

The global picture of accreditation mechanisms for Veterinary Education Establishments (VEEs), and the value of improving them

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The role of accreditation systems in maintaining the educational standards of veterinary medicine are pivotal in securing animal health and welfare, as well as protecting a society that requires safe foods of animal origin. Without appropriate benchmarking and audit, the quality and competence of each emerging generation of veterinarians cannot be assured and, by extension, the professional services provided to society cannot be guaranteed.

In an international context, the challenge is more pronounced. With animal health and welfare legislation variable and a diversity in the maturity of the veterinary profession and animal health industries— which may or may not be linked to the economic status of a country and the resources available— the need to provide agreed frameworks of assurance is problematic. At the centre of this are the Veterinary Education Establishments (VEE), together with their Veterinary Authority (VA) and Veterinary Statutory Body (VSB).

Across aspects of the international landscape of veterinary education, there have been significant steps towards harmonisation of objectives if not, necessarily, individual standards and competencies.

When one talks of the need to improve VEEs, there are some bigger questions that one might seek to address. For example, advancing standards does come at a cost and it is cost that somebody must be prepared to bear— either government or student. A more appropriate approach might be to set out minimum requirements (for all) and then seek to refine (for many) and finally seek to advance (for a few). Within this framework or window of standards, both societal need and affordability will provide the context that would determine an individual VEEs aspiration.

In contrast, there can be no argument against the need to improve our *mechanisms* of accreditation— transparency, consistency, equality, efficiency, even simplicity, must be the rocks on which we build these systems. This can be done independently of the standards themselves and is a necessary precursor to consideration of harmonisation at any level.

The establishment of an OIE core curriculum is an important step, but how it fits into the tapestry of VEEs and the various accreditation systems remains to be seen.

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