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## Perceptions of Professionals, Faculty, and Students Regarding the Implementation of an Agricultural Communications Degree Program in the United Kingdom

Jefferson D. Miller

*University of Arkansas, jdmiller@uark.edu*

Abby Davis

*University of Arkansas*

Kobina D. Fanyinkah

*University of Arkansas, kobinaf@uark.edu*

*See next page for additional authors*

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# Perceptions of Professionals, Faculty, and Students Regarding the Implementation of an Agricultural Communications Degree Program in the United Kingdom

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of professionals, faculty, and students regarding the implementation of an agricultural communications degree program in the United Kingdom (U.K.). It aimed to gather detailed opinions to aid in the planning of future agricultural communications curricula in the U.K., where no formal academic programs in this discipline exist in higher education. This study used a qualitative approach in the form of interviews to gain in-depth opinions on four different research objectives. Participants were pooled from three different demographic groups in the U.K.: industry professionals, faculty, and students. These stakeholders expressed that writing and journalistic skills were extremely important for agricultural communications graduates to possess. Interpersonal skills were also useful. A generalized knowledge of agriculture was preferred. The study found that experiential learning placements would be a beneficial addition to a potential program, and those could be customized to fit the needs of the student. It also found that degree programs in the discipline would fit well into a bachelor's or master's program, or single modules could be integrated into existing programs in related disciplines. Recommendations of the study focused on the layout of a potential degree program. They also focused on conducting further research on potential placement opportunities and on the impact an agricultural communications degree program could have on females in agriculture.

## Keywords

Agricultural communications, curriculum, academic program

## Funding Source

This work was supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Hatch project 1018548.

## Authors

Jefferson D. Miller, Abby Davis, Kobina D. Fanyinkah, Alex McLeod, Casandra Cox, and K. Jill Rucker

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Jefferson D. Miller, University of Arkansas  
Abby Davis, University of Arkansas  
Kobina D. Fanyinkah, University of Arkansas  
Alex McLeod, University of Connecticut  
Casandra Cox, University of Arkansas  
K. Jill Rucker, University of Arkansas

### **Abstract**

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## Introduction

In the United States, the academic discipline of agricultural communications has been among the fastest growing agriculture-related disciplines in higher education (Miller et al., 2015). Agricultural communications coursework in colleges and departments of agriculture in U.S. institutions has focused on preparing professionals to communicate agricultural information to those within the agriculture industry but also to those outside the industry, including consumers and the general public. This emphasis necessitates that programs equip graduates with a variety of communication skills necessary for success as communications professionals in the diverse agriculture industry (Corder & Irlbeck, 2018). Alternately, in the United Kingdom, while the profession of agricultural communications is an important part of the agriculture industry, the academic discipline does not exist in the U.K. higher education system. This is the case even though in the U.K. agricultural studies have been growing at a fast pace at the university level (Truss, 2016).

According to Ben Briggs, editor of *The Farmers Guardian* in Preston, U.K., agricultural communications employers typically hire graduates skilled in agriculture, then teach them to be strong communicators, or they hire graduates skilled in journalism and teach them about issues and topics related to agricultural production practices and technologies. Therefore, employers in the U.K. do not usually have the ability to hire employees trained in both areas (personal communication, May 30, 2017).

The need to develop an agricultural communications degree program in the U.K. has already been established through previous research conducted by Maples (2018) (see also Miller et al., 2020). Building on this study, further research needed to be conducted to determine what types of academic modules should be included in a degree plan, what competencies employers would expect from a recent graduate, as well as understanding what students expect to learn and what faculty might expect to teach. Though some literature exists on these topics, especially literature focused on building academic programs in the U.S., little to no information exists to guide the development of agricultural communications academic programs in the U.K.

