Review into Agricultural Education and Training in New South Wales

Review process

Why did the NSW Government commission the Review?
The key rationale for the Review is the need to ensure that high quality agricultural education and training is available in our State into the future given the sector’s importance to the NSW economy. The agriculture sector contributes around $9 billion to the NSW economy every year and provides food, fibre, raw materials and energy for Australia and the world.

What is the purpose of the Review?
The purpose of the Review is to provide recommendations to ensure that:

- Agricultural education and training in the NSW school and tertiary sectors is appropriate for current and future industry needs
- Agricultural education and training is promoted to current and future students as an attractive and rewarding career
- The agricultural sector is supported by an appropriately educated and trained workforce
- NSW Government-owned education and training institutions, research stations and other facilities are best positioned to respond to future industry needs.

Who conducted the Review?
The Review was conducted by Emeritus Professor Jim Pratley, an eminent research professor of agriculture at Charles Sturt University.

What was the review process?
Professor Pratley considered previous inquiries, reports and reviews, consulted directly with stakeholders, circulated an Issues Paper and invited submissions from interested parties.

Professor Pratley held discussions with a broad range of agriculture and education stakeholders, and was assisted by a reference group. Nine roundtable meetings were held in October and November 2012 in Sydney, Wagga Wagga, Yanco, Armidale, Tamworth and Dubbo. More than 80 submissions were received from individuals and organisations in response to the Issues Paper which was released in October 2012.

Where can I access the report?

Government response

What is the Government’s response to the Review’s recommendations?
The NSW Government has accepted 26 of the 27 recommendations to Government. Implementation of these recommendations will commence from 2014.

The Government strongly encourages industry to consider its capacity to implement the Review’s 15 recommendations to industry.
Who will implement the recommendations?
New South Wales schools, TAFE NSW, the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards, and the NSW Department of Primary Industries will implement the Government response to the Review.

As the Review makes recommendations for both Government and industry, industry also has a significant role to play in the implementation of the industry recommendations, and a vested interest in the outcomes.

What are the key recommendations?
The Review identifies children’s lack of knowledge about the source of food and fibre as a significant concern. It recommends establishing an ‘Agriculture and Food Week’ (Government Recommendation 2), and makes a range of other recommendations about incorporating agricultural education in the school curriculum, and improving the expertise of teachers and the resources available to support the teaching of agriculture in primary and secondary schools.

The Review also sets out a recommendation for the re-establishment of the Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture (Government Recommendation 24), which is supported in principle.

Why is the Government supporting the implementation of 26 of 27 recommendations?
The Review identifies actions that together have the potential to deliver improvements to agricultural education and training in New South Wales to better meet the workforce needs of the agricultural sector. For this reason the Government is supporting the majority of the Review’s recommendations.


What action does the Review recommend to promote careers in agriculture? How will the Government implement this recommendation?
The Review found that there are perceptions that agriculture does not offer a secure career path, despite a significant undersupply of graduates in agriculture and related fields.

Careers advisers are the first point of contact in high schools for students seeking advice on further study and career opportunities. The Review recommends improvements to the provision of advice about careers in agriculture in NSW schools, to ensure students are provided with well-informed advice on possible careers and pathways (Government Recommendation 1).

The NSW Government will take up the need to improve provision of advice about careers in agriculture with school sectors.

Will agriculture become a compulsory part of the Technology curriculum?
Although Technology is a mandatory subject in Years 7 and 8 and includes agriculture in some units, it is not currently mandatory for schools to choose these particular units. The Review recommends that, in the teaching of Technology in each of Years 7 and 8, at least one content area should be based on agriculture, food and fibre (Government Recommendation 5).

This recommendation will be implemented by the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards through NSW syllabuses for the Australian curriculum in Technology.

What does the Review recommend with respect to teachers of Agriculture and Primary Industries?
The Review recommends further investigation of the qualifications of teachers in Agriculture and Primary Industries to determine future directions in recruitment are designed to ensure strong depth of expertise in these areas (Government Recommendation 7). This will be undertaken by the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards in 2014.

The Review also recommends that the agricultural high schools directly appoint agriculture teachers (Government Recommendation 8), given the importance of these roles in these schools, and that head teachers responsible for agriculture form a network as leaders in agricultural education and training (Government Recommendation 11).

This is supported in the context of ‘Local Schools, Local Decisions’.
How will the Government respond to recommendations relating to agricultural high schools?

The Review makes a range of recommendations relating to the existing agricultural high schools: Farrer Agricultural High School, Hurlstone Agricultural High School, James Ruse Agricultural High School and Yanco Agricultural High School. The Government supports these recommendations, except for the recommendation relating to joint RTO status.

Furthermore, the NSW Government supports the agricultural boarding schools to actively consider their enrolment procedures to prioritise the enrolment of students from rural and remote areas.

The Review also found that there is a gap in the coverage of agricultural high schools in central NSW. The Government will explore options for the designation of an agricultural high school for this region, but will not explore the need for additional boarding facilities in the area.

How can VET in schools better promote agriculture careers?

Vocational education and training in schools is a vital part of any effort to engage more young people in learning and lift school retention rates through to Year 12.

Currently, most students undertaking VET in schools are enrolled in Certificate II in Agriculture.

The Review recommends that, over time, schools should move towards offering Certificate III in Primary Industries to promote employment outcomes for students (Government Recommendation 17).

How will the NSW Government support students in metropolitan areas to undertake vocational education and training in agriculture?

The Review found that there is a lack of training opportunities in metropolitan areas, particularly for obtaining practical skills in agriculture. It recommends that TAFE NSW considers the offerings in primary industries in the metropolitan area to ensure students have appropriate access to such training (Government Recommendation 19). This recommendation is supported.

What were the Review’s findings in relation to higher education in agriculture?

The Review found that there is a need to increase the number of graduates in agriculture and related fields. It also found that stipends for postgraduate scholars are not competitive with graduate salaries, and employment of researchers is not stable.

The Review makes a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring that the best minds can be attracted to agricultural research and industry leadership.