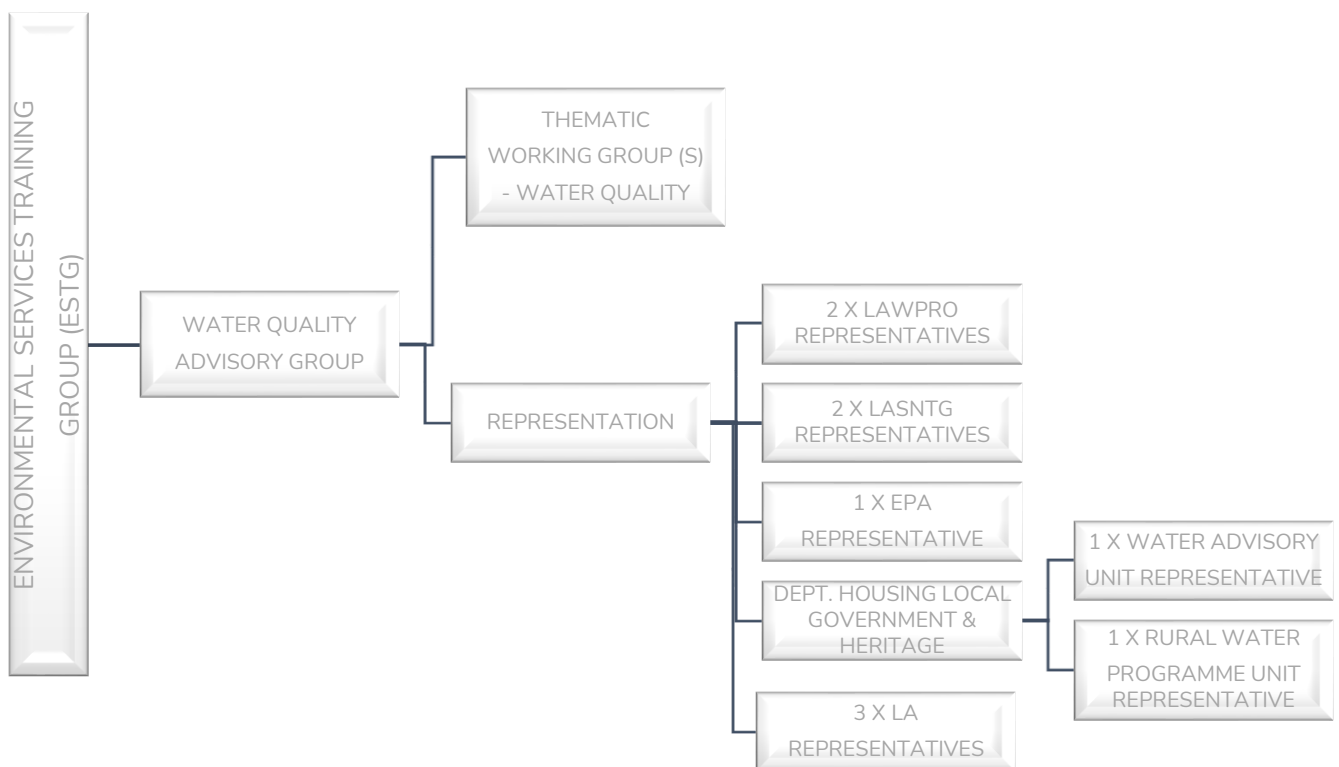




GOVERNANCE

The governance structure supporting the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030 is built on an established model set out by the Local Authority Services National Training Group (LASNTG) across its national training pillars. This model is proven, representational and operationally agile; ensuring that complex, multi-stakeholder programmes can be delivered.

This section sets out the formal architecture through which the water quality training programme will be directed. It defines the roles, reporting lines and decision-making mechanisms that underpin the plan's implementation, ensuring strategic alignment with national policy, regulatory expectations and local government capacity. By embedding clear accountability, structured collaboration and expert oversight, the governance model provides a robust foundation for national delivery. It ensures that the programme remains responsive to evolving priorities, whilst safeguarding consistency, quality and long-term institutional value.



Note: It is understood that the ESTG may consider transferring governance of the plan and subsequent training provision to another group, should a more fit-for-purpose body be identified. If such an opportunity arises, the governance of the plan may be transitioned accordingly.

WATER QUALITY ADVISORY GROUP

Overview	The Water Quality Advisory Group will provide strategic leadership and oversight for the development and implementation of the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030. It is responsible for setting programme direction, approving the annual work plan and ensuring that training delivery aligns with sectoral priorities, national policy and Local Authority operational needs. The group ensures effective governance, transparency and accountability across the life cycle of the training programme.
Representation	1 x LASNTG (Chair) 2 x LAWPRO Representatives 2 x LASNTG Representatives 3 x Local Authority Representatives 1 x EPA Representatives 2 x Dept. Housing Local Government & Heritage
Reporting to	Environmental Services Training Group (ESTG)
Details	• Provide strategic oversight of the national training programme, including training design, delivery and evaluation. • Approve the annual work plan and review key performance indicators. • Allocate resources—financial, technical and personnel (to support effective training programme delivery). • Guide the establishment, scope and objectives of Thematic Working Groups. • Act as the final decision-making body in relation to course approval and programme content. • Ensure training priorities are informed by emerging policy, legislative changes and operational realities. • Monitor progress, assess outcomes and make evidence-based recommendations for continuous improvement. • Liaise with external stakeholders (as appropriate), to ensure system alignment and cross-agency coherence.

