

Ag Institute Australia

National Accreditation Scheme for professionals in Agricultural, Natural Resource and related sectors – a new framework

Mike Stephens 07/10.11

Introduction

With the incorporation of the Australian Association of Agricultural Consultants (AAAC) into The AIAST, the united body trading as **Ag Institute Australia** has become the peak organisation representing all professionals in agriculture, including those in commercial agribusinesses (employees or self-employed), or the public sector (Government advisers, University academics and researchers or teachers in educational institutions).

There is widespread acknowledgement within the Institute and the specialist discipline societies, that all professionals in agriculture and natural resource management who are interacting with clients, should be accredited and meet minimum standards of knowledge and ethics, and only provide evidence-based recommendations and information underpinned by good science and economics and not based on belief or fashion. A strong, credible accreditation program will help to protect our profession and Australia's reputation, in agricultural and related production and natural resource management.

The AIAST has operated the **CPAg** (Certified Practising Agriculturalist) Accreditation for many years. The AAAC has for a number of years also offered through the AIAST the pilot **AgCredited™** and **EnviroCredited™** Accreditation program for their members. Some specialist societies have also operated accreditation programs e.g. Soils.

Over the years there has been much discussion and many workshops and reviews of accreditation. As a culmination of all this work, input from stakeholders and the restructure of the Institute, the AIAST Board:

1. Has developed a revised framework for accreditation for professionals in agriculture and natural resource management that has been built on the pilot AgCredited program. The AgCredited™ and EnviroCredited™ program will be offered exclusively to Ag Institute members, but is a benefit offered to members and is not a compulsory requirement of membership of Ag Institute Australia.
2. Will ensure that this accreditation has rigour and credibility, is cost effective, requires on-going professional development and which is underpinned by nationally recognised Units of Competency under the Australian Quality Training Framework.
3. Is revamping the publically accessible database (Register of Agricultural Professionals) of accredited specialists offering client services in specialist disciplines. This register is offered by Ag Institute Australia as a service to members. Listing on the register is voluntary. The register will take the place of the AAAC membership listing
4. Has revamped and will maintain the CPAG program until 31 December 2013. Before that date an assessment will be made regarding the uptake of AgC and EnvC and if necessary the CPAG status will be extended.
5. All consultants currently listed on the AAAC listing are eligible to remain listed beyond 1 January 2014 provided they complete the AgC requirement.

Those already holding AgCredited or EnviroCredited status will not be required to undertake the process again, but will be required to keep up to date by meeting annual professional development requirements.

Who should be accredited?

Accreditation should be available to all professionals in agriculture and natural resource management, including all those in commercial agribusinesses (employees or self-employed), or the public sector (Government advisers, University academics and researchers, Teachers) who teach, undertake research, or give specific technical, financial, managerial or policy advice to farmers, agribusiness, catchment managers, community groups, government agencies, public utilities and potential investors in the broad range of disciplines that could be applied to those sectors. It is also applicable to those who undertake activities as a consultant or contractor, plus members of specialist professional groups and societies.

Benefits of Accreditation

As well as bringing responsibilities, accreditation also brings significant benefits to the individual professional, employers and the industry.

Benefits to the professional

- i. Accreditation can be used by members in the marketing and promotion of their services thereby gaining a competitive advantage.
- ii. Accreditation gives clients confidence that professional quality assurance standards have been met and that there is a commitment to maintaining currency in skills and knowledge. It also signifies that the professional has agreed to abide by the Code of Ethics of Ag Institute Australia.
- iii. Accreditation is an additional qualification which will enhance submissions, applications for funding, and tenders for consultancies or projects.
- iv. Accredited members are eligible for listing on the public, searchable, on-line Register of Agricultural Professionals to indicate specialist expertise and availability for consultancies, membership of boards or committees and other professional activities.
- v. The Register of Agricultural Professionals facilitates networking of like-minded professionals.
- vi. Accreditation provides a mechanism to manage risks through demonstration of due diligence and professionalism to assist in any litigation defence or applications to reduce professional indemnity insurance premiums.
- vii. The quality assurance standards provide a benchmark which the professional has to satisfy through independent assessment.
- viii. Accreditation demonstrates professional standing and a proactive approach which will assist with recruitment and career development.
- ix. The Statement of Attainment for studies completed as part of Accreditation may qualify for credit in other education programs e.g. bachelor or masters degree studies.
- x. Accreditation enhances credibility, professional image and peer group acceptance.
- xi. Accredited members receive a certificate and are entitled to use AgC or EnvC after their name, and the appropriate logo on their business stationery.

