



Accreditation Standards Review

JULY 2022
FEEDBACK
ON PHASE 1
CONSULTATION



Introduction

The Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC) began a review of the approved accreditation standards ('the standards') for entry-level programs in early 2022. The standards are used to evaluate veterinary education and training programs that lead to general registration as a veterinarian in Australia and New Zealand.

The review is being conducted by a Task Group appointed by AVBC.

In Phase 1 of the review, AVBC invited stakeholders of veterinary services and veterinary education, to take part in a short survey to help inform the early work of the Task Group. Perspectives and

suggestions were sought on a series of questions relating to the [current AVBC standards](#), the new [Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' \(RCVS\) accreditation standards](#) and veterinary education more broadly. The purpose of this document is to report on the outcomes of this first phase of consultation.

The review process will continue across 2022 and is intended as an iterative process, with additional opportunities for consultation. Updates will be posted to the AVBC website: avbc.asn.au/accreditation-standards-review.

1. Background

- 1.1. For a six-week period (16 February – 23 March 2022), a short survey was enabled on the AVBC website, inviting stakeholder feedback on questions relating to the existing AVBC standards and to the general direction of a new set of standards.
- 1.2. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent out by email to a wide range of stakeholders in Australia and New Zealand, including, but not limited to, education providers, professional associations, employers, government departments and accreditation assessors. Information was also published on the AVBC website.
- 1.3. Stakeholder discussions. Using the survey questions as a guide, Prof Rosanne Taylor, Chair of the Standards Review Task Group held extended focused discussions (over zoom) with key stakeholders. These included representatives of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) including many Special Interest Groups, the New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA), the heads of Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand (VSANZ) and veterinary student organisations.

Meetings were typically 1.5 hours in duration. There were 31 attendees across these meetings, representing many others. Prof Taylor and Dr Strous (Executive Director, AVBC) also gave a presentation about the standards review to the Chief Veterinary Officers' Forum, with over 100 participants, in April 2022.

- 1.4. This document summarises the information and emergent themes arising from the survey, four extended email responses and the focused discussions.
- 1.5. An important objective of the Standards Review is to ensure that all veterinary graduates are able to achieve Day One Competencies (D1Cs) to practice safely, and sustainably, demonstrating the professional knowledge, skills and attributes required. In the survey and focused discussion, many respondents commented specifically on D1Cs. These are beyond the scope of this Standards Review and are not summarised here. However, these comments have informed the work of an AVBC Working Group now reviewing the D1Cs. Further information can be found on the [AVBC website](#).

2. Survey respondents

Thirty-seven responses to the survey were received together with four more detailed email responses. The table below provides a breakdown of respondent groups. Respondents could select multiple answers. The largest respondent group was veterinarians in practice.

RESPONDENT TYPE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Private practice (Veterinarian)	44
Private practice (Veterinary Nurse/Technician)	-
Veterinary student	5
Education	27
Research	17
Registration Board	5
Professional organisation	15
Government	7
Veterinary Industry	5
Other	19

3. Stakeholder responses

Responses to the survey questions received from all sources including the weblink, email, stakeholder meetings and the Standards Review Task Group are summarised below.

Part 1: Current AVBC Accreditation Standards

- Q3. Do you have any comments on the current AVBC Standards? Can you identify problems or difficulties with the existing standards? Are there particular strengths?**
- Q4. Are there any Standards that should be added/expanded, or any that should be deleted or combined?**
- Q5. Any other general comments about the AVBC Standards?**

There was overlap in responses to these questions, so they are summarised together here. Most respondents did not identify specific standards that should be reworked.

- 3.1. Where comments were made in support of the current standards, attention was drawn to:
- The strength of the current AVBC standards in that they help ensure that universities provide adequate resources to veterinary schools and that the quality required for veterinary professionals to service the Australian community is not compromised.
 - The role that ratios and the standards play in helping to protect the quality of veterinary clinical and practical teaching (Standards 2 and 8).
 - Flexibility in Extra Mural Studies (EMS) was also welcomed.

3.2. Respondents commented on:

- The importance of clarity in expression and avoidance of duplication and overlapping of standards, particularly to avoid "double jeopardy".
- A perceived decline in the attention given to research, or recognition of the importance of students learning from educators who are active in scholarship and/or research in their disciplines.
- An opportunity to reconsider the role, validity and application of ratios such as staff:student ratios
- Perceptions of insufficient attention to animal welfare, resilience, business understanding and financial decision making, animal handling competence (particularly cattle and horses), biosecurity and communication skills (Day One Competencies).
- The pressure on students, particularly in clinical years and the impact of negative experiences on successful transition to practice.
- The need for improved monitoring and oversight of student placements, particularly clinical learning opportunities and quality assurance (Standard 7).
- Insufficient clarity on expectations and the quality assurance processes that ensure achievement and relevance of Day One Competencies.
- The requirement for omnicompetence of graduates could be further considered; however, this was balanced by concerns that a move towards more omnicompetence limited to one or two species would not be possible with existing registration systems and would limit graduate career options.
- Too much emphasis on inputs rather than outcomes.
- Need for greater emphasis on understanding farm systems and management.