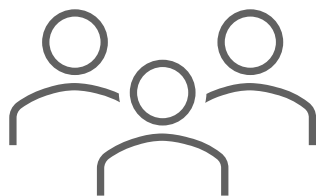
THEMATIC WORKING GROUP(s) - *to be formed on a need's basis.*

Overview	Thematic Working Groups will be established on a structured, task-specific basis to support the implementation of the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030. These groups will provide technical insight, specialist expertise and strategic recommendations in relation to defined areas of course development, regulatory interpretation and thematic alignment. Where appropriate, they may also contribute to the design or review of training content, ensuring its scientific accuracy, operational relevance and policy coherence.
Representation	Working groups will be formed on a needs basis, each tailored to address specific areas of courseware development +/- technical challenge. Notably, the composition of each working group will be determined based on the nature of the task or issue at hand; however, it is likely that membership will consist of one or more of the following cohorts: Local Authority staff possessing relevant technical expertise +/- experience. Private industry experts with specialist knowledge. Sectoral Bodies & Representative Organisations.
Reporting To	Water Quality Advisory Group
Detail	• Conduct targeted analysis and technical review in support of identified programme/training needs. • Provide expert recommendations on thematic priorities, course structure and regulatory interpretation • Support the development, refinement, or validation of water quality training content • Facilitate inter-agency knowledge exchange and horizon scanning on emerging issues • Identify technical gaps and propose evidence-based innovations in training delivery or content design • Support alignment with evolving policy, scientific understanding and sectoral practice

| THE TEAM

The following offers an introduction to the team responsible for the strategic coordination and delivery of the national water quality training programme. The structure reflects a focused and high-performance approach, ensuring that all aspects of programme development, implementation and oversight are managed with expertise and accountability.

Operating within a defined governance framework and supported by experienced project promoters, the team will deliver on the priorities set out in this training plan and Annual Work Plan(s).

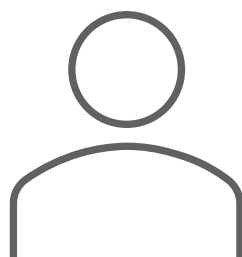


PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

LASNTG / LAWPRO

The Programme Management team holds overall responsibility for the strategic direction, governance and delivery assurance of the national water quality training programme. The team ensures alignment with national policy objectives and facilitates inter-agency coordination.

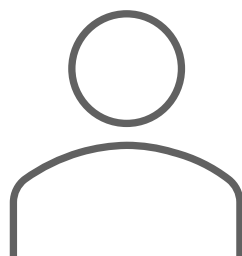
Core responsibilities include oversight of programme budgeting, engagement with senior stakeholders and monitoring the performance and impact of all training activities to ensure consistency and efficacy.



WATER QUALITY PROGRAMME CO-ORDINATOR

Senior Executive Scientist (or analogous)

The Co-ordinator will ensure that water quality training is technically robust, aligned with statutory and regulatory requirements; and responsive to emerging environmental priorities. The role requires advanced scientific knowledge, strategic programme management expertise and the capacity to engage with multiple stakeholders across Ireland's water quality ecosystem.



ADMINISTRATOR

Grade IV

The Administrator will oversee operational delivery of the national training programme, including but not limited to the coordination of training schedules, management of participant engagement across Local Authorities and the maintenance of accurate records to support monitoring, evaluation and reporting.



PARTICIPANT PROFILE

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

To ensure effective and sustainable delivery of the national water quality training programme, implementation will follow a phased approach; central to this strategy is the identification of six distinct target groups within the sector. These groups reflect variations in technical responsibility, decision-making authority and thematic engagement with water quality. By segmenting the audience in this way, the programme can deliver tailored content that is both role-specific and progressively developmental.

The profiles that follow define the functional roles of these six target groups.

01 SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Senior Leadership roles hold executive accountability for strategic planning, resource allocation, policy alignment and organisational compliance *e.g. Directors of Service, Senior Executive Officers, Senior Executive Engineers, Senior Scientists.*

Water Quality Role Alignment

Senior Leadership personnel perform a pivotal role in embedding water quality within broader strategic agendas, such as land use planning, policy, climate action and community development. Their decisions directly influence water protection mandates, the resourcing of specialist teams and the prioritisation of interdepartmental collaboration. Skills for which include, but are not limited to:

- Strategic interpretation of water governance frameworks (e.g. WFD, RBMP, RMCEI).
- Integration of water quality objectives into corporate plans and local development strategies.
- Risk-informed decision-making in the context of enforcement and compliance.
- Interdepartmental co-ordination on multi-functional water initiatives.
- Communicating statutory responsibility to elected members and external stakeholders.

02 ENGINEERING & PLANNING ROLES

Engineering and Planning staff are responsible for spatial development oversight, infrastructural design and regulatory planning processes within the Local Authority sector *e.g. Executive Engineers, Planners, Flood Risk Officers.*

Water Quality Role Alignment

These professionals are often tasked with assessing planning applications, infrastructure upgrades and development controls in ways that intersect directly with hydrological systems. They play a critical role in safeguarding water bodies through appropriate site assessment, drainage planning and cross-departmental integration of water quality constraints. Skills for which include, but are not limited to:

- Technical understanding of hydrological impact from development activities.
- Integrating water quality considerations into land-use planning and zoning decisions.
- Interpreting environmental assessment data for planning applications.
- Nutrient management and stormwater run-off mitigation.
- Legal and procedural knowledge relevant to Section 4 discharges and environmental licensing.

