

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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National standards for agriculture education developed to address industry needs

In a national first, tertiary-level education standards for agriculture have been developed to help universities design and deliver programs that meet agreed standards, attract more students and produce skilled graduates.

The national standards will be officially launched by Senator Richard Colbeck, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, in front of 700 delegates at the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) Outlook 2015 conference in Canberra today.

Led by the University of Tasmania, the standards were developed through a nationwide consultation with industry, graduates, and academics as part of the Federal Government funded Agriculture Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (AgLTAS) project.

AgLTAS project leader and University of Tasmania undergraduate degree coordinator for agriculture, Dr Tina Acuna, said the national agriculture education standards define the nature and extent of agriculture and also outline the key threshold learning outcomes for graduates – representing what a student should know, understand and be able to do upon graduation.

“The aim of the standards isn’t to make every university the same, or even to standardise the curriculum, it is about enabling students to have confidence that their degree is held to a high standard,” Dr Acuna said.

“It is important that we raise the profile and reputation of university education in agriculture to help address the current skills shortage where there are almost six jobs for every agriculture graduate.

“The industry stakeholders who were consulted also agreed that students needed to demonstrate highly developed problem solving and communication skills.

“Industry specific (vocational) knowledge was generally regarded as attainable during on-the-job training both during and after graduation.

“Given the dynamic nature and wide range of agricultural industries, graduates need to be life-long learners, capable of undertaking continued professional development to practice agriculture as professionals.”

Launching the standards in Canberra today, Senator Richard Colbeck said they would raise the profile and reputation of university education in agriculture to help address the current skills shortage.

“Agriculture and its related industries support 1.6 million Australian jobs and in the current environment of agricultural growth and innovation, it is vital that agriculture graduates have the necessary skills and knowledge needed by industry to secure Australia’s future economic prosperity and to meet national objectives for food production and supply,” Senator Colbeck said.

Industry input was vital in developing the national standards to ensure that agriculture graduates left university with the skills and knowledge needed by industry.

As a major employer of Australian agriculture graduates, the Managing Director of national agricultural contract research firm Peracto, Ian Macleod, provided expert advice during the development of the standards.

“Universities must address the design, content and delivery of their agricultural curriculum to meet the needs of industry now and into the future,” Mr Macleod said.

“These new standards will address these issues by informing the development and design of agriculture curricula delivered at Australian universities and will further promote agriculture as a career to encourage more young people into the growing industry.”

The standards have been endorsed by the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture and developed to be used by universities around Australia to inform their courses.

The AgLTAS project is funded by the Federal Government’s Office for Learning and Teaching and was developed in collaboration with The University of Adelaide, University of Western Sydney and Charles Sturt University.

Available for interview (on site at ABARES Outlook 2015 or via phone):

- Dr Tina Acuna, AgLTAS Project Leader, University of Tasmania
- Professor Holger Meinke, President, Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture and Head of the University of Tasmania’s School of Land and Food.
- Ian Macleod, Managing Director, Peracto

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