

Profitable business is the focus for agriculture and its educational institutions

By SIMON LIVINGSTONE

THOSE working in agriculture are aware of the many changes and challenges that have affected the industry over the past ten years. The agricultural sector has had to adapt and embrace changes to mechanical, biological and information technology. Farm managers have had to adapt themselves and their businesses to cope with complexity and change. They have needed to be pro-active in creating new opportunities, or they have found it difficult to maintain their competitiveness. Farming is a business and many of the nation's progressive managers have equipped themselves with essential management skills through the completion of formal studies.



As pressure is placed on institutions to be more client focused, they are required to provide value-for-money through quality teaching and learning support services.

Educational institutions have an important role in preparing people for success in their chosen industry. As changes have affected the rural sector, pressures have been placed on educational providers to refine their focus

and direction. Traditionally the imparting of knowledge and the development of cognitive skills in learners was the main charter of educational institutions. Today, colleges and universities still carry out this role, but they are also required to operate more as businesses.

RECENT CHANGES: The Australian higher education sector in the 21st century face different challenges and opportunities than it has in previous periods. Those holding management positions in higher education institutions before the 1990 would not have used terms such as cost effectiveness and efficiency very often. However those days are now over and these terms are often discussed in colleges and universities. Mission statements, strategic plans, benchmarking ar

Agriculture • Animal Science • Forestry • Resource Management • Rural Business • Horticulture • Food Science • Horses



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

STUDY:

- Bachelor of Agricultural Science
 - Bachelor of Agriculture
 - Bachelor of Rural Business
- Advanced Diploma in Agriculture
- TAFE courses in agriculture, rural business, dairy, production horticulture and viticulture

Call 1800 815 803.

www.landfood.unimelb.edu.au

Institute of
**land &
food**
resources

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

MANAGEMENT

performance indicators are no longer unfamiliar concepts in the education sector.

Recent trends in higher education, such as universities functioning more as commercial businesses, the move from elite to mass education, changes to work and work practices, are all having an impact on how educational institutions are operated and managed. The list of changes goes on to include the introduction of quality management and accountability, considering students as clients and customers and the globalisation of higher education.

Australian universities are implementing these commercial business practices into their operations and this move is creating tension in the sector. This commercialisation involves higher education institutions operating on profit principles offering services for sale. Educational institutions are now organisations that sell their services (education) to customers and consumers with the aim of the business being to achieve increased economic efficiency. Those who support the commercialisation of higher education in Australia argue that universities must change their current thinking on funding models. Universities need to

look at mixed funding models rather than rely on dwindling government funding.

To make public institutions more efficient, successive governments have used financial restrictions, marginally funded places and competitive grant schemes and have encouraged universities to work with the business community. Commercial arms have been established in most higher education institutions to capitalise on the development of intellectual property and to provide education and training services to industry. In order to generate additional income to operate and expand Australian universities now source income from fee-paying students, higher education contribution scheme fees, consultancy work and corporate sponsorship.

As Commonwealth Government funding has reduced, universities have actively sought to capture the lucrative international student market. Education is now an export industry with Australia receiving billions of dollars in income from overseas student's education.

The higher education sector has traditionally been reluctant to acknowledge students as customers. However, these views are changing with academics now coming to terms with treating students as

valued clients as more students financially contribute to their education. For those institutions that have always charged student fees, this is not a new development. Students expect good teaching and a quality learning environment. Many students view diplomas and degrees as commodities and there is an expectation that academics will give generously of their time and attention to assist them with their studies.

A university education is a significant investment for students, whether they pay fees or contribute to the cost of their education through the higher education contribution scheme. As pressure is placed on institutions to be more client focused, they are required to provide value for money through quality teaching and learning support services, including access to tutors and lecturers as well as flexible access to learning materials and resources.

For the business world, performance indicators are used regularly and widely in order to increase and maximise performance. These business procedures, however, are new concepts to the higher education sector.

Some academics working in large institutions have concerns about the

New Opportunities

Bachelor of Science (Animal Science) @ Adelaide



Internationally recognised as a leader in research and teaching in livestock sciences, the University of Adelaide, Faculty of Sciences will introduce a Bachelor of Science (Animal Science) for first-year intake in 2004. The program will focus primarily on the sciences relevant to livestock, wildlife, and companion animals.

Bachelor of Science (Animal Science):

- Three-year program
- First year at North Terrace campus
- Later years at Roseworthy campus
- Basic biological sciences and chemistry
- Animal structure and function
- Animal health and welfare
- Animal behaviour and breeding
- Animal nutrition and metabolism
- Animal biotechnology



www.sciences.adelaide.edu



EDUCATION AND TRAINING

◀ introduction of performance indicators into their workplace and have read their implementation as a reduction in their autonomy over their own work practices.

Those academics opposing the use of performance indicators believe their development has been driven by an economic and commercial agenda.

But performance measures can be useful when institutions look at the extent to which graduates are satisfied with the quality of their experience, the success of graduates in proceeding to further study or securing employment, and the satisfaction of employers with the skills and attributes institutions seek to instil in their graduates. In recent years, the higher education sector has promoted good teaching as being of the utmost importance for successful graduate outcomes. Institutions have brought in student appraisals, created teaching awards and encouraged innovation in lecturing.