03 | ENFORCEMENT & COMPLIANCE OFFICERS

This cohort includes Environmental Enforcement Officers and Waste Inspectors with statutory responsibilities for monitoring, investigating and enforcing compliance e.g. *Water Pollution Inspectors, Agriculture & Industrial Compliance Officers*.

Water Quality Role Alignment

This staff cohort operates at the frontline of regulatory delivery. Their role is central to the implementation of environmental law, whereby these individuals help to prevent unauthorised discharges, detect misconnections, oversee inspection of wastewater treatment systems and uphold enforcement measures in accordance with the RMCEI framework and environmental policies. Skills for which include, but are not limited to:

- Advanced regulatory literacy and procedural enforcement pathways
- Evidence gathering, report writing and court file preparation
- Incident investigation and rapid response coordination
- Prosecution support and inter-agency collaboration
- Practical application of compliance tools and enforcement legislation

04 | TECHNICAL & SCIENTIFIC SPECIALISTS

This LA staff group provide data, research and field testing to support enforcement, planning and community programmes. They contribute directly to the technical foundation, upon which regulatory decisions are made e.g. *Hydrologists, Technicians*.

Water Quality Role Alignment

The work of this staff cohort underpins the entire regulatory system, informing enforcement actions, planning responses and compliance tracking. Responsibilities span from field sampling to interpreting complex datasets and developing pollution mitigation strategies. Skills for which include, but are not limited to:

- Advanced analytical techniques in water and soil sampling
- Data interpretation, modelling and digital assessment tools (e.g. GIS, SSRS)
- Integration of scientific evidence into operational workflows
- Legislative frameworks governing monitoring and reporting
- Climate resilience and emerging pollutants (e.g. pesticides, industrial discharge)

05 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OFFICERS

Community Engagement staff facilitate communication and work with communities, enterprises and other stakeholder groups on issues relating to environmental awareness, community water projects and public consultations *e.g. Community Water Officers*.

Water Quality Role Alignment

This LA staff cohort is essential to fostering behavioural change, ensuring compliance and building local ownership of water protection measures. Their work can often intersect with public health messaging, participatory planning and educational campaigns. Skills for which include, but are not limited to:

- Communication of technical content to non-specialist audiences.
- Environmental education design and public engagement strategies.
- Conflict management and de-escalation in contentious contexts.
- Ethical and professional conduct in public discourse.
- Risk communication and advocacy in support of water quality goals.

06 FIELD & MAINTENANCE STAFF

This group includes operatives and maintenance personnel responsible for the physical operation of environmental infrastructure, site inspections and routine environmental services across Local Authorities. They ensure the daily operation, repair and maintenance of water services and pollution control systems *e.g. General Services Supervisors, Water Services Operatives*

Water Quality Role Alignment

This LA staff cohort carry out day-to-day actions critical to the prevention of water pollution, the identification of infrastructure failure and the real-time monitoring of system performance. Skills for which include, but are not limited to:

- Site-level identification of pollution incidents and response protocols.
- Inspection of WWTPs, drainage networks and water bodies
- Operation and maintenance of monitoring infrastructure
- Health, safety and environmental risk mitigation procedures.
- Reporting protocols and liaison with enforcement personnel.

The aforementioned profiles underscore the importance of a training programme that recognises functional diversity whilst enabling system-wide coherence.

It is anticipated that water quality training developed to accommodate differentiated learner needs, will ensure that training is not only technically robust but also professionally relevant and strategically embedded within the broader water governance ecosystem.



TRAINING DEVELOPMENT

This section sets out the key components and principles which guide how training is developed, adapted and delivered across the Local Authority sector. The approach is designed to ensure that training remains high-quality, relevant to specific roles and responsive to the changing demands of environmental regulation, policy implementation and organisational capacity.

Training development will be structured around three interconnected pillars, which together provide a clear and practical foundation for ensuring consistency, relevance and impact. These pillars support the programme's core aims - building technical and strategic capacity, meeting statutory responsibilities and strengthening professional practice across the local government system.



THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS

Outline and structure water quality related topics to be addressed through training provision.

LEARNING PATHWAYS & OBJECTIVES

A standardised model for learning objectives to ensure pedagogical consistency, support measurable outcomes and enable learning pathways, aligned with professional competency requirements.

MODULAR ARCHITECTURE

A modular system that facilitates the development of distinct, interoperable training components, capable of being configured into structured learning pathways and deployed across multiple modalities and staff cohorts.

THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS

The following thematic structure defines the core domains through which training content will be developed and delivered under the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan. These themes reflect the multidisciplinary, cross-functional nature of Local Authority responsibilities as they pertain to water quality (and will collectively support onward modular design).

Each thematic area represents a distinct sphere of operational focus, professional competence and statutory responsibility. Within each theme, a suite of indicative training modules addresses technical, regulatory, strategic and community engagement dimensions of practice. Whilst the listed modules are not exhaustive, they offer a representative overview of priority areas for capacity-building across the sector.

It is important to note however, that the structure is regarded as dynamic. Thus, it is anticipated that thematic categories and associated content may evolve over the life of the programme, to reflect emerging regulatory requirements, policy development and operational challenges.