Benefits to the industry and employers

- i. Employers can be confident that when engaging an Accredited employee, contractor or consultant, the professional has met rigorous Professional Standards of expertise and ethics, and has made a positive commitment to keeping up-to-date with new technology, knowledge and industry developments, a process that is independently audited.
- ii. Accreditation provides independent recognition for both corporate and non-corporate professionals and enhances the professional image of the industry.

- iii. The public Register of Agricultural Professionals facilitates identification of appropriate accredited professionals who have been peer reviewed and measured against agreed industry standards, and recognised for their specialist expertise, or are available for participation in projects or serving on relevant boards and committees.
- iv. Accreditation demonstrates proactive, industry self-regulation thus reducing the likelihood of unsympathetic imposed regulations.

Accreditation requirements

There are four components to Accreditation:

1. Initial Accreditation valid for one year.
2. Maintaining Accreditation through on-going professional development and industry involvement.
3. Optional Accreditation as a specialist in up to 3 discipline areas.
4. Optional listing on the publically accessible Register of Agricultural Professionals.

Those awarded Accreditation are entitled to use the post nominal **AgC** or **EnvC** after their name. Those awarded specialist Accreditation are entitled to add the specialisation to the post nominal after their name e.g. **AgC (Specialisation)**.

1. Initial Accreditation

The requirements for initial accreditation are:

- 1) **Pre-requisite:** Membership of Ag Institute Australia (AIA).
- 2) Payment to the Ag Institute of the **Accreditation Application Fee**. This fee covers administration costs of mentoring applicants, assessing and auditing professional development and industry involvement, maintenance of the Register of Agricultural Professionals, issue of Certificates etc.
- 3) Successful completion of the **5 core competency units** (skill set) at Level 5 (Diploma) of the Australian Quality Training Framework. See **Table 1**. A training/assessment fee applies and is payable to the RTO.
- 4) At least 3 years **relevant work experience**.
- 5) Signing the Ag Institute Australia **Code of Ethics**.

Completing the Core Competency Units

1. The core units are offered as a Skills Set by CSU Training, the Registered Training Organisation of Charles Sturt University.
2. Participants enrol in the Skill Set and individual Units. Units can be completed by:
 - a. Undertaking on-line training and assessment through CSU Training.
 - b. Undertaking assessment only by providing evidence of competency (recognition of current competence).
 - c. Credit transfer for any of the units completed with another Registered Training Organisation.
3. All assessments and training resources conducted through CSU Training will be contextualised to the wide range of activities conducted by agriprofessionals across the agricultural and related industry sectors.

4. CSU Training will place all training and assessment resources on-line where they can be accessed by those enrolled in the Units.
5. A CSU-T trainer/assessor will guide participants through the training and assessment process to complete the core units.
6. The Statements of Attainment awarded qualify for Credit Transfer (CT) in further studies in the VET sector or advanced standing in the Tertiary sector. For example: Diploma, Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma or Masters in Agriculture or Agribusiness. The level of credit would be determined by the education provider.
7. CSU Training will inform the Ag Institute when a participant has completed the core units.

Table 1: Core Competency Units (Skill Set)

AgCredited Core Skill and Context	Competency Unit Code	Competency Units
Communication. Effective communication is essential in all sectors whether it be through: writing reports, submissions, training materials, or technical bulletins; giving presentations; advising clients; answering questions and enquiries; or conducting field days and workshops.	AHCWRK509A	Provide specialist advice to clients
OH&S. Agriculture is a high risk occupation. Compliance with OHS legislation and implementation of safe work practices is essential whether as an employer, supervisor, employee or self employed person. Every individual and business must comply with OHS requirements.	AHCOHS501A	Manage OHS Processes
Professional risk management. All employers, supervisors, employees and self employed people must identify and manage risks associated with the business, organization or activity.	BSBRK501A	Manage Risk
Project management: Project management skills are applicable in a very wide range of activities. For example: running research or extension and capacity building projects; developing and delivering training courses, workshops and field days; rural development activities; applying for funding grants; developing a new enterprise; and so on.	BSBPMG510A	Manage Projects
Enhancing professional practice. All successful businesses and organizations have goals, objectives and legal obligations. In this context individuals need to assess their own personal skills and knowledge and plan their professional development activities. It is also essential that they develop and are active in professional networks, reflect on and evaluate their professional practice, and implement continuous improvement processes.	BSBLED503A	Maintain and enhance professional practice

2. Maintaining Accreditation

Accreditation will lapse if the annual requirements to maintain Accreditation are not fulfilled. These requirements are:

- 1) Completion of a **minimum of 30 points relevant professional development** annually (approved and audited). Examples of eligible activities are shown in Table 2.

