

# ACADEMIC, INDUSTRY AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE INCLUSION OF “VOCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE” IN A LEARNING AND TEACHING ACADEMIC STANDARDS STATEMENT FOR AGRICULTURE

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## ABSTRACT

We report on the perspectives of academic, student and industry stakeholders identified through a national project to develop a Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (LTAS) Statement for the Agriculture discipline. Agricultural teaching (and research) relies on strong links with industry due to the applied nature of the discipline. Without these links, sustainable and profitable practice change in agricultural systems cannot be achieved. A pilot project, in 2011-2012, with academic staff from three Australian universities, identified vocational knowledge (or application of practical knowledge that is very industry-specific) as a potential focus for a Threshold Learning Outcome (TLO). The AgLTAS project provided the opportunity to validate or refute this proposed focus by seeking input from a wider group of stakeholders, including industry. National consensus was sought by a process of iterative consultation with academics, students across four Australian universities and industry stakeholders. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from industry participants who attended a series of workshops across most Australian States and Territories and via an online survey. Surprisingly, and contrary to the findings of the pilot project, industry representatives considered vocational knowledge of lesser importance than the need for students to attain highly developed problem solving and communication skills, based on the rationale that these skills can generate new opportunities and innovation in agriculture. Industry-specific (vocational) knowledge was generally regarded as attainable during on-the-job training after graduation. The next phase of the project will trial the Standards Statement for Agriculture by benchmarking the academic standards achieved in four universities that teach Agriculture and related disciplines, using a Curriculum Mapping Tool, developed as a deliverable of the project. The tool is fully editable and can be used to map curriculum for what is taught and assessed against any set of standards statements.

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