NO.	THEME	MODULE (S) Please note, the following module list is not exhaustive and it is anticipated that water quality topics and themes may be expanded +/- contracted during the lifetime of the training plan.
1	WATER LEGISLATION & POLICY	Water Framework Directive (WFD) River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) Local Authority Enforcement Responsibilities Other EU Water Directives (Drinking Water, Bathing Water, etc.) Water Related Regulations General Legislative Framework Institutional roles (EPA, LAWPRO, Irish Water)
2	ENFORCEMENT & COMPLIANCE	Local Authority Enforcement Responsibilities Prosecution, Legal Frameworks & Court Files Section 4 Discharge Licensing (Surface Water) Environmental Inspection Discharge Licensing (Groundwater) Regulatory Monitoring & Compliance Assessment Agricultural Inspections RMCEI Training Public Reporting & Regulatory Intervention
3	LAND-USE & PLANNING	Agriculture Planning Applications Nutrient Management Planning Assessment General Planning Applications Biosolid Land Spreading Applications Forestry Applications Anaerobic Digester Applications

4	WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT	Surface Water Sampling Protocols & Data Evaluation Investigating Pollution Incidents Catchment Assessment/Catchment Science Small Stream Risk Score (SSRS) Misconnections GIS & Digital Assessment Tools Online Tools - Data & Maps Urban Pressure Assessments Contaminated Land Impacts on the Water Environment Hydro-Morphology Groundwater Sampling Protocols & Data Evaluation Drinking Water Catchment Risk Assessment & Risk Management Monitoring Frameworks & Obligations Groundwater Assessment & Protection Data Analysis Pesticides & the Water Environment Landfill Impact on the Water Environment
5	WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT	Catchment Management Emergency Pollution Response Coordination Drinking Water Source Protection Bathing Water Assessment & Management Mitigation Measures - Water Environment Cross-Agency Pollution Response Planning Urban Planning & Sustainable Development Climate-Resilient Infrastructure Planning Identifying & Mitigating Industrial Pollution Shellfish Waters Assessment & Management
6	CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION	Nature-Based Water Management Solutions Climate Change Impacts on Water Systems Flood Risk Management Drainage & Adaptation Planning Public-Private Collaboration for Adaptation
7	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & OTHER	Water Quality Awareness & Community Education Enhancing Public Engagement in Water & Environmental Services Water Related Health & Safety Community Emergency Preparedness & Response Resilience Training for LA Water Officers Ethical & Professional Challenges in Community Based Water Quality Roles Conflict Management & De-Escalation

LEARNING PATHWAYS & OBJECTIVES

The role of learning objectives in guiding the design, development and evaluation of training content under the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan is essential. Learning objectives/pathways provide a critical link between the thematic structure of the programme and the competencies required to perform defined roles within the Local Authority system. They serve as the basis for determining the scope, depth and intended outcomes of individual training modules and enable a consistent approach to instructional design across all areas of provision. To support rigour and clarity in their formulation, all learning objectives developed under this plan will be aligned to Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Domains (Bloom et al., 1956). This framework establishes a hierarchical model for classifying learning according to cognitive complexity and provides a standardised structure for articulating expected outcomes. It ensures that training content is appropriately calibrated to the knowledge, skills and decision-making requirements of diverse roles and supports progression across foundational and advanced learning pathways.

The table that follows presents an expanded classification of Bloom's cognitive domains, with associated instructional verbs to support consistent use across all content development activities.

CATEGORY	REMEMBER	UNDERSTAND	APPLY	ANALYSE	EVALUATE	CREATE
COGNITIVE PROCESS	Recall facts, definitions and concepts of water quality and water quality related principles.	Comprehend interpret and summarise concepts as they pertain to water quality.	Tangibly use Water Quality related knowledge and expertise in situations.	Deconstruct and examine relationships	Make judgements on water quality scenarios based on criteria	Combine elements to form new structures or concepts
INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS	Recognition Memory Recall	Explanation Illustration Translation	Execution of procedures, methods +/- models	Comparison Inference	Critical appraisal Validation justification	Design Synthesis Integration Formulation
LEARNING VERBS	Identify Define List Recognise, Label Name Describe Recall Match Select ...	Explain Summarise Interpret Classify Compare Give examples Estimate Describe Discuss Infer ...	Use Demonstrate Apply Implement Execute Carry out Solve Perform Employ Operate	Analyse Differentiate Examine Investigate Organise Compare Contrast Attribute Categorise Question ...	Evaluate Assess Defend Critique Prioritise Judge Verify Recommend Support Argue	Create Design Develop Construct Compose Propose Formulate, Plan Produce Generate ...

MODULAR ARCHITECTURE

Stakeholder consultation undertaken during the development of this training plan has affirmed the need for a modular training architecture aligned with the operational complexity and role-specific requirements of the local government water quality sector. This approach enables training to be structured in self-contained, thematically aligned modules, which can be systematically combined, sequenced and adapted over time. It offers a flexible yet coherent framework for building capacity across professional cohorts in a sector that is subject to continuous policy evolution and organisational change.

The modular system supports the strategic alignment of training content with defined functional responsibilities, ensuring that the learning experience is targeted, role-relevant and developmentally progressive. The structure allows for the creation of learning pathways that reflect both mandatory competencies and supplementary skills, enhancing clarity in workforce planning and professional advancement.

In parallel, the architecture incorporates diversified delivery methods, facilitating both centrally co-ordinated training provision and digital access to support wider participation. This dual-channel approach enables consistency in content design whilst extending the reach and adaptability of training delivery.

As courses are developed and delivered, it is anticipated that individual modules will accumulate to form a comprehensive, structured repository of water quality knowledge. This growing body of content (over time) will serve as a training resource and evolving intellectual catalogue—capturing the technical, regulatory and strategic dimensions of water quality management within the Local Authority context, becoming a key asset for ongoing learning, institutional continuity and sector-wide capacity-building.

