



Agriculture project crops up

National standard for graduates to be worked out

THE AgLTAS project aims to develop a National Academic Standards Statement for Agriculture representing the threshold, or minimum, levels of achievement that are expected of a bachelor-level graduate.

University of Tasmania
Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture/School of Agricultural Science senior lecturer and AgLTAS project leader Tina Acuna applied for the national funding.

She was happy to have secured the two-year nationwide project grant earlier this year.

Leading the project, UTAS is working collaboratively with Charles Sturt University, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Adelaide.

Dr Acuna said the project looked to find out what industry wanted university agriculture graduates to know, understand and do when they finished their degree.

“The collaboration with the other universities means that rather than us going out to all the universities, each partner university will draw on their networks,” Dr Acuna said.

Throughout the project, the partnered universities will work closely with industry find out where tertiary agricultural education currently sits in each state and territory. Here in Tasmania, UTAS invited industry members to attend a workshop, Setting Academic Standards for Agriculture, last week at the Devonport Entertainment &

Convention Centre.

Dr Acuna and Dr Richard Doyle, deputy head of school for TIA/SAS facilitated the discussion.

Dr Doyle said while only a small number of industry members attended it was an enthusiastic and energetic discussion.

“One thing that came out strongly was the importance of partnership between industry,” Dr Doyle said.

“We also have to make sure that students aren’t only capable academically but have workplace skills in a range of industries.

“There is also a need for graduates to have really strong communication skills, both oral and written.”

Dr Doyle said there were parallels between agriculture and medicine in the importance of linking students to industry.

“Universities put the medical school down near the hospital so that students can engage in the practice. This is what participants are asking for agriculture,” he said.

“Here in Tasmania we work collaboratively with agricultural industries.”

Dr Acuna said once there was a nationwide approach to the standard of tertiary agricultural education, those involved in the project would have a chance to look at the agricultural degrees being offered.

“We will be looking to see how well the degrees are meeting those standards,” she said.

“From there it will help us

review curriculum.”

UTAS will shortly go through a school merger combining TIA/SAS with geography and environmental science.

Dr Doyle said this had opened up space to review the curriculum of the geography, environmental and spatial science majors in the bachelor of science course, as well as the bachelor of agriculture and agricultural science.

“We are having these conversations of how we might look at reviewing and potentially changing some aspects of the curriculum in future,” Dr Doyle said.

“From UTAS’s perspective, we might see the rollout of some of these changes from 2015.”



Dr Richard Doyle ... graduates should have practical knowledge.



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Dr Tina Acuna, whose study is finding out what the industry wants from its agriculture graduates.