

The agriculture industry in the UK and Australia has been confronted by a number of challenges in the last century, ensuring that the agricultural education on offer in both countries is continually advancing new theories and strategies. Outbreaks of diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease in intensively reared farm animals in the UK, and the fragile ecology of farmed land in Australia due to the country's climate, have encouraged the development of sustainable methods of land management.

The attention to the wider issue of sustainability, which is a feature of many modern agricultural courses in Australia and the UK, means that they have become popular with students who are not necessarily following a traditional agricultural career path. "The care of the environment and the quality of life for community members has become important to all types of students," says Stephen Blunden, Course Coordinator for the Systems Agriculture degree course at the University of Western Sydney in Australia. "We have students with business,

Selection of institutions that provide agriculture courses in the UK and Australia

	Use agents	Number of students	% overseas students
Australia			
Charles Sturt Uni, School of Agriculture, NSW	✓	1,285	1
Uni. of New England, School of Rural Science and Agriculture, NSW		465	7
Uni. of Sydney, Faculty of Rural Management, NSW	✓	450	3
Uni. of Western Sydney, Sch. of Environment and Agriculture, NSW	✓	105	11
UK			
Brookby Melton College, Leicestershire		35	0
Harper Adams Uni. College, Shropshire		1,700	2
Otley College, Suffolk		3,500	1
Rodbaston College, Stafford		650	1
Uni. of Aberdeen, Dep. of Agriculture and Forestry, Aberdeen, Scotland	✓	384	8
Writtle College, Chelmsford	✓	1,600	14

equine, landscape management, conservation, education, third world development and community development interests."

Writtle College in the UK has recently introduced a new degree programme in agriculture and the environment, which combines modules from its agriculture and rural resource degree programmes. "[The course] gives either would-be farmers a better insight into environmental issues or would-be environmental managers a better insight into agricultural methods," says John Vipond, Course Manager and Admissions Officer at Writtle College in Chelmsford.

The wide variety of subjects on offer is also proving to be an attraction for many potential agricultural students. Richard Jopling, Head of Liaison and Marketing at Harper Adams University College in Shropshire in the UK, has noticed an increase in interest amongst students for courses associated with land-based industries. "We are seeing a significant increase in the number of students joining our degree courses in agricultural engineering and off-road vehicle design," he says. "Many such courses are now sponsored by commercial companies within the industry."

Links with the agricultural industry play a vital role in ensuring that agriculture courses in the UK and Australia are kept up-to-date with ever-changing farming methods. "[Our

Agriculture

in Australia and the UK

Agriculture worldwide has experienced great changes over the last century and the continuous development of new skills and practices has required that education in this field keeps pace. Colleges and universities in the UK and Australia have noticed an increasing demand for courses dealing with sustainability issues.

Bachelor of Systems Agriculture course has been designed in conjunction with industry professionals to ensure that the professional development of students is a central feature of this course," says Blunden in Australia.

David Bebb, Director of International Relations at Writtle College, adds, "Our industrial and international links ensure that we are fully responsive to changing needs and we constantly adapt programmes and introduce new ones." The three masters programmes offered at Writtle College, in international horticulture - run in conjunction with a Dutch partner - horticultural crop production and post harvest technology, are, according to Bebb, "increasingly popular with international students".

Owing to different climates, soil conditions and the availability of technology, agricultural methods worldwide vary widely and many agricultural students, therefore, find it useful to learn about new techniques overseas. Acram Taji, Vice Dean of Rural Science and Agriculture at the University of New England in Australia, says that most international enrolments are for postgraduate studies. "Our postgraduate students come from Iran, Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Japan and the African continent."

Bebb has noticed an increase in interest from students from India and China in recent years, and puts this down to the Prime Minister's initiative to increase the number of international students in the UK (see *Education Travel Magazine*, October 1999, page 35). "China and India have been targeted as priority-one countries under the Prime Minister's initiative," he says. "The British Council has been doing a lot more marketing, and colleges and universities have been putting more effort into these countries too. We started visiting [China and India] last year - with an immediate surge in applications."

Graduates of agriculture courses can choose to go into a wide range of career fields. The agriculture courses offered by the University of Sydney in Australia are focused around business and management which give graduates a lot of career flexibility. "Our courses have, unlike traditional science or

economics-based courses, always focused on the business of agriculture and management and so relate more to commerce than either science or economics," says Hugh Haynes at the university's Faculty of Rural Management. "The majority of our graduates obtain their first appointment in accounting, finance, trading and marketing roles."

In the UK too, agricultural courses can prepare students for various careers. "Graduates can feed into careers such as land engineering, food distribution companies, machinery and technology," says Laura Hack, Marketing Coordinator at Otley College in Suffolk in the UK. "A student with an agricultural qualification will have numerous transferable skills that will allow them to gain employment in many different fields." ○



PHOTOGRAPH: WRITTLE COLLEGE

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	UK	Australia
Example of award	Certificate, diploma, BSc, MA, MSc, postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma	Certificate, diploma, BSc, MSc, postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma
Length of course (years)	1-4	1-4
Min. English requirements - Toefl	500	500
Min. English requirements - Ielts	6.0	6.0
Approx. tuition fee for one year of an undergraduate degree course in local currency	£7,500 (US\$10,500)	AUS\$15,000 (US\$7,500)