WATER QUALITY - CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The following outlines a robust classification system that will be implemented as a core component of training development - to underpin the structured, scalable and high-quality delivery of water quality training. In this context, the classification system will function as a formal model that organises all elements of training provision; inclusive of participant profiles, learning objectives, thematic focus areas, module formats and accreditation pathways (into a coherent and replicable framework). This model serves not only to standardise the development of training content, but also to enable modular design, cross-programme integration and long-term adaptability across diverse stakeholder groups and learning contexts.

It is noted that the effectiveness of this taxonomy and its ability to support modular development will align to the consistent and disciplined application of its structure. Therein, all content (notwithstanding topic or context) must align with defined categories and naming conventions in order to maintain integrity, enable traceability and avoid fragmentation. This shared water quality classification ensures that each module can be reliably reused, referenced +/- updated within a broader curriculum; thereby maximising the return on investment in training development and safeguarding quality over time. Whilst this classification system provides a structured foundation for the consistent organisation of training content, it is acknowledged that new and emergent training needs may arise over the lifetime of the programme. In recognition of this, it is proposed that designated training promoters will have the authority to revise and expand the classification's naming conventions as required, provided such updates are managed through a formalised process. This ensures the system remains responsive and relevant, while safeguarding consistency and coherence across all training outputs.

CLASSIFICATION	PILLAR	NAMING CONVENTION
Participant Profile	Target Audience /Learner	Senior Leadership/ Engineering & Planning Roles/ Enforcement & Compliance Officers/ Technical & Scientific Specialists/ Community Engagement Officers/ Field & Maintenance Staff
Learning Objectives	Bloom Classification Model	Remember/Understand/Apply/ Analyse/Evaluate/Create
Training Topics	Theme	Water Legislation & Policy Enforcement & Compliance Land-Use & Planning Water Quality Assessment Water Quality Management Climate Change Adaptation Community Engagement & Other
	Module Topic	See Previous Section “Thematic Focus Areas”
Module Type	Training Activity	Micro-Learning/ Workshop/ Information Briefing / Lecture/ Simulation/ Field Trip/ Case Study/ Practical
Accreditation	Qualification	Academic - NFQ Levels 1 to 10 Industry Recognised Certification CPD Points No Formal Qualification
Duration	Minutes	15/30/45/60/90/120/180...
Delivery Format	Modality	Online / Blended/ In-Person

ENABLING TOOLS

To support the development of a modular water quality training system, structured around a clearly defined classification, it is proposed that the following tools and templates be used to guide the architecture's construction. Whilst the metadata standard will apply universally across all modules, other tools may vary in relevance depending on the specific module.