Continual professional development is essential to improve knowledge and skills and to keep up to date with rapidly changing technologies and information. This is critical to professionalism and credibility. The equivalent of 1 week per year is expected.

Activities eligible for professional development are those which contribute to the development of professional skills and knowledge. Activities which are considered to be part of normal duties and work and which do not contribute to *professional development* of knowledge or skills, or which are not relevant to the profession or specialisation, are ineligible.

- 2) **Evidence of continued professional involvement.** Those accredited as a Specialist will need to provide evidence of continued professional development and involvement in the specialist discipline. Evidence of active participation will be audited.
- 3) Payment to the Ag Institute of an **annual Accreditation fee** when Institute membership is renewed. This fee covers the ongoing administration costs.

Table 2: Examples of eligible activities and claimable points (subject to ongoing review).

Approved Activity	Maximum Claimable Points
Formal study leading to a qualification or Statement of Attainment:	
• Post-graduate study (Grad Cert, Grad Dip, Masters, PhD)	75 points per year
• Training at Certificate or Diploma level	50 points per year
• Short Course (Statement of Attainment)	to a maximum of 7 points per day
Active participation in:	
• Seminar or workshop	1 point per hour to a maximum of 7 points per day
• Field or study tour	a maximum of 6 points per day
• Conference	to a maximum of 6 points per day
Professional activities over and above normal work:	
• Preparation and delivery of talks, seminars, workshops, or lectures not considered part of normal work	to a maximum of 4 points per lecture (sample to be attached. Claimants may be asked to demonstrate that this is the first time such a lecture has been delivered)
• Committee work not considered part of normal work	to a maximum of 10 points per year
• Contributing to technical publications, refereed papers, submissions or reports not considered part of normal work	to a maximum of 8 points per paper sample to be attached
• Mentoring of early career professionals not part of normal work	to a maximum of 10 points per year
Other professional development activities:	
• Evidence of PD activity to be submitted for consideration	points allowed will be based on assessment of activity.

Applying for recognition of professional development

When Accredited members renew their Ag Institute membership they must submit evidence of professional development activities and continued industry involvement. This can be done by:

- submitting a hard copy form, or
- completing the on-line form at the Ag Institute web site.

Points gained in excess of the 30 points minimum can be carried forward and credited to the following year. No more than 30 points can be carried forward.

The number of points claimable for an activity will be determined by the Accreditation Manager and Accreditation Committee.

Event organisers are requested to seek prior approval for allowable points to count towards Accreditation so that it can be publicised and used in promoting the event. Members attending events are encouraged to seek a ruling on allowable points prior to the event.

Evidence required to demonstrate on-going industry involvement and professional development may take the form of:

- Certified copies of qualification certificates or testamurs.
- Certificates or other evidence of attendance at an event plus a brief summary of professional development outcomes and benefits.
- Certified third party reports or references (e.g. from a supervisor).
- Independent workplace assessment.
- Copies of publications, reports, presentations or submissions (confidentiality will be maintained).

Follow-up audits of this evidence will be undertaken.

Applicants will be informed of the number of points credited.

3. Optional Specialist Accreditation

Members who wish to be Accredited in a specialist discipline (Table 3) are able to do so. Additional specialist disciplines may be approved depending on demand.

Specialist Accreditation is limited to three disciplines.

