



Impact of veterinary education and veterinary specialisation on the veterinary profession and society

The veterinary profession is a regulated profession in Europe. In order to be licensed to practice, the candidate has to follow a comprehensive training programme. In order to facilitate the free movement of veterinarians within the EU, minimum training requirements for the recognition of professional qualifications are laid down in the EU legislation.

After graduation, veterinarians shall ensure that they maintain and develop their qualifications by following appropriate continuous professional development and training. Additionally a number of veterinarians develop knowledge, skills and competences in a specific direction or area, study that part in great detail and become 'specialists'.

Society will always need high-level veterinary services, that is to say veterinarians with advanced skills as well as veterinary Specialists. To obtain the most out of veterinary specialisation in terms of benefits for the animals, their owners, society and the veterinary profession, the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS) together with their Specialist Colleges and the rest of the profession and academia, should first identify the primary objectives of veterinary specialisation in a broad societal context. The tools necessary to achieve these objectives, such as standards and quality assurance, can then follow in relation to the needs.

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1. Introduction

In many countries, certainly in Europe, the practice of veterinary medicine is regulated. There are good reasons to do so. The issues at stake, such as animal health and animal welfare, public health and ecosystem, are too important to leave these to just anyone who might wish to practice. There is a need to protect animals and people against quacks and malpractice.

While such regulations aim to set and assure certain minimum standards for veterinary medicine there does not seem to be a clear vision on what could or should be done at the

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higher levels of veterinary medicine. What are the reasonable expectations society might have from high-level veterinary services; are these expectations met, is there a need to regulate certain aspects and if so to what purpose?

This working document tries to identify what contributions top-level veterinary medicine provide and what the optimal conditions for accomplishing these contributions are.

2. Pre-graduate training

The first veterinary school, as we know these today, was established in Lyon (FR). It opened its doors in 1762. Nowadays, there are more than 100 veterinary schools in Europe where the knowledge and skills required to become licensed to practice veterinary medicine are taught.

In the European Union, the content of education falls under the competence of the Member States, and National governments decide about the veterinary curriculum. According to article 165 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, the Community's role is a supportive one: "to contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and by supporting and supplementing their actions".

However, in order to facilitate the free movement of veterinarians, minimum training requirements for an automatic recognition of professional qualifications throughout the EU are setⁱ. On top of the undergraduate curriculum, additional specific requirements are laid down in the EU legislation for the training of Official Veterinarians, acting on behalf of the competent authoritiesⁱⁱ.

The European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) in association with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe developed a system for the visitation and evaluation of veterinary schools. The programme was initiated by the European Commission. In 2000 the Joint Education Committee of EAEVE and FVE (JEC) took over the programme and developed it to the European System of Evaluation of Veterinary Training (ESEVT). The system has been running successfully for nearly 30 years.ⁱⁱⁱ

The World Organisation for Animal health, OIE developed Guidelines for a Model Core Veterinary Curriculum^{iv}. These guidelines complement the OIE recommendations regarding the competencies of graduating veterinarians ('Day 1 graduates') to National Veterinary Services of quality^v.

3. Post graduate training: Lifelong learning and continuous professional development

Graduating veterinarians ('Day 1 graduates') have sufficient knowledge, skills and competences to enter the veterinary profession and to start a veterinary career. This 'Day One Competence' is the minimum standard required and is the starting point for a variety of roles in the veterinary profession (e.g. as Practitioner, Hygienist, Scientist, National Veterinary Services Officer, Animal Welfare Officer, Designated Veterinarian)^{vi}. The graduate who has achieved Day One competence should be capable to independently perform appropriate entry-level tasks and duties of the veterinary profession and be confident enough to practice veterinary medicine at a primary care level on their own, while knowing when it is appropriate to seek direction from more experienced or specialized colleagues.

However after graduation, in whichever field the new graduate decides to enter, additional training will be needed to keep up to date with the new developments in veterinary medicine and to progress in their personal professional development. In some countries, veterinarians are obliged to spend a certain amount of learning-time in order to keep their license to practice, while some roles may also require postgraduate training and further formal qualifications, such as specialisation in certain fields.

Available post-graduate training for veterinarians varies a lot from country to country in Europe. It can be provided as single courses, or as structured programmes in particular areas of veterinary medicine. Equally the quality assurance of the existing post-graduate possibilities is managed differently throughout Europe.

FVE together with EAEVE, EBVS and UEVP have jointly worked on the development of a standard for middle-tier post graduate education and they have established Veterinary Continuous Education in Europe (VETCEE). VETCEE evaluates the level/quality of education of modules and ensures that the programmes in the different European countries approved by VETCEE are at the same level and according to certain (common, agreed) standards.

4. Veterinary specialisation

A number of veterinarians develop knowledge and skills in a specific direction or area and study that part in great detail, and call themselves 'specialists'.

The European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS) awards European Veterinary Specialist status based on a specialist diploma being awarded by one of the 25 recognized Veterinary Specialist Colleges (in 36 specialist areas) following the completion of rigorous at least 4 years full time (or 8 years part time) postgraduate training, education, and examinations. Standards are benchmarked to level 8 of the European Qualifications Framework, and the individual Colleges have the full responsibility to organize the content of the specialisation programmes and the criteria for specialist status. The number of veterinarians active as European Veterinary Specialists has grown from 267 in 1996 to more than 3500 by 2015.

The roles veterinary specialists should play within the veterinary profession and within our society are manifold. They include, responding to societal desires and needs, research and exploring new fields, encouraging young veterinarians to further develop their knowledge and skills, pre- and post-graduate education and training of veterinarians and other health professionals, communication of new knowledge and insights, giving feedback to other members of the profession, developing practice guidelines, promoting a good presence of specialists in all countries and quality assurance.

To get the best out of veterinary specialisation in terms of benefits for the animals, their owners, the society and the veterinary profession, the profession together with EBVS and the Specialist Colleges should first identify the primary objectives of veterinary specialisation in a broad societal context. The tools necessary to achieve these objectives, such as setting standards and quality assurance, can then follow in relation to the needs.

It is important to ensure that the Diplomat qualification remains attractive for veterinarians to take up as well as to maintain it throughout their professional career. It is necessary to strike a balance between encouraging sufficient people to become specialist, and finding the optimal level of specialisation.

5. Conclusion

	Evaluation of quality of education	Regulation of veterinarians in a country
Specialisation	EBVS/ National Education Committees	VSBs / National committees
Middle-tier training	VETCEE/ National Education Committees	VSBs / National committees
	Day-1 competence	VSBs
Undergraduate training	EAEVE	

It is within the nature of the veterinary profession that the graduation from veterinary schools is only the beginning. Veterinarians need not only to maintain what they have learnt during their undergraduate education, but also continuously develop by acquiring new knowledge and competences in any career path they have chosen to follow.

Society will always need high level veterinary services, that is to say veterinarians with advanced skills as well as veterinary specialists. To get the best out of veterinary specialisation in terms of benefits for the animals, their owners, the society and the veterinary profession, the profession together with EBVS and the Specialist Colleges should first identify the primary objectives of veterinary specialisation in a broad societal context.

ⁱ Directive 2005/ 36 as amended Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council

ⁱⁱ REGULATION (EC) No 854/2004 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

ⁱⁱⁱ [ECCVT Statement: Harmonisation of veterinary education: fundamental for establishing EU citizens' trust in veterinary services](#)

^{iv} Veterinary Education Core Curriculum OIE Guideline, September 2013

^v OIE recommendations on the Competencies of graduating veterinarians ('Day 1 graduates') to assure National veterinary Services of quality. May 2012.

^{vi} ECCVT doc