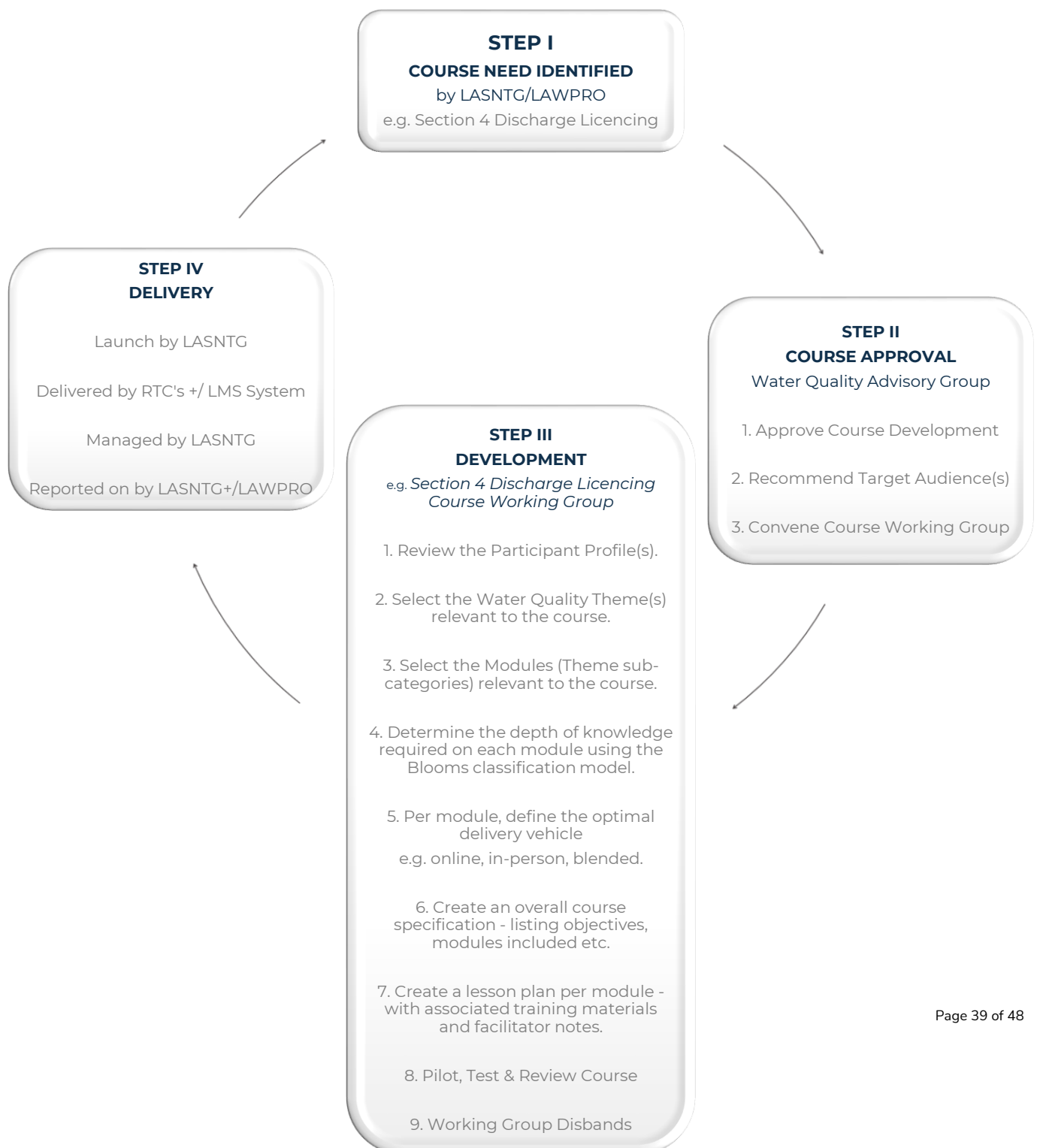
TEMPLATE	FUNCTION	ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE BUT NOT BE LIMITED TO	FORMAT
Course Specification	A document to support the description of a course. Audience is both internal and external. It collates all functional course information.	Overview/ Target Audience/ Course Aims / Course Objectives/ Indicative Course Specification/ Learning Outcomes/ Duration/ Accreditation/Theme Selection / Module Topic Selection/ Training Activity Type/ Accreditation	Document
Lesson Plan	This is an internal operations document that outlines the specific flow of each training module, adopting a timebound structure.	Learning Objective Selection/ Schedule of Learning /Outline/ Activities/ Resources, Delivery Method....	Document
Facilitator Guide	Aligned to the lesson plan, this is an internal guide for use by different trainers, who will be delivering the a standardised module.	Session overview, time allocations, scripts, slide links, activity instructions, FAQs....	Document
Slide Deck	This template ensures visual/brand consistency in the delivery of slides and thereafter the inter	Cover, objectives, content layouts, activities, summary, quiz, follow-up resources	PPT/Slides
Storyboard	Supports visual/audio/multimedia modules	Frame, visual notes, narration, interactions, timing, transitions	Table /PPT/ Slides
Module Metadata Standard	Facilitates search & tagging	See sample below	Table
	Field Name	Description	Field Type
	Water Quality Theme	Subject Area	Dropdown
	Module Title	Clear, Descriptive Title Of The Module	Text
	Module Code	Unique Identifier For Tracking And Versioning	Text / Code Format
	Version	Version Number Of The Module	Text / Number
	Author / Developer	Person Or Team Responsible For Module Creation	Person / Email
	Date Created +/-Updated	Date The Module Was First Completed +/- Updated	Date
	Status	Lifecycle Status Of The Module	Dropdown
	Operational Role(S)	Roles For Which This Module Is Designed	Multi-Select
	Learning Objectives	Specific Intended Outcomes Using Bloom's Taxonomy	Long Text
	Bloom's Level	Cognitive Level Of The Module	Dropdown
	Topic Tag(S)	Keywords To Aid Discoverability And Cross-Linkage	Multi-Select
	Module Type	Format / Instructional Style	Dropdown
	Delivery Format	Delivery Modality	Dropdown
	Duration (Minutes)	Estimated Time Required To Complete The Module	Number



DELIVERY

COURSE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

To support the delivery of water quality training goals, a series of courses is expected to be developed over the lifetime of the training plan. Anchored in the water quality classification system and guided by a defined governance structure, the following provides an illustrative example of what this process might entail. However, it is acknowledged that the process may vary subject to the training need identified.



TRAINING IMPLEMENTATION

To support the effective and sustained implementation of the national water quality training programme, a phased delivery approach will be adopted. Each phase reflects a defined level of operational capacity within Local Authorities, beginning with core statutory functions and progressing toward advanced, integrated practice across disciplines. Supporting this, Catchment Science will provide the central organising structure for the programme; it will enable training to be delivered in a systemised and policy-aligned manner, embedding learning within real hydrological contexts and responding to local environmental pressures. Furthermore, the modular design, combined with sequenced implementation will ensure consistency with national priorities, alignment with organisational readiness and a clear trajectory for building technical and institutional capability across the sector.

PHASE 01	ENFORCEMENT & COMPLIANCE This first phase of training delivery responds directly to the sector's most urgent capacity needs - those that carry the highest legal and procedural significance. It addresses core enforcement obligations that, if underperformed, present immediate risks to water quality outcomes and institutional compliance. It is anticipated that this phase will lay the groundwork for regulatory consistency and statutory confidence by equipping Local Authority staff with a clear understanding of their legal mandates and procedural responsibilities. Activities to Support: · Clarifying statutory responsibilities and legal duties across enforcement functions. · Strengthening procedural confidence in regulatory actions, including licensing, inspection and escalation pathways. · Building fluency in legal application through scenario-based exercises and practical casework. · Etc. Catchment Science Framing Enforcement actions are contextualised within real hydrological systems, ensuring that statutory interventions are spatially informed. Staff learn to connect compliance decisions with catchment flow dynamics, pollutant pathways and downstream ecological outcomes—grounding regulation in environmental reality.	PHASE 02	TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY & CAPABILITY With statutory compliance systems in place, Phase 02 training will shift towards strengthening day-to-day environmental management capacity. This includes analytical practices, assessment protocols and the use of digital tools to enhance Local Authority responsiveness and field accuracy. This phase will support operational excellence by focusing on core competencies needed for reliable data collection, diagnostic assessments and evidence-led enforcement. Activities to Support: · Deepening understanding of sampling methodologies, catchment surveys and source tracking techniques. · Enhancing capabilities in pressure assessments, misconnection tracing and digital mapping. · Standardising data management practices to support evidence-based enforcement. · Etc. Catchment Science Framing Staff apply technical skills within the catchment context, using spatial risk insights to direct fieldwork and interpret findings. This not only improves the precision of technical outputs but also embeds systems-thinking in operational workflows (bridging data with ecological function).
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PHASE 03 STRATEGIC INTEGRATION