## Review of Literature

Sprecker and Rudd's (1998) study on creating the agricultural communications curriculum for the University of Florida found two themes related to communication skills that should be included in the curriculum. The first theme was that communications skills were, overall, more important than agricultural knowledge. The researchers noted that students' oral and written skills need to be excellent. They also suggested that students need to be versatile and able to perform a variety of communication functions in both print and electronic media. The second theme was that a broad overview of topics related to food, agricultural and natural resources was essential for students studying agricultural communications. The study's participants, who were agricultural communications professionals in Florida, thought coursework that overviewed agricultural topics was more beneficial than highly specialized agriculture courses (Sprecker & Rudd, 1998). In more recent studies, it has been observed that agricultural communications students should be trained in an array of public communication skills, which supports Sprecker and Rudd's (1998) recommendation for students to be versatile (Morgan, 2010). Morgan and Rucker's (2013) comparison of skills industry professionals and faculty viewed as most important for agricultural communication graduates found the skills with the

highest level of agreement among faculty and industry professionals included “oral communication and the correct use of grammar” (p. 61), and the ability to understand the agriculture industry was still perceived as an important skill for graduates (Morgan & Rucker, 2013). Leal et al. (2020) found that among communications faculty, recent graduates, and industry professionals all placed the highest importance for technical skills on “communicating in written form” (p. 7). Courses in writing were also atop the list of types of courses in Cannon et al.’s (2014) work describing U.S. undergraduate courses in the discipline. The most important technical skills needed for students were found in courses that focused on visual communication, oral communication, professional development, and written communication. Miller et al. (2020) and Rushing et al. (2014) also described experiential learning opportunities – internship placements and capstone course – as common in U.S. programs.

Research on building post-secondary agricultural communications curricula has focused on developing curricula to prepare students in U.S. agricultural colleges and universities for communications-related careers in the nation’s agriculture industry. Miller et al. (2020), however, began to promote the idea of establishing academic programs at “land-based” colleges in the U.K., which are similar in some ways to land-grant universities in the U.S. While research findings related to U.S. programming might be somewhat transferable to scenarios in the U.K., employment cultures for agricultural communications professions are unique in each country, so these recommendations for U.S. agricultural communications academic programs may not be wholly applicable to institutions in the U.K.

An interesting aspect of the literature on U.S. curricula is that the academic discipline attracts more females than males (Miller et al., 2015). This characteristic of the discipline is important because it brings to light an opportunity for the agriculture industry to be more inclusive of females. In fact, there has been a movement in the U.K. to close the gender gap in many professional all fields, including agriculture. In 2013, only 16% of agriculturalists were women, according to the Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs [DEFRA] (2018). Current data show that just 4.2% of female farmers in Europe are under the age of 35 (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2021). However, the number of women enrolling in agriculture courses in the U.K. is rising. Harper Adams University has doubled its number of female agricultural students in five years (Shields, 2019). Also, the Royal Agriculture University enrolled 44% more female students in 2019 than five years prior. Women in agriculture are increasingly taking up top and leadership roles. Minette Batters’ election as the first female National Farmers Union president has highlighted females’ prominence in U.K. agriculture (AgriFood Training Partnership, 2019). Hopkins (2016) reported that the number of women involved in agriculture has increased from 3% in the 1970s to 60% in 2016. This rise in participation by females follows a trend set first in the U.S. DataUSA (2020) reported that 79.6% of U.S. agricultural communications degree program students were female, while Miller et al. (2015) found over half of agricultural communications faculty in higher education were female.

This study is informed by Stakeholder Theory. Freeman (1984) defined stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (p. 46). Stakeholders are the groups whose support is considered to be vital to the survival and success of the corporation or entity. Stakeholder Theory, which has been employed in other academic discipline development efforts (Anderson, 1995; Carnegie, 2007; Rude, 2009), is useful because it promotes the concept of considering the opinions of many different interest groups in decision-making processes. Noting the theory’s normative base, Freeman and Reed

(1983) asserted that all organizations, systems, and situations involve multiple stakeholders with diverse interests and that the interests of all stakeholders must be continuously balanced “in order to achieve the greater good, whether the primary objective is profitability or merely survival and growth” (p. 32). This idea has found a home in higher education strategic planning (Association for Experiential Education, 2021).