A formal focus on quality has come gradually to higher education where the Federal Government initially encouraged universities to monitor their own performance; through to the present where an outside body audits the sector.

Typically educational institutions measure client satisfaction with their



It is likely that the purely campus-based institutions will become small, while international and global institutions will dominate the education market.

courses through a formal questionnaire sent to graduates several months after course completion. This is a valuable source of information on perceptions of various aspects of the teaching experience, such as the quality of teaching, the clarity of goals and standards, the nature of assessments, the level of workload and overall satisfaction. These indicators are among the tools institutions can use to measure and build on the quality of their teaching services. In 2001, Marcus Oldham College, Geelong, Victoria, was rated by the Department of Education, Employment and Training survey as the number one institute in Australia in the

categories of teaching, student satisfaction, skills developed and student retention.

FUTURE: Technology has influenced how institutions conduct their business, such as the use of the Internet, satellite broadcasting and video conferencing. Higher education is available internationally and students have a large selection of institutions to choose from as providers export themselves through distance-education methods of delivery. The question is whether universities of the future will need the same infrastructure they currently require in order to adequately service their clients?

It is likely that the purely campus based institutions will become small, while international and global institutions will dominate the education market. It is unclear whether we will see the demise of the traditional campus in favour of the virtual on-line university. It is likely that universities will still provide on campus education, however they will increasingly develop cyberspace courses. (See page 29).

Educational institutions need to approach this direction carefully. Around the world, universities have failed in this form of education because many student



Upgrade your professional skills — in Agriculture

You can obtain UNE's Certificate in Agriculture or Graduate Certificate in Rural Science by completing four units of your choice through external part-time study. Our courses contain the latest information and are specifically designed for industry application. You can specialise in any of the following areas.

- Applied Animal Nutrition • Animal Health and Welfare • Feedlot Management • Meat Science and Technology
- Animal Breeding and Genetics • Sustainable Grains Production • Poultry Science • Wool Production • Cotton Production
- Horticulture • Viticulture • Agronomy.

Ask about individual programs to suit specific interests.

For further information contact Penny Purvis in the Faculty of The Sciences.
Phone: 02 6773 3106 Fax: 02 6773 3376 Email: ppurvis@pobox.une.edu.au

study.une.edu.au

UNE — rated the maximum ★★★★★ for Educational Experience in the Good Universities Guide 2003.



Phone 013723 - 0300

MONASH UNIVERSITY

Executive Certificate in Agribusiness (for non-graduates)
Graduate Certificate in Agribusiness
Graduate Diploma in Agribusiness
Master in Agribusiness

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

MANAGEMENT


do not want to study online. Often students prefer to attend the premier institutions and they do not wish to log onto website classrooms. Students have a large number of institutions and courses from which to choose. Whether they wish to study farm business management, agribusiness, agricultural science, farm economics, agricultural commerce, food science and technology or environmental engineering, the question is will the investment of money and time into their education provide them with the skills to succeed in their chosen field?

BUSINESS FOCUS: Graduate outcomes are a critical indicator of how effectively institutions are defining and instilling the skills and attributes expected of their graduates. Success in the workplace is viewed as the most obvious indicator of

successful outcomes for educational institutions.

Regardless of the agricultural qualification students complete, employers expect their staff to have developed business skills. Employers are looking for graduates who can contribute to the organisation early in their careers. Employers seek graduates who have general skills in communication, decision making, problem solving and teamwork. Whether the graduates are expected to communicate with clients, other employees, or management, the bottom line is that successful employees are competent in this area.

In many workplaces, employers have been disappointed with graduates' writing skills. Possibly the students, as part of their studies, have not been taught to

write in a manner appropriate to business communications. Employers now presume that graduates have skills in computing, along with an understanding and experience in email, the Internet, word-processing and spreadsheets. The major skills in short supply are not academic or discipline specific; rather employers consistently identify shortages of personal transferable skills as the main area of concern. Students considering academic studies need to realise that business skills are transferable across all occupations. 

Simon Livingstone is the Principal of Marcus Oldham College, Geelong, Victoria. He has specific research interests relating to the commercialisation of the Australian higher education sector. Phone (03) 5243 3533, email <livingstone@marcusoldham.vic.edu.au>.

Catholic Agricultural College Bindoon



"innovative & exciting academic, vocational & sporting programs"

"residential care is friendly, comfortable & affordable"

"total social, spiritual & ethical development"

Our College specialises in Agriculture, Hospitality, Auto Workshop & Equine studies.



For more information please contact:
Ph: (08) 9576 1040 Fax: (08) 9576 1146
Email: admin@cacbindoon.wa.edu.au

Productive Solutions for Australia's Future **New Agriculture**

Be a part of the New Agriculture revolution. Charles Sturt University offers a range of undergraduate courses.



Study areas:

- Agriculture
- Irrigation
- Agribusiness
- Equine Studies
- Environmental Horticulture
- Production Horticulture
- Supply Chain Management
- Olive Production

Flexible study options - on campus, distance education or single subject.

www.csu.edu.au/student/newagriculture

For more information contact:
Judith Boadle on 026933 2801
or email jboadle@csu.edu.au

**CHARLES STURT
UNIVERSITY**



Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Course/Area of interest _____

Please send to: Judith Boadle, School Liaison Officer, School of Agriculture, Charles Sturt University, Locked Bag 588, WAGGA WAGGA NSW 2678