The final phase supports cross-functional collaboration and reflects a maturing system where legal and technical competencies are already embedded. The ambition of this training phase is to enable long-term environmental governance by embedding water quality considerations across Local Authority functions, fostering interdisciplinary co-ordination and strengthening stakeholder engagement.

Activities to Support:

- Facilitating internal coordination across planning, infrastructure, housing and environmental units.
- Enabling proactive engagement with communities, elected officials and external stakeholders.
- Supporting alignment between planning systems, climate adaptation efforts and catchment-scale priorities.
- Etc

Catchment Science Framing

Staff position catchment science as a central component to decision making. This geographic framework will be used to enhance coherence across departments, strengthen the consistency of public messaging and ensure that relevant decision-making is informed by real-world hydrological interdependencies.

CATCHMENT SCIENCE – ANCHOR

At time of training plan development, the existing Catchment Science course is recognised as a recurrent training need across Ireland's Local Authorities and is widely regarded as a benchmark in the provision of technical and applied learning in the field of water quality and catchment management.

Given its sustained relevance and its foundational role in building sectoral capacity, it is proposed that the course will be retained as a core offering within the training plan. Whilst it is designed as an eight-day programme, project promoters will have the flexibility to deliver the course in smaller, modular units where this aligns more favourably with local delivery contexts and/or participant needs.

Additionally, whilst the existing course content provides a robust and well-established framework, project promoters may choose to revise or update materials during the lifetime of the plan, ensuring that the course remains responsive to emerging scientific developments, policy changes and evolving practice within the catchment management domain.

ACCREDITATION

It is anticipated that the training programme will allow for multiple modes of accreditation to reflect varying levels of formality, and delivery contexts across course offerings. This approach ensures recognition of learning, whilst maintaining flexibility for programme organisers.

A primary mode of recognition will be the continued issuance of certificates of completion by the LASNTG. This practice ensures verifiable standards of participation and achievement across all training activities.

Where applicable, training activities may also be eligible for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) recognition, subject to alignment with relevant professional and regulatory bodies. This will support participants in fulfilling sector-specific CPD requirements and reinforces the relevance of training to professional practice. In addition, where the course structure meets the necessary academic criteria, accreditation may be pursued through delivery in partnership with third-level institutions. This may allow for the awarding of academic credit, contributing to recognised qualifications and supporting participant progression within formal education pathways.

By offering a range of accreditation options, the national water quality training programme will ensure that participation is standards-driven and conducive to both professional and academic development.

INNOVATION SANDBOX

In a domain defined by shifting scientific understanding, spatial interdependencies and growing policy complexity, Local Authorities must be equipped not only with current knowledge, but with the capacity to adapt, lead and learn in real time. The dynamic nature of catchment systems, the continuous advancement of environmental science and the expanding responsibilities placed on Local Authorities require structured, forward-facing approaches to learning and development. To embed this capacity, the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030 includes a dedicated Innovation Sandbox. The sandbox acts as a mechanism for testing new methodologies, exploring emerging tools and fostering strategic partnerships. It ensures that the national training system remains open to experimentation, grounded in evidence and capable of real-time continuous improvement. It is anticipated that sandbox activities will complement, enhance and extend core training delivery, facilitating the incorporation of emergent practices, technologies and strategic partnerships in a systematic and scalable manner. Such activities will be organised across three interrelated pillars:



LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Supports the piloting of targeted interventions that respond to emerging challenges or offer new learning opportunities.

- Thematic L&D projects addressing system needs and future policy directions.
- Water quality peer learning pilots to support practitioner-to-practitioner knowledge exchange.
- Case study development that captures operational insight.

MODULAR ARCHITECTURE & TECHNOLOGY ENHANCEMENT

Focuses on strengthening the training system's design and delivery infrastructure. It enables the integration of new digital tools and improvements in the organisation and accessibility of training content.

