

**Securing Australasia's future in biosecurity, food production, One Health and animal welfare**  
**Independent expert review of the veterinary science education capability of Australia and New Zealand**

*Commissioned by Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand (VSANZ)*

**Terms of Reference**

**Context**

The global veterinary profession faces enormous challenges meeting the growing needs of farmers, pet owners and governments to safeguard biosecurity, animal welfare and population health. These well-documented challenges have been building for many years, but COVID-19 has brought them into focus and added urgency to calls for major strategic change to the way countries approach veterinary education, research, regulation and service delivery.

Veterinary courses are among the most expensive of all university professional programs to deliver. The high cost reflects the demands of delivering a comprehensive clinical training program across a range of animal species and external accreditation standards, which are driven in turn by the high regulatory standards set by domestic and international veterinary education accrediting bodies acting on behalf of veterinary regulators. Accreditation standards include numerous delivery requirements not faced for most professional courses, including strict student to staff ratios and the condition that universities directly provide clinical teaching for both large and small animals through veterinary teaching hospital facilities.

The Australian Government's *Job-ready Graduates* changes to higher education funding provided a welcome seven per cent net increase in funding for each new Commonwealth-supported student from 2021. However, for some Australasian veterinary schools there remains a substantial gap between total funding received for each enrolled domestic veterinary student and the cost of educating them. The *Job-ready Graduates* package also changed the way universities are funded to support core veterinary science research, effectively removing the 'base research' component from the Commonwealth Grants Scheme (CGS) and implied from student contribution amounts. Australasian universities have for decades covered their funding shortfall for veterinary teaching and research through a range of strategies, including: increasing enrolments to dilute fixed costs; the provision of full fee-paying places for domestic and international students; reductions to central overhead charges and, ultimately, by cross-subsidising from revenues earned by other faculties, philanthropy and other sources.

COVID-19 and the prolonged international border closures of Australia and New Zealand have profoundly impacted the operations of the nations' universities and eight schools of veterinary science. Each veterinary school operates in a different institutional, funding and regional context and has experienced the effects of the pandemic differently. However, well before this crisis they had acknowledged collectively through VSANZ that continuing with current approaches to veterinary science education, accreditation and research would not be sustainable, nor would it see them capable of delivering on Australasia's long-term needs for workforce renewal and enhanced research capability.

It is within this context that the Review will consider the following key questions and any other important matters that may arise during the Expert Panel's consultations and analysis.

1. What are the key skills, knowledge and attributes that veterinarians will need in the next decade? How can accrediting bodies, the profession, Australasian universities and governments work more effectively together to ensure that students leave veterinary schools equipped with transferable competencies needed for long and successful careers as veterinarians, as well as take account of the continued financial pressures faced by universities to sustain high-quality veterinary science programs?
2. Looking ten years out, what are the key challenges and opportunities that veterinary schools in Australia and New Zealand face in terms of their responsibilities to educate and train their future veterinary workforces? What needs to change to ensure the schools can address the identified challenges and take advantage of the opportunities over the next decade? Specifically:
  - (i) What opportunities are there for structural reform to make Australasian veterinary schools financially sustainable? What have been the key learnings from the disruption to veterinary schools caused by COVID-19?

- (ii) Is there a place to develop a new kind of professional Australian and/or New Zealand veterinary qualification, which has modularisation/specialisation (e.g. companion animals, livestock, equine, poultry, exotic) options – whether at an early or post-primary-qualification stage – focused on the requirements of the nation? If so, how should this be achieved?
  - (iii) Can we make changes of the kind described above and still retain the ability of Australia and New Zealand to contribute to a global, mobile veterinary workforce with mutual recognition of qualification and freedom of movement, that is, to continue to attract overseas students and practitioners?
3. How strong is the research performance of Australasian veterinary schools in the global context? What is the nexus between a veterinary school's research capability and its capacity to educate veterinarians suited to the modern workforce? What could be done to optimise the education / research mix of veterinary schools?

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