- A need for greater emphasis on the physical and emotional demands of being a vet, including self-management and identifying and addressing mental health risk factors (Standard 6).
- Standard 2 should focus on *sustainability* of finances.
- Reconsider focus on traditional teaching facilities such as lecture theatres, as changing patterns of curriculum delivery reduce or eliminate need for these facilities.
- A requirement to enhance diversity (eg Standards 2.3 and 2.4 in RCVS) is not reflected in the current AVBC standards.
- Environmentally sustainable veterinary practice is not a component of current standards.

3.3. Several respondents commented on broader matters including registration, the costs associated with accreditation visits and the importance of continued alignment of AVBC standards with those of other accreditation bodies.

Part 2: New RCVS Accreditation Standards

Q6. Inputs vs outcomes. Would you support a similar shift in focus in the AVBC Standards?

- 6.1. There was very strong support for a greater focus on outcomes in the new standards.
- 6.2. Some respondents noted additionally:
- The importance of having outcomes that are clearly defined and a robust assessment strategy.
 - Outcomes evidence alone will not be sufficient; to ensure sustainability and quality control of a veterinary program; input data and information on processes will also be needed.
 - A focus on outcomes relevant for graduate entry to practice and direct observation of

students' capability in performing common 'entrustable professional activities', fits with global thinking.

- Employers emphasised team-fit and ability to adapt to varying work pressures, as core requirements for graduates that were more important for success in practice over acquiring complex or niche skillsets.

Q7. Do you support a risk-based approach to accreditation?

- 7.1. A risk-based approach to accreditation was broadly supported. It was considered a sensible approach, providing opportunities for veterinary schools to choose the most relevant evidence, including evidence collected for other purposes, with the added potential to reduce significant ongoing costs of accreditation, in both time and resources.
- 7.2. Whilst supporting a risk-based approach, which would allow site visits and reporting to be adapted to the circumstances of each school, some caveats were noted:
- A good risk management process will need transparent rules about what constitutes full compliance (resulting in a lighter touch) versus when more in-depth investigation is required.
 - If a school has previously shown gaps but now appears to have strong outcomes – these gaps should still be reviewed to ensure that they have been remediated for the longer-term.
- 7.3. A few respondents did not support a risk-based approach, based on concerns that it would lead to a reduction in requirement for maintenance of high standards in all areas of veterinary school and program operation.

Q8. Do you support the idea of a 'living' rubric?

- 8.1. Of those who answered this question, there was very strong support for the idea of a living rubric. One respondent noted that an outcomes-based approach naturally lends itself to a more open rubric as proposed.

- 8.2. There were a few specific comments, all on a theme of quality assurance; for example:

- Important not to confuse the idea of a "living" rubric with "variable" rubric; you could get into trouble comparing, say, a dispersed model of education with a more traditional one, if the evidence required failed to require them to demonstrate equivalent standards to a traditional veterinary hospital-based clinical training .
- Consideration should be given to describing different levels of achievement in the rubric – the 'must haves' (prescriptive) and 'nice to haves'.
- What is the source of the triangulated evidence? Is it outside the vet school and how will quality assurance, integrity and security of this data be handled?
- Ensure that there is not an inconsistency with the lived experience of staff and students at the school versus the evidence provided by the school and evaluated during a site visit.
- A crucial requirement is for quality of teaching and assessment, i.e., student knowledge, skills and attitude must be assessed appropriately by well-trained and suitably qualified staff, within robust quality assurance systems.

Q9. Any comments on the RCVS Domains?

- 9.1. The idea of Domains was well supported but several respondents also commented that an overall reduction in the number of standards, as has been achieved by the RCVS, would be welcomed.
- 9.2. There were a few additional comments relating to the scope of the Domains – respondents were keen to ensure that attention to research, graduate programs, and non-clinical skills was not diluted in a more themed approach.
- 9.3. The importance of continued alignment with the RCVS and AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) standards was also observed.

Q10. Any other comment on RCVS Standards?