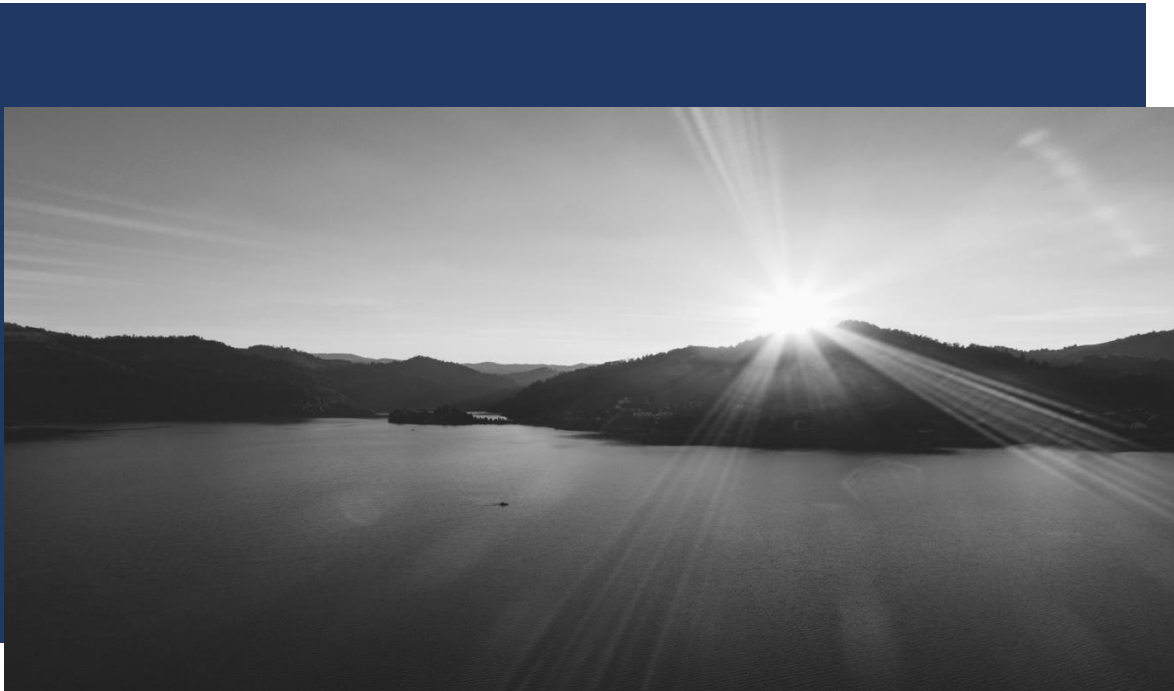
STRATEGIC COLLABORATION & KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Facilitates meaningful engagement with national and international partners, supporting alignment with best practice, policy development and research advancements.

- Strategic collaborations with public agencies, academic bodies and training institutions.
- Participation in knowledge exchange initiatives, nationally and internationally.
- Hosting of and contribution to sectoral events that promote innovation and system learning.



PERFORMANCE & EVALUATION



Hereunder find an overview as to how performance will be measured throughout the lifecycle of the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030. It outlines the key performance indicators (KPIs) that will be used to track progress and defines the role of the Annual Work Plan as the central mechanism for sequencing and operationalising training delivery over time. Together, these provide a consistent structure for ensuring that implementation remains aligned with the plan's strategic intent; and that progress can be measured across all stages of delivery. The targets set out in this section reflect expectations relating to course development, participation, accreditation, innovation and engagement; whilst the Annual Work Plan provides the means through which this intent is translated into annual targets and practical action.

ANNUAL WORK PLAN

Supporting the phased training implementation structure, an Annual Work Plan will be deployed as part of the water quality training programme. This will act as the operational instrument through which the Water Quality Training Plan is delivered, sequenced and adapted over time. It will set out the specific activities to be undertaken in a given calendar year, translating the strategic intent of the overall plan into concrete implementation steps. Adopting this approach will ensure that training provision remains responsive to sectoral capacity, policy developments and emergent operational needs (whilst maintaining alignment with the broader goals of the national training plan). Notably, the Annual Work Plan will also provide a mechanism for monitoring progress, assessing performance and incorporating feedback from participating Local Authorities, training partners and oversight bodies.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	TOTAL
STAFF						
PROGRAMME CO-ORDINATOR	1	1	1	1	1	1
ADMINISTRATOR	1	1	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	2	2	2	2	2	2
CATCHMENT SCIENCE						
ANCHOR COURSE						
OPTION TO SEGMENT THE EXISTING COURSE INTO SMALLER LEARNING UNITS (AS APPROPRIATE)	1	1	1	1	1	1
COURSE DEVELOPMENT & DELIVERY						
NEW COURSE DEVELOPMENT	2	2	2	2	2	10
COURSE DELIVERY (NEW & EXISTING)	5	5	5	5	5	25
ACCREDITED COURSE (AVAILABILITY)	1	1	1	2	2	
LOCAL AUTHORITY - PARTICIPANT PROFILES						
ENFORCEMENT & COMPLIANCE OFFICERS	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	
TECHNICAL & SCIENTIFIC SPECIALISTS	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	
SENIOR LEADERSHIP			☒	☒	☒	
ENGINEERING & PLANNING ROLES			☒	☒	☒	
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OFFICERS				☒	☒	
MAINTENANCE STAFF				☒	☒	
INNOVATION SANDBOX						
L&D PROJECTS	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	
EXAMPLES						
MODULAR COURSE ARCHITECTURE – MODEL DEVT.						
LMS TECHNOLOGY						
STRATEGIC L&D COLLABORATIONS						
EVENTS						
WATER QUALITY PEER LEARNING – PILOT(S)						
CASE STUDY DEVELOPMENT						
NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE PROJECT						
TRAINING METRICS						
TRAINEES	200	300	400	500	600	2100

COST STRUCTURE

A comprehensive costing exercise has been completed to support the implementation of the Local Authority Water Quality Training Plan 2026–2030.

This includes projected resource requirements across course development, delivery, administration and system co-ordination. The completed costings provide a basis for financial planning and have been made available to the relevant oversight and funding stakeholders.

For Further Information

Contact Details

LASNTG
Local Authority Services
National Training Group
Friar's Court, Nenagh
Co. Tipperary
Phone: 052 616 6260 .
Email: lasntg@tipperarycoco.ie

LAWPRO
Local Authority Waters Programme
The Lodge, Ballingarrane,
Clonmel,
Co. Tipperary
Phone: 052 616 623
Email: info@lawaters.ie