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Research degrees are undertaken on both a full-time and part-time basis with the majority of students electing the latter approach. Many professional agricultural economists working in Queensland have undertaken external/part-time research degrees to upgrade their qualifications.

Agricultural Education at RMIHE: some personal views

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The School of Agriculture at Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education (RMIHE) developed from the former Wagga Wagga Agricultural College. Its history of agricultural education and experiment can be traced back to 1892. The initial role was to teach and demonstrate modern farming practices to the farming community and students were sons of farmers who aimed to return to work on farms.

Today there is still a strong emphasis on providing students with a "practical" education through various courses at the Associate Diploma level. But over the years the type of students has changed reflecting changes in Australian society and the declining importance of farming as a source of employment. At the degree level (Bachelor of Applied Science (Agriculture)), students receive a broad education which enables them to enter professions which service agriculture. Furthermore, course developments such as the introduction of a Postgraduate Diploma and a proposed Masters Degree (by 1990) extend the trend away from the practice of farming towards the science of agriculture. In this respect RMIHE now competes with universities and indeed aspires to become a university.

The developments at RMIHE are not mirrored in all Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs). But with the current policy proposals at the Federal level of abandoning the binary system of universities and CAEs, the options open to CAEs appear to merge with (or become) a university or to adopt a course profile and role similar to the current Colleges of

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Technical and Further Education (TAFE).

The forces of change have caused the following issues to become prominent in the planning of curricula and course direction:

Articulation, meaning the formalised linking or joining of different levels of courses to enable students to progress from, say, Associate Diploma to Masters level with appropriate credit for previous study. This is one notion which has come out of the Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Tertiary Education conducted by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission. The historical pattern of course development has been to introduce more and more specialised (level specific) subjects with a tendency to smaller average class sizes. With articulation, one subject would serve a number of courses and class sizes would be higher.

Upgrading, means a number of things: enhancing course content; introducing more advanced courses; developing new courses to meet perceived markets. Some of this pressure for upgrading stems from a desire to achieve university status and could be at the cost of losing or abandoning courses at the Associate Diploma level. But the changing market for graduates is also playing a part. Developments in fields such as horticulture, equine science, and possibly biotechnology and agribusiness, are market induced changes.

External study, to make higher education more available to a wider group of the population. To facilitate articulation of courses, a wider range of subjects will need to be offered by external mode. Currently the Bachelors degree is available only by full-time study. External study is also seen as a means of exporting education and attracting a wider group of overseas students to undergraduate study. For example, potential exists for offering mixed modes of study involving students in some full-time study in Australia and some external study in their own country.