IMPLEMENTING THE THRESHOLD LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR AGRICULTURE AT UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The national Learning and Teaching Academics Standards statement for agriculture (AgLTAS) describes the nature and extent of the discipline and threshold learning outcomes (TLOs) that define the core knowledge and skills expected of students by graduation. The AgLTAS statement has been endorsed by the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture and can be used to communicate to current and future students the minimum standards of their degree, as well as to inform curriculum design. While the AgLTAS document provides explanatory notes to assist educators to further understand the intent of the TLOs there are no exemplars on how the AgLTAS standards can be implemented.

We present two case studies of how academics at the University of Tasmania and the University of Adelaide used the AgLTAS to map their respective agriculture curricula. An online Curriculum Mapping Tool (CMT) was used to evaluate the alignment between the curriculum and the TLOs and to identify gaps in the curriculum where improvement may be required. Workshop participants completed pre- and post-workshop questionnaires to evaluate the benefits of mapping the curriculum for the respective degrees against the AgLTAS TLOs. The pre-workshop questionnaire collected demographic data about the participants and their knowledge about the agriculture degree and TLOs, and the Australian Qualifications Framework. The post-workshop questionnaire established perceived changes in each participant's awareness, knowledge, connection with the teaching team and curriculum. It was also used to inform the development of the explanatory notes section in the AgLTAS statement. In addition, four units from each University were chosen randomly for external benchmarking.

The output from the CMT demonstrated that the two degrees met or in some instances exceeded the graduate level TLOs for agriculture, although determining the proficiency level for a TLO can be an issue. External reviewers examined the curricula of the courses at the two Universities for alignment to the TLOs to identify and enable correction for academic bias in internally mapping units. The external evaluation aligned well with the results from the CMT. A combination of external review and curriculum mapping workshops involving the entire teaching team is however still recommended when mapping degrees to TLOs.

The process of curriculum mapping was shown to provide most academics with a more holistic view of how the degree meets the AgLTAS and has the potential to drive innovation in assessment design. Curriculum mapping also assisted academics by reinforcing their understanding of constructive alignment between assessment and learning outcomes at the unit, course and the discipline threshold standards. We will also provide commentary on what we believe are the next steps and implications of the AgLTAS for curriculum development, industry engagement and graduate employability in the agriculture discipline.

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