

Developing a Model for Meat Inspection and Quality Assurance Employment Outcomes for University Graduates and Undergraduates.

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Project Description

The industry is suffering an ongoing shortage of recruits who are young, able and qualified in meat inspection and quality assurance. In recent years the 'pool' of talent from which to attract future meat inspectors and QA personnel has considerably dwindled. In particular, the recruitment of new meat inspectors to the industry has become a major challenge and threat to the sustainability of the industry. Likewise, the pool of potential QA staff often lacks the academic background to implement and maintain increasingly complex HACCP-based QA systems.

This project has explored the prospect of attracting university graduates to consider a career in the red meat processing sector. Many students have little knowledge of the career opportunities available and this model offers them insights into the sector and an opportunity to enter it 'work-ready'.

A model of training was developed and trialed whereby animal and agricultural science university students received training in meat inspection and quality assurance while still completing their undergraduate studies.

The trial was run over eighteen months at the Charles Sturt University's (CSU) Wagga Campus and the NSW Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Verto, delivered the training. One export and two domestic plants participated in the project, providing industry placement opportunities and on-site tutors.

Project Content

15 CSU students were recruited from those undertaking animal/agricultural science courses at the Wagga Campus. The students were initially enrolled in the *Certificate III in Meat Processing*

(*Meat Safety*) and when they finished this course they were enrolled in the *Certificate IV in Meat Processing (Meat Safety)*. The university arranged for students to receive course credits for the completion of the *Certificate IV in Meat Processing (Meat Safety)*.

The delivery program started with an intensive week-long theory and practical program on campus. This week's study covered anatomy, inspection procedures, legislation and knife sharpening. This program was run before the students undertook their on-site training.

The students were divided into two groups with half studying ovine inspection and half bovine inspection. The students did 120 hours of onsite training practicing the inspection process and identifying diseases and conditions. The students also observed ten ante mortem inspections as well.

The on-site practical sessions were run over a six-month period and timed around students' availability and company preferences. There were no more than 3 students in the plant at any one time and most of the time there was only one or two on site at the same time. All the participating companies found that the students worked well and that they are happy to have more students.

The students finished their Certificate III course utilising distance education materials. Once they completed the Certificate III they were enrolled in the *Certificate IV in Meat Processing (Meat Safety)* which was focused on quality assurance units.

Project Outcome

The project has developed a viable model for the delivery of meat inspection and quality assurance to animal/agricultural science undergraduates. The model worked for the RTO, the students and the participating companies

Out of the 15 students enrolled in the Certificate III course, 13 students have completed the course and enrolled in the *Certificate IV in Meat Processing (Meat Safety)*. Four of the students have chosen to do both the ovine and the bovine inspection units, which added approximately another 50 hours of study to their course. The project is continuing, utilising state funding to allow students to complete the Certificate IV course. Out of the four students who have graduated, three have found employment in the industry.

Benefit for Industry

The model offers a meaningful way for the industry to interact with the universities and provide access to meat inspection and quality assurance training for undergraduates. This training makes the students 'work-ready' on graduation and attractive to industry. In time, this will help relieve the skills shortages in the industry and enable companies to attract graduates to provide the next generation of quality assurance managers.

The training also creates a profile for the red meat processing sector on campus which has not previously been present at many universities. The other potential spin off from this project is to establish a rapport between regional universities and red meat processors, enabling research and development projects that are of mutual benefit to both parties.