Table 3: Example specialist areas

Agronomy- Crop
Agronomy- Pasture
Education & Training
Extension/Adoption/Capacity Building
Farm Business Management
Finance and Agribusiness Management
Horticulture & Specialty Cropping
Human Resource Management
Irrigation and Water Management
Legal/Loss Assessment
NRM/Environmental Management
Project Management
Livestock Production – Extensive
Livestock Production - Intensive
Research and Development

Requirements for Specialist Accreditation

To be awarded Accreditation in a specialist discipline, the requirements are:

- **Pre-requisite:** Basic Accreditation.
- **Specialist education:** Completion of a minimum of 3 approved level 5 or higher competency units in the specialist discipline, or completion of a specialist Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters or PhD. Specialist technical qualifications can be gained through Universities providing relevant programs or Registered Training Organisations offering relevant level 5 competency units. A list of recommended Units and

RTO's will be placed on the Ag Institute Australia web site. Completion could be via assessment only (recognition of current competence) or training and assessment.

- To maintain Specialist Accreditation, a minimum of **10 points** of the 30 points of **annual professional development** plus **professional involvement in each specialist discipline** is required.

4. Optional listing on the Register of Agricultural Professionals

As a service provided to Accredited members, Ag Institute Australia maintains a publically accessible, searchable database of Accredited Agricultural Professionals. Listing on the Register is optional.

- Accredited members may apply to Ag Institute Australia for inclusion on the register.
- Members with Accreditation as a specialist can apply to be listed on the register according to their Accreditation Specialisation.
- Those currently listed on the Consultants Register will continue to be listed providing the requirements for professional development and industry involvement are maintained.
- Applicants must furnish evidence of Professional Indemnity and Public Liability Insurance as appropriate.

Summary of Accreditation requirements

AWARD	REQUIREMENTS
Accreditation - AgCredited or EnviroCredited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership of Ag Institute Australia • PLUS completion of the 5 Core Units of Competency at level 5 • PLUS sign the Ag Institute Code of Ethics • PLUS at least 3 years relevant professional involvement • PLUS payment of the Accreditation fees
Specialist Accreditation - AgCredited (specialisation) (in a maximum of 3 specialisations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accredited member of Ag Institute Australia • PLUS completion of at least 3 approved specialist Units of Competency at level 5 or above OR completion of a specialist higher education Graduate certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters or PhD.
Maintaining Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial membership of the Ag Institute Australia • PLUS completion of at least 30 points of relevant professional development per year. For Specialist Accreditation, at least 10 points of PD are required in the specialist discipline. • PLUS continued relevant professional involvement • PLUS payment of the annual Accreditation administration fee
Listing on the Register of Agricultural Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued Accreditation of the Ag Institute • Plus Professional Indemnity and Public Liability Insurance coverage as appropriate
Listing on the Register of Agricultural Professionals as a specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued Specialist Accreditation of the Ag Institute • Plus Professional Indemnity and Public Liability Insurance coverage as appropriate

CPAg (Certified Practising Agriculturalist)

The CPAg program has been revamped and will remain in place until 31 December 2013. Before that date an assessment will be made regarding the uptake of AgC and EnvC and if necessary the