In the context of this study, stakeholders include professionals, academic faculty, and students. The framework acknowledges that these groups have unique perspectives shaped by their roles, experiences, and needs. Stakeholder theory guides the study’s purpose of collecting and valuing the informed opinions of these groups, recognizing their collective insights as crucial for guiding the creation of a new agricultural communications academic discipline in the U.K.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

This study was designed to gather detailed information from stakeholders to aid in the planning of future academic programming in the discipline of agricultural communications in the U.K., building on the previous survey work of Miller et al. (2020), which determined the need for such programming. Since the publication of that research, administrators at one U.K. institution shared with the authors a desire for more data describing what such a program should look like, according to input from stakeholders. So, the purpose of this study was to gather the opinions of professionals, academic faculty, and students, which could be used to guide the creation of a new agricultural communications academic discipline in the U.K. This purpose was accomplished through the following objectives:

1. Determine professional skills U.K. agricultural communications professionals, faculty, and students would expect students to have after completing an agricultural communications degree.
2. Ascertain stakeholders’ opinions on what modules will be most useful to graduates entering the agricultural communications field in the U.K.
3. Establish stakeholders’ desired organization of the potential degree plan and determine if apprenticeships could be beneficial in transitioning from student to employee.
4. Determine perceptions regarding what impact implementing an agricultural communications degree could have on increasing females’ involvement in the U.K. agriculture industry.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine perceptions regarding the prospect of creating agricultural communications curricula in the U.K. Qualitative field interviews were conducted with three different stakeholder groups: professionals, academic faculty, and students. Fourteen stakeholders participated in the study, including three students, five faculty members, and six industry professionals. Because online surveys have already been conducted on this topic by Maples (2018), using face-to-face interviews allowed for more in-depth reconstruction of events, activities and feelings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Participant Selection**

With the concepts associated with Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) as a guide, interviewees were selected from three participant groups who would be key stakeholders should an agricultural communications curriculum be developed and offered by a U.K. higher education institute. The pool of professional participants in the agricultural communications sector was drawn from the Guild of Agricultural Journalists (GAJ), a U.K. professional society affiliated with the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ). These participants consisted of editors, journalists, broadcasters, photographers, and public relations/marketing specialists. Respondents in this pool also included people who engaged in journalism, press, and/or public relations in the U.K.'s rural sector. The pool of academic agriculture faculty participants and students were drawn from Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) in Edinburgh. The faculty were purposively selected professors and lecturers in agricultural disciplines who could provide a post-secondary educator perspective to the study. The agricultural student participants had experience in and around the agricultural academic programs and provided a student-oriented perspective that could inform the study. They were in a class in the existing Agriculture BSc degree program at SRUC. This study was approved by the [University] Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the protocol was deemed safe for the human participants involved. The approval number provided for this research is IRB #1904195519.

## **Instrument Development & Data Collection**

The researchers, who included U.S. faculty members experienced in agricultural communications and qualitative research, curated interview questions designed to evoke participants' detailed opinions. Two studies conducted earlier on agricultural communications competencies in the U.S. and U.K. served to guide the development of the questioning route (Large, 2014; Miller et al., 2020). Ultimately, the instrument included questions that addressed each research question. Also, with Stakeholder Theory in mind, three questioning routes were customized for the three unique stakeholder groups – employers, students, and faculty.

Questions were developed to elicit discussion around six key constructs:

- Potential appeal of the agricultural communications profession to female students
- Structure of potential student placement programs regarding pay, location, housing, and duration
- Important skill sets for potential graduates
- Important learning modules in technical agriculture and in communications (modules equate to classes or courses in the U.S. system)
- Structure of potential full courses (HNC, HND, BSc, BSc(Hons), MSc (1-year), MSc (2-year) (also called programs in the U.S. system)
- Existing disciplinary programs where agricultural communications may fit

The interviews were conducted in person or by phone call. An introductory email was sent out to inform participants of the study and gauge whether they would like to participate, then telephone and in-person interviews lasting 15 to 30 minutes were conducted with willing participants over an 8-week period. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researchers.

## **Data Analysis**

After the data collection period, the resulting interview transcripts were loaded into NVivo 11 qualitative data analysis software. NVivo 11 allowed the researchers to develop a hierarchy of descriptive, thematic codes based on the research objectives, which emerged as a result of continuous patterns that surfaced during the interviews among the stakeholder groups. Following Corbin and Strauss' (1990) constant comparative approach, codes and patterns were developed as a result of the analysis of responses to six interview questions.

