

Collaboration between Veterinary Authorities and Veterinary Statutory Bodies to Ensure Implementation of OIE Standards and Guidelines

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Shortly after its 1st Global Conference on Veterinary Education, the OIE convened an *ad hoc* Group on Veterinary Education (AHG) to follow-up on recommendations made during that conference. The initial charge to the AHG was two-fold: to define minimum competencies for delivery of Veterinary Services and develop recommendations for a model core veterinary curriculum to meet those competencies (1).

Over the course of the next four years, the AHG developed, with input from and review by OIE member countries, other stakeholders, and the Terrestrial Code Commission, two important documents that serve as educational resources for OIE member countries. The first, titled *Minimum Competencies Expected of Day 1 Veterinary Graduates to Assure Delivery of High-Quality National Veterinary Services*, was published in May 2012 (2). The second, titled *Veterinary Education Core Curriculum—OIE Guidelines*, was published in September 2013 (3). Together, these two documents provide guidance to Veterinary Education Establishments (VEEs), particularly those in developing countries and countries with in-transition economies, as they enhance and refine curricula and to OIE assessors conducting a Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) assessment.

These two OIE guidance documents have been available for VEEs to use—either alone or as part of a VEE Twinning Programme—for approximately three years. Two questions now arise: how can graduates of a VEE be assessed to determine whether they meet OIE’s minimum competencies, and how can a VEE be assessed to ensure it is making progress toward implementing a curriculum based on the OIE guidelines? Such assessments may best be accomplished in any given country through collaborative efforts of the Veterinary Authority and Veterinary Statutory Body, each of which carries legislative authority. Indeed, the OIE defines “Veterinary Authority” as the governmental authority of a member country, comprising veterinarians, other professionals and para-professionals, having the responsibility and competence for ensuring or supervising the implementation of animal health and welfare measures, international veterinary certification and other standards and recommendations in the Terrestrial Code in the whole territory (4). Likewise, the OIE notes that a competent “Veterinary Statutory Body” (VSB), autonomous from any political or commercial interests, can ensure the excellence of the veterinary profession through appropriately licensing or registering veterinary professionals, and providing minimum standards for initial and continuing education and professional conduct (5).

Certainly, collaboration between the Veterinary Authority and VSB can help ensure implementation of OIE educational standards and guidelines. However, because the needs, resources and capabilities may differ vastly across countries, there may be no one ideal structure through which this collaboration can—or should—occur. For example, licensure requirements through the VSB in countries in which government (public) veterinarians comprise the majority of the profession may be different from those in countries in which private fee-for-service practice is the accepted model for delivery of both companion and production animal veterinary services. Additionally, in some but not all countries, educational accreditation—that is, the application of standard requirements that reflect societal and professional expectations to both self- and non-governmental peer-reviews of an educational programