A NATIONAL project based in Tasmania is set to shape the future of higher education in Australian agriculture. Led by Dr Tina Acuna from the University of Tasmania, the project, known as AgLTAS, aims to answer the question: “What should a graduate in agriculture and related disciplines know, understand and be able to do?”

“Workshops are currently being held across Australia to engage with industry members, students and academics to develop a national Learning and Teaching Academic Standards for Agriculture - AgLTAS - statement,” Dr Acuna said.

The project, which includes collaboration from Charles Sturt University, the University of Adelaide and the University of Western Sydney, builds on the previously published Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Statement for Science, but with a focus on agriculture. Agriculture and related disciplines, which includes areas such as agricultural science, horticulture, wine science, agricultural economics and agribusiness, are taught at 14 universities across Australia.

The project was launched in August this year and is funded for two years by the Australian government’s Office for Learning and Teaching.

Dr Acuna said the project has gotten off to a great start, with more than 17 workshops already held across the country in Tasmania, South Australia, NSW, Victoria, ACT and Queensland.

“The workshops are generating some valuable discussions. There are diverse opinions and we are also finding common themes,” Dr Acuna said.

“The learning outcomes expected in a graduate are so far broadly similar to that for science, but in the context of agriculture.

“For example, we have identified themes around knowledge and understanding, along with skills in inquiry and problem solving to critically analyse and address problems in agriculture,” Dr Acuna said.

“There are also a lot of changes in university regulations about the design of courses and learning outcomes that can lead to tensions between universities and employers if we don’t align our expectations.”

More workshops are scheduled for early February and an online survey is also available. Dr Acuna said they were encouraging as many people as possible to take part.

He said diverse opinions were needed so that the national statement reflected the views of the broader agricultural community.

After the consultation, the AgLTAS statement will be drafted by the project’s reference group and first and second drafts will be published in the AgLTAS newsletter in December and February. A submission will go to the Australian Council of Dears of Agriculture in March 2014.

The AgLTAS statement will then be trialled to benchmark standards achieved in universities that teach agriculture and related disciplines and published as case studies.

www.agltas.edu.au