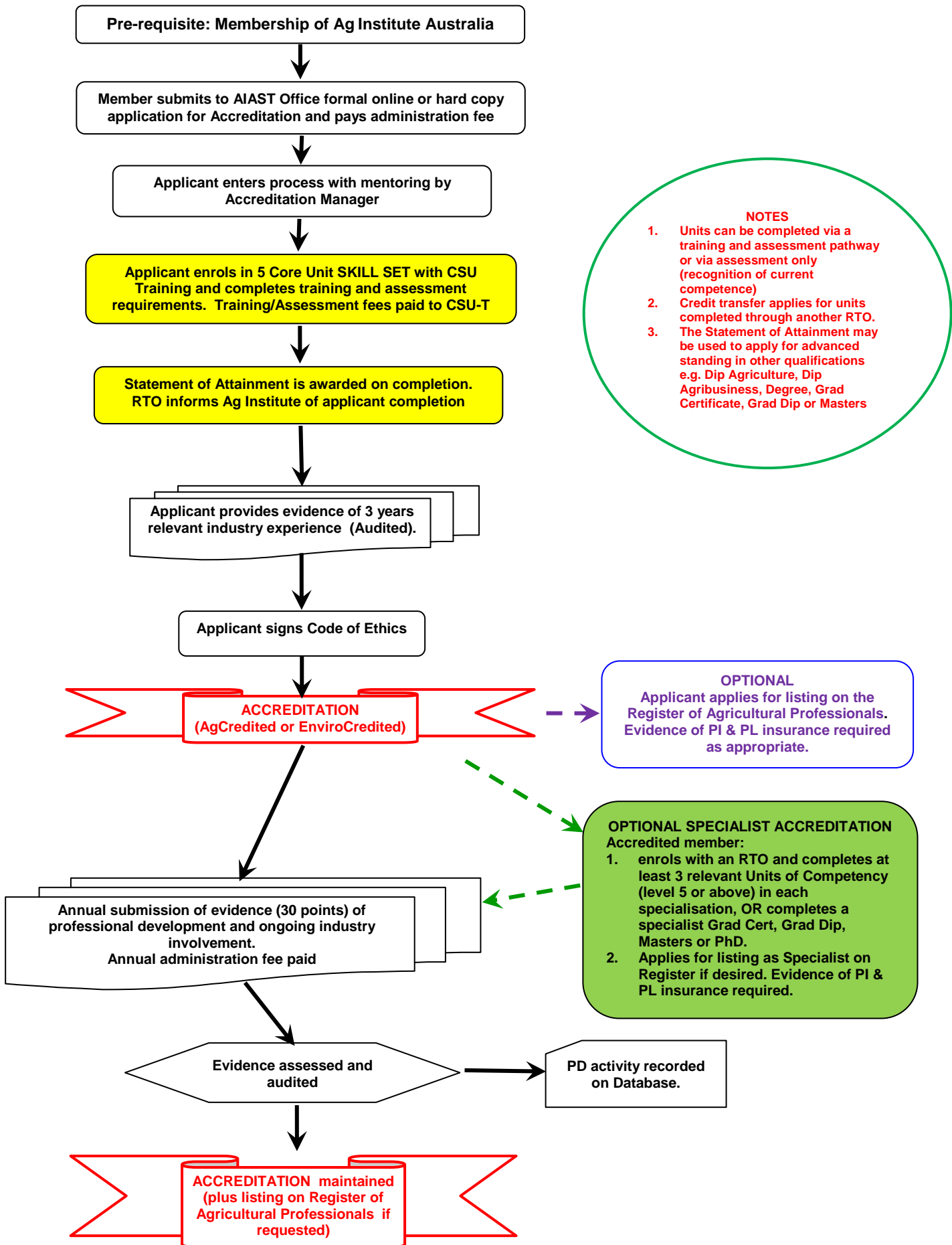
CPAg status will be extended. The CPAg program will continue as a recognition of ongoing professional development. Industry activities will be recorded on-line or via form as at present. Participants will receive acknowledgement of these activities.

The Accreditation process

1. Members apply and pay the Accreditation administration fee to the Ag Institute office to enter the Accreditation process.
2. The Ag Institute Accreditation Manager will mentor and guide the applicant through the process.
3. The applicant will be referred to CSU Training to undertake the training and assessments as required to complete the 5 core Units of Competency. The applicant will pay CSU Training the relevant training/assessment fees.
4. The applicant and CSU Training will inform the Ag Institute office of completion of the core units.
5. The applicant provides evidence to the Accreditation Manager of at least 3 years relevant industry experience. This is auditable.
6. The applicant signs the Ag Institute Code of Ethics.
7. Initial Accreditation is awarded if all requirements are satisfied.
8. The applicant applies to be entered on the Register of Agricultural Professionals if desired.
9. To maintain Accreditation, professionals annually submit evidence of a minimum of 30 points of relevant professional development, plus continued industry involvement, plus pay the annual Accreditation administration fee when renewing Ag Institute membership.
10. To be Accredited as a specialist, an Accredited member must enrol with a Registered Training Organisation and complete at least 3 relevant specialist Units of Competency at level 5 or above, or complete a specialist higher degree. A maximum of 3 specialist disciplines are allowed.
11. On completion of the specialist Units, an applicant can apply to the Accreditation Manager to be Accredited as a specialist and if desired be entered on the Register of Agricultural Professionals as a specialist.

The following flowchart shows the pathway to Accreditation.

The Accreditation Process



- NOTES**
- Units can be completed via a training and assessment pathway or via assessment only (recognition of current competence)
 - Credit transfer applies for units completed through another RTO.
 - The Statement of Attainment may be used to apply for advanced standing in other qualifications e.g. Dip Agriculture, Dip Agribusiness, Degree, Grad Certificate, Grad Dip or Masters