## **Research Rigor**

Rigor, in general, was assured in this study by the researchers' dedication to following well established qualitative interview methodology as prescribed by Corbin and Strauss (1990), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Merriam (2009). Qualitative data analysis conducted using NVivo 11, which provided an audit trail, was peer-reviewed by a panel of experts, constituting the type of audit proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Further, though the research was conducted by researchers from the U.S., the in-person interviews involved in this study took place in the U.K., typically at the participants' academic institution or place of work, lending an element of ethnographic credibility to the data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). To improve the credibility of the qualitative questionnaire, other experienced faculty reviewed the interview questions. These experts provided feedback and suggestions to reduce ambiguity, remove leading and emotive questions, and confirm the viability of the questions viable for this study (Merriam, 2009). Based on their feedback, the interview questions were finalized for this study (Creswell, 2014)

## **Reflexivity Statement**

Credibility in qualitative research is closely tied to the relationship between the research and the participants. It is increased when the researchers interpret their relationship to the study with a subjectivity statement (Sandelowski, 1986). All the researchers involved in this study are directly involved in the agricultural communications discipline as either students or faculty members at [University]. Involvement in the discipline may produce bias toward implementing an agricultural communications degree program in the U.K. because of personal experiences in the discipline in the U.S. However, the researchers worked to remain as objective as possible during data analysis by focusing on the themes that emerged through the process of employing the NVIVO 11 qualitative data analysis software.

## **Findings**

### **Skills and Learning Expectations**

Research objective one focused on determining what skills potential employers would expect new graduates to possess after completing an agricultural communications degree. It also directed researchers to describe what students would expect to be learning as well as what faculty would expect to teach. Three overarching themes emerged that indicated the skills students might be expected to learn in an agricultural communications program in the U.K. The



four themes were writing and journalistic skills, interpersonal skills, knowledge of agricultural issues and topics, and digital skills.

### ***Writing and Journalistic Skills***

Among all three stakeholder groups, writing and journalistic skills were found to be a priority. Agreement emerged across professionals, faculty, and students alike on the importance of the ability to write well. A faculty member shared this perspective: “If you can write, you can think. So, if you can communicate clearly in that written form and order your thoughts correctly, then you have kind of crunched together a lot of things about communications” [CM, faculty]. The agricultural communications professionals interviewed in this study clearly placed an emphasis on the ability to develop and write stories about agriculture, serving as a communications mediator between farmers and their audiences. There was much agreement among all participants, but especially among professionals, that being able to accurately portray the important aspects of an agricultural story to the public was a key part of an agricultural communicator’s job. To do this, one must have a basic knowledge of agriculture to begin with. Understanding the agricultural sector while also having good writing skills is key.

At the [agricultural publication], we find it’s easier to teach an agriculturalist to be a journalist than it is to teach a journalist to be an agriculturalist, and that is mainly because of the complex nature of agriculture, and they must have a deep understanding of it. [KF, professional]

### ***Interpersonal Skills***

Another finding was that interpersonal skills were highly valued among students, faculty, and professionals. Many participants stressed the importance of being able to verbally communicate with people. Interpersonal communication skills, presentation skills, interview skills, and other human interaction skills were vital to an agricultural communicator’s success. PH, a faculty member, stated he thought people in general devalue human interaction, so, he emphasized the importance of integrating interpersonal skills into agricultural communications curriculum: “It is important to be able to interact with a range of people and to be able to draw insights from those interactions.”

### ***Knowledge of Agricultural Issues and Topics***

Another point of agreement among the stakeholders was the need for agricultural communications graduates to be able to effectively explain key concepts and core messages related to agricultural issues and topics. Professionals indicated the importance of knowing how to find the key message in a story of any type – journalistic, marketing, or public relations – and being able to portray that message orally, as well as in writing.

If the core messages are not clear and are not properly expressed, then polishing it up still means it is flawed. So being able to explain the key concepts, being able to explain them clearly and correctly and then being able to make it accessible is extremely important. [DH, professional]

### ***Digital Skills***

While developing core messages and accurate storytelling were important across all participants, there was a lack of agreement regarding the importance of creative digital skills. Some professionals placed an importance on skills such as photography, video editing, and graphic design, while most students and faculty minimized the importance of these skills in comparison to skills such as writing, speaking, and storytelling. “Digital skills such as graphic design and photography are probably just easier things to pick up as you go along” [KD, student].

### ***Course or Program Modules***

The second research objective guided the assessment of what modules professionals, faculty, and students felt would be most useful in the degree program. Questions related to this objective focused on what agriculture-related course modules and what communications course modules should be implemented into the degree program.

### ***Broad Agricultural Content***

Stakeholders’ responses showed agreement regarding the need for students to have a broad understanding of agricultural practices and principles. Many did not feel the need for students to get a highly specialized education in the technical disciplines of agricultural production, such as livestock reproduction or plant genetics. Rather, having a basic working knowledge across a wide span of agricultural fields should prove to be more beneficial.

I think it should be at a fairly fundamental level of agriculture across the corridor. So arable crop production, livestock production systems, and other things so they are getting understandings of the basic systems. Different systems of production of different species of livestock and things like that. [SM, faculty]

### ***Current Issues***

Some stakeholders stressed the importance of students having a knowledge of current newsworthy topics in agriculture, such as animal handling and welfare, so they would know how to better communicate about those topics in their jobs. They also said it was important for journalists to be able to communicate what goes on around the farm and to be able to promote agriculture from the agriculturalists’ perspective.

They should have an understanding on welfare. So, there should definitely be some animal science welfare classes that they should take because those are some of the issues that the public are always questioning. So, as a journalist you need to be able to back up the reasons why we do things. Anything that we can do to promote agriculture within our writing, I think is crucial. [CD, faculty]

### ***Skills-based Modules***

The stakeholders’ opinions regarding the types of communications course modules that should be offered focused more on skills than course modules. Having little to no frame of

reference for the types of modules offered in an agricultural communications program, they mostly reverted to discussing communications skills when answering questions about which communications classes they would expect students to take. However, some stakeholders suggested the journalistic and communications courses should take precedent over the agriculture-based courses. Thematic among these responses, as with the first research objective, was a heavy emphasis on the need to teach journalistic writing and interpersonal communication skills. So, it is reasonable to interpret the stakeholders would expect to see course modules focusing on these skills. Specifically, stakeholders discussed the need to know how to write well in terms of choosing proper angles, organizing a story, and reporting with accuracy. Moreover, participants' comments demonstrated their perceived importance of students possessing those soft skills such as speaking and communicating tactfully with people.

They need to have the ability to write, or they need to be taught the ability to write. Plus, the number one thing we insist on is complete and utter accuracy at all times. And you need to be taught the basics of constructing a story – putting it together and adding value to it by having a knowledge of where to go in the industry to get that knowledge. [KF, professional]

## **Organization of Degree Plan**

Research objective three guided efforts to determine three aspects regarding the potential organization of the degree program: (a) what degree type or structure would be the best fit for the program, (b) the potential to integrate an agricultural communications degree program into an existing discipline as an area of emphasis or concentration, and (c) how stakeholders felt about experiential learning placements being part of the degree program and how those may be structured with regards to compensation, location, and duration.

### ***Potential Degree Type***

The goal of the first interview question was to determine what degree structure the program would best fit. Most post-secondary institutions in the U.K. have three potential structures where an agricultural communications degree program could fit: (a) Higher National Diploma (HND) – two-year program; (b) bachelor's degree (BSc) – three- or four-year program; and (c) master's degree (MSc) – one-year program, post-bachelor's degree. The structures with the most support were the bachelor's degree and the master's degree. Many participants thought the degree program could fit into both programmatic structures. The bachelor's degree was the structure that was mentioned the most, and it was the one many thought of first. Several participants who showed a preference for developing a bachelor's degree also mentioned offering the program as a master's degree option. Many thought it would do well as a specialized master's degree because students could either get a bachelor's in journalism or agriculture and then get the master's in agricultural communications. "I would think a BSc, but I could really see it fitting into an MSc because you can do a BSc in journalism or agriculture and then use the MSc as a specialization" [SM, student].