10.1. A few specific comments were received on this question. In summary:

- Support for greater emphasis on student welfare and on diversity and inclusion statements. The latter sits alongside the requirement to ensure students admitted to the degree are capable of meeting Day One Competencies. Respondents sought guidance on student admission and fitness to practice.
- A focus on professional outcomes such as Day 1 skills, Graduate Year 1 and Year 3 skills/roles will ensure a focus on educating veterinarians for the future, not just on ticking boxes.
- Support for further refinement and reduction of specifications in favour of the 'high trust' accreditation approach applied in other health professions in Australia.
- The overall 'bespoke' RCVS accreditation process promises to be more efficient and effective in guiding improvements, than the previous process involving a generic accreditation visit.

10.2. A few respondents indicated specifically that they did not support the RCVS EMS policy, notably continued detailed requirements for pre-clinical and clinical EMS including minimum number of weeks.

Part 3: The broader context of veterinary education

Q11. Looking to the veterinary profession over the next 5-10 years, what are the key implications for AVBC's new standards?

11. The table following, provides a breakdown of surveyed and emailed responses to this question (respondents could choose more than one option).

RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Major focus on common conditions in primary veterinary care	63
Safe practice in the community, incorporating cultural and safe practice	41
Student well-being, transition to practice and professional sustainability	71
Emerging technologies in veterinary education and practice	37
Professional responsibilities for animal welfare advocacy and education	46
Advanced and continuing veterinary education	24
Innovative and collaborative models for veterinary education	34
Other	15

Q12. What do you believe should be the top 5 areas where a change in emphasis is needed in veterinary education over the next 7 years?

12.1. Several common themes emerged in response to this question – including a need for greater focus on:

- The teaching of common conditions in primary care rather than gold standard specialist care and providing student experience for competence and confidence in management of common conditions.
- Use of a range of models, simulations, mannequins, and resources to reduce, replace and refine animals in teaching.
- Student wellbeing, selfcare, transition to practice, including greater access to continued education and new graduate support.

- Professional sustainability/wellbeing and improved career pathways for veterinarians.
- The role of veterinarians in emergencies (climate change; disease outbreaks; emergent diseases).

12.2. Other topics areas identified by respondents included a need for greater emphasis on:

- Use of technology eg.in record keeping, genetic medicine, biotechnology, using digital and online tools in veterinary practice.
- Use of protocols.
- Use of checklists for examination, use of diagnostic equipment and interpretation of results.
- Cultural awareness and competence.
- Environmental impact of current practices in the veterinary industry.
- Non-clinical skills including population medicine.
- Veterinary business basics.
- Collaborative models of veterinary education between veterinary schools.
- Extent to which streaming can be incorporated under existing veterinary registration requirements in Australia and New Zealand.

Q13. What does competency-based education offer to accreditation?

- 13.1. Many respondents were not familiar with Competency-Based Veterinary Education (CBVE). Of those that responded, CBVE was strongly supported as an appropriate model for contemporary veterinary education, noting the way in which a CBVE model enables the incremental development of individual student competency to be assessed and remediated.
- 13.2. It was cautioned that it is important to be realistic about what competencies a student can reasonably be expected achieve prior to graduation.

13.3. One employer noted that ticking off 'skills' like catheter placements by the university does not translate into an employer having confidence in students' skills/education and that students gain most of their practical competencies in veterinary practices.

Q14. Are there any other issues that you think the Standards Review Task Group should consider within the review?

Q15. Other suggestions?

The responses to these questions are summarised together – many are consistent with themes previously identified in this report:

- Concern for the longevity of graduates in the industry and the need to understand and address the reasons that graduates leave veterinary practice.
- A need to prepare students to successfully navigate a changing world, particularly with reference to societal attitudes and technologies.
- Support for the incorporation of new technologies in the delivery of veterinary education within curriculum and assessment.
- The importance of continued alignment between the standards of accreditation bodies, specifically RCVS, AVMA and AVBC.
- A benefit for the profession and veterinary schools from a national survey of graduates and employers that includes questions to allow some level of cross-school comparison and access to better outcomes data (as per RCVS).
- A need for effort to reduce secondary costs for students during their veterinary school education.
- Requirement in standards for channels of communication, other than those that are university regulated, for students to provide feedback, raise concerns, and report issues, with the option of anonymity. Particularly important for schools with small cohorts.

Concluding comments

There was strong, broad support for the directions proposed for AVBC's review of standards, and processes, with stakeholder input informing major directions in the review.

In the next phase of this review of AVBC accreditation standards we will:

- Review and incorporate stakeholder feedback;
- Develop a revised/new set of AVBC standards and map them to existing and international standards;
- Develop a rubric for the standards and examples of evidence;
- Review and update the accompanying policies and procedures; and
- Invite stakeholder input into the draft new standards and supporting documents during August 2022.

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