

European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education: 2015-2020 strategic plan review

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The free movement of trained veterinarians across Europe is now almost taken for granted. This requires the automatic recognition of the veterinary qualifications of European citizens from across the Member States, and also relies on the assumption that veterinary training is equivalent across the European Union (EU). When hiring a graduate from any EU State, the Irish veterinary employer needs to be assured that their employee not only has received a level of education and training that ensures sound overall competencies, but also has the required knowledge, skills, attitudes and aptitudes to understand and be able to perform entry-level national veterinary service tasks that relate to the promotion of animal and public health. In the EU, this assurance is achieved by the European system of evaluation of veterinary training (ESEVT) as developed by the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE).

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESEVT

Up until 1978, the different countries in the then European Economic Community (EEC) each offered a veterinary medical curriculum, which was based on traditions and state (local) legislation. Within the worldwide veterinary profession at the time, accreditation beyond a nation's own borders was offered by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), and by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), but there was no 'European' system of recognition. The focus of veterinary curricula could, and did, vary substantially between countries, particularly with regard to species focus, and the degree to which veterinary

public health was incorporated within the core curriculum. In 1978, the Directive 78/1027/EEC and Decision 78/1028/EEC established the Advisory Committee on Veterinary Training (ACVT) that required harmonisation across the then nine EEC Member States. Ireland, which alongside the UK and Denmark had acceded to the EEC in 1973, was represented on the ACVT committee by appointees Brendan T Farrelly, Fintan J Cooney, Seosamh Hanley, John Hannan, John J Vaughan and Traolach Ó Nualláin. The ACVT ran a pilot study during the years 1985-1989, visiting one veterinary educational establishment in each of the nine Member States of the time. The aim of the pilot study was to ensure that veterinary training up to the stage where students are qualified to practice was of a comparably high standard throughout the EU and, where appropriate, to put forward suggestions aimed at improving that training.

On the initiative of, and financed by the ACVT, the EAEVE was founded in 1988 in Paris, France, as a European-accrediting organisation, and registered under French law. Following removal of EU funding, in 1994 ACVT assigned the responsibility for administering the visitation and evaluation programme to EAEVE.

EAEVE is the only transnational, non-governmental accrediting organisation for veterinary medicine in Europe with the primary objective to monitor the harmonisation of the minimum standards set down in the study programme for veterinarians or veterinary surgeons in the EU Directives. EAEVE membership is voluntary; currently there are 96 member establishments of which 75 are within the EU. The other members come from outside of the EU and include teaching establishments in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Switzerland, Norway, Turkey and Israel. The Federation of Veterinarians in Europe (FVE) joined with EAEVE in 2000 to share responsibility for the evaluation process and together formed the European Committee of Veterinary Education (ECOVE) as an independent entity. ECOVE is the final arbiter in the evaluation of veterinary training, and is currently led by Professor Giovanni Re (EAEVE, chairperson, Italy) and Dr Pat Talty (FVE, vice-chair, Ireland).

EAEVE STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2020

The publication of the EU directives 2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EU on professional mobility and recognition

of professional qualifications (medical doctors, nurses, midwives, veterinarians, dentists, pharmacists and architects) provided an imperative to ensure equivalency of registrable qualifications across Europe. These directives laid down very specific requirements regarding veterinary training, including course duration and content. In response in particular to the 2013 directive, and also to develop a new vision for the future for veterinary training in Europe, EAEVE published its EAEVE Strategic Plan 2015-2020 in January 2015.

This strategy laid out a vision of harmonisation and improvement in quality for all veterinary medicine establishments in Europe and beyond, and lays out the broad strategic objectives to promote the culture of quality, be recognised as the official accreditation authority for veterinary education in Europe; collaborate with other international accreditation bodies to develop a global accreditation system for veterinary training, enhance the quality of the ESEVT through updating the evaluation procedures and integrating quality assurance methodologies, and increase public awareness of the ESEVT.

One of the tasks under the strategic plan was to establish new standard operating procedures for evaluation of veterinary training. EAEVE has been actively seeking membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were developed to conform to established best practice. These new SOPs were adopted at the 2016 EAEVE General Assembly, in Uppsala, Sweden. The revised SOPs also took account of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) document: Guidelines for a Model Core Veterinary Curriculum.

VISITATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION OF STANDARDS UNDER THE UPPSALA SOP

Overall, there are currently 100 veterinary educational Establishment members of EAEVE in 33 countries. The normal cycle of ESEVT visitation for accreditation purposes is once every seven years and, currently, there are approximately 25 visitations per year. In the months before a visitation, a panel of eight experts is assembled by EAEVE from the published list. This panel is composed of experts from across Europe in the following disciplinary areas: basic sciences, food safety and quality, clinical sciences companion animals, clinical sciences food-producing animals, and quality assurance. The panel also includes one veterinary practitioner, one veterinary student and one ESEVT coordinator. The establishment submits a self-evaluation report in advance of the visitation, and the visitation itself follows a five-day standardised programme. To be recommended for accreditation, the visited establishment must meet the Uppsala SOPs 11 specific standards within the following domains: that the establishment is well managed; has adequate financing to sustain its educational, research and social commitments; has appropriate resources of staff, facilities and animals; provides an up-to-date professional curriculum; provides

an appropriate research-and-evidence-based learning environment; operates a fair and reliable assessment system; and operates ad hoc quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms. The visitation acts as an opportunity for the establishment to show the visitors how they meet the required standards, and for the visitors to see the teaching, research and clinical facilities and speak with staff and students in structured and unstructured meetings. At the end of the visitation, the visitors produce a report that outlines their findings and recommendations, and this is forwarded to ECOVE for the final decision on accreditation.

Subsequent to the ECOVE decision, the visitation report and ECOVE decision on accreditation are published on the EAEVE website. The establishment is also obliged under the SOP to publish a copy of the visitor report on their own website, regardless of outcome. This report is, therefore, available to the veterinary stakeholder who wishes to identify the accreditation status of any course, and standards of education that any potential employee may have received.

EAEVE has actively promoted its evaluation system with the result that all European establishments of veterinary training will have been evaluated at least once by spring 2018. A number of European States (ie. Hungary, Austria and Germany) have accepted the ESEVT-accreditation process in lieu of a national process, and discussions are ongoing with other EU-accreditation bodies. An increasing number of non-European veterinary teaching establishments (eg. from Asia and Africa) have formally asked for an evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The ESEVT process provides the assurance that veterinary education in Europe and beyond will continue to develop to match to the needs of the stakeholders; students, practice employers, animals, animal owners, state inspectorates and the general public. Raising the standard of veterinary education worldwide is an achievable goal, and Irish veterinary practitioners have a representative voice in this process through the FVE and EAEVE.