The most important issue with the HND was the potential lack of interest in the program. Many thought it would fit well into a traditional three- to four-year program or as a one-year master's if there were enough interest in the program. Some stakeholders felt introducing the discipline as single modules into an already existing academic program would be a beneficial

way to initiate a program. This would allow students to learn about agricultural communications and journalism and acquire an introduction to the field. This also could build awareness of the discipline among prospective students and might garner some student interest that could lead to the development of a complete degree program in the future.

I think the program would be quite hard to sell. I think to start it off, it would probably be easier to introduce, easier and more likely to be successful, to introduce it as a single module, a single unit, a single course within an existing program. [DH, professional]

### ***Options for Integrating Agricultural Communications into Existing Programs***

The concept of integrating agricultural communications modules into existing disciplinary programs was well received, and subjects had much to share on this topic during the interviews. Findings showed support for the idea that communications-based modules would fit well into either general agriculture programs or rural business management programs.

I think it would fit into the rural business management because it is really general, or the agriculture program, which is the other general one. [CM, faculty]

### ***Experiential Learning and Placement Opportunities***

The interview question regarding experiential learning opportunities in an agricultural communications program guided the solicitation of opinions on work placements being part of the degree program and, if so, what those placements would look like regarding the duration, location, and pay. Industry professionals, students, and faculty felt placements should be integrated into the program. They claimed placements give students valuable work experience and help students gain a broad knowledge of the field they plan to enter. To expand on the topic, a student explained, “because we don’t have a degree program at the moment, I think industry experience detailing what that course could lead to in [terms of] employment would be quite essential” [AW, student].

Stakeholders agreed on the need for an experiential learning placement experience in an agricultural communications program. However, there was a lack of agreement regarding what those placements might look like. One theme was that placements should be flexible and tailored to fit the student’s lifestyle within some minimum requirements. “I wouldn’t expect this to be a one size fits all. It would be up to the organization that is doing the internship and hosting those candidates” [CD, faculty].

The stakeholders’ discussion of the potential durations of the placements also failed to show consensus. Opinions on the duration of a student’s placement ranged from one day a week throughout a year to every day for more than a year. The discussion of locations of potential experiential placements generated more agreement, as many said the location could be anywhere and placements should be flexible to the student. “The location can really be anywhere. I mean, agriculture is such a huge part of the landscape that it could be anywhere” [CD, faculty].

Most stakeholders felt students should expect to get paid in a work placement if their work was benefitting the organization. A few stakeholders claimed it was up to the organization providing the placement on whether they would be paid or not. However, the majority said they would expect students to be paid for their work and they would expect the pay to be guided by the U.K.’s national living wage policies. “I think placements should be paid, and I think that the national living wage is appropriate these day” [KD, student].

I don't necessarily know that pay would be required. Depending on what the placement was, if the placement was a lot of work or you were actually doing work that benefited the organization that you were placed with, I think some form of payment would be expected by many students. [AR, student]

### **Potential to Attract Females into the Agriculture Industry**

Research objective four guided efforts to determine the impact implementing an agricultural communications degree program would have on the number of females involved in agriculture. Participants were asked to explain their thoughts on how/if implementing an academic program in agricultural communications would attract more females to the agricultural sector. Responses on this topic were not consistent among the participants. While many participants did not think the imbalance in attractiveness of the program toward females would be large like it is in the U.S., they still thought more females might be interested in studying agricultural communications. For the ones who did think the percentage of females studying communications would be higher, their reasoning was that more females than males tend to study art, humanities, and social science subjects such as English, journalism, and business management. The U.K. is aiming to reduce gender segregation or gender imbalances across all employment sectors, and some participants thought the agricultural communications degree program could potentially help reduce the gender gap in the agriculture industry. "... we [could] actually bring some women into agriculture, which would be fantastic, considering in Scotland we have a remit that we must reduce gender segregation and gender imbalances" [PH, faculty].

### **Conclusion**

Objective one was reached by asking respondents what skills they deemed most important for agricultural communications graduates to possess after completing a degree program. According to Sprecker and Rudd (1998), agricultural communicators should not be agriculturalists primarily, but rather specialized communicators. The data collected indicated writing and interpersonal communications were viewed by stakeholders as crucial skills for graduates to possess after graduation. Interestingly, results showed digital skills such as graphic design, photography, or web design were deemed of less importance across professionals, faculty, and students alike, though some professionals – typically agricultural communications generalists who practiced those skills often – viewed them as important.

Objective two was reached by asking stakeholders to identify the technical agriculture courses and communications courses which should be included in the program. Similar to Sprecker and Rudd (1998), respondents agreed students should get a broad base of all areas in agriculture, so a generalist approach to equipping students with agricultural knowledge would be critical. This follows much of the same approach as programs in the U.S. (Large, 2014). Participants felt students should have a solid basis in journalistic writing and interpersonal communications, such as interview skills and presentation skills, while courses teaching digital skills were either deemed less important or not brought up at all by participants.

Objective three was reached by identifying the recommended degree structure, determining the opinions on internship placement, and determining the structure of the internship placement. There were mixed results on what degree structure the agricultural communications program would fit into. The most common answers were the bachelor's (BSc) and the one-year

master's (MSc) programs. Some participants said an MSc would fit best because students could complete an agriculture or journalism degree and use the MSc to specialize. However, there were consistent results to show that introducing the program as a single module, into an already existing degree program first, would help increase interest in the program. This would increase awareness in the new program by introducing students to the field. Some programs in the U.S. have taken this approach, with several prominent programs growing out of the agricultural education discipline (Large, 2014). There was a consensus for making a placement part of the program, which is a common characteristic of U.S. programs. The benefits of participating in placements and other experiential learning activities in college is well documented. This is supported by Large's (2014) examination of U.S. programs, which showed a substantial trend toward integrating experiential learning into the curricula through internships. Successful practical capstone coursework in agricultural communications has also been described by Rushing et al. (2014). Participants thought placements should be flexible and, ultimately, up to the student and organizations hosting the placement. Most thought students should expect to be paid for their work (Large, 2014).

Conclusions for objective four, which focused on participants' perceptions of how an academic program in agricultural communications might attract more female students, were unclear. While some predicted more females would be interested than males, a similar number thought the program would attract females and males equally.

This study strived to garner the perceptions of major stakeholders regarding the implementation of an agricultural communications degree program in the U.K. A total of 14 respondents participated in the study. Collected data showed that answers across the three stakeholder groups were overall similar. All three groups perceived writing and interpersonal skills to be of utmost importance and thought they should be heavily integrated into the potential degree program. It can also be concluded that placements should be incorporated into the program, but further research should be conducted to determine what placements would look like.

### **Recommendations/Implications**

First, the study found that communication and interpersonal skills were crucial and should be highly emphasized in any future degree program. This is a useful contribution because success in the field of agricultural communications depends on these abilities. It is suggested that courses be created that concentrate primarily on writing and interpersonal communication in order to make sure that students receive enough training in these areas. Additionally, through projects and assignments, students should be given the chance to improve these skills. As a result, graduates of the program will be better prepared to communicate effectively and professionally in work.

Second, the study found that placements should be included in the program. Placements give students the opportunity to get real-world experience in a professional context, allowing them to put their newly acquired skills and knowledge to use. Internships, job placements, and other chances to work in agricultural communications may be available. More research is needed to understand the specifics of these placements, but they have the potential to significantly improve students' educational experiences and prepare them for careers in the sector.

Finally, it is advised that a broader study be carried out to obtain more in-depth perspectives from experts, faculty, and students. A larger study would provide a more

representative sample of thoughts and perspectives because this study was constrained by its small sample size and purposeful selection of participants. A study collecting more insight from professionals, faculty, and students would add depth to the findings on this topic and would solidify knowledge of how best to initiate an agricultural communications academic discipline in the U.K. Such an effort may also lead to a more concrete understanding of whether a program would attract more females than males, as is the case in the U.S.

After the Miller et al. (2020) quantitative survey of U.K. stakeholders, there have been other additional research endeavors that have documented significant progress in the field. Subsequent studies by Thorn et al. (2022) and Dymont (2022) have shed light on the advancements made and need to equip more agricultural science graduates with communication skills in the agricultural communication curriculum globally, namely in Australia and Canada. This qualitative stakeholder study has not only expanded upon these works but has also introduced novel insights and innovative approaches, which should guide the development of agricultural communication curriculum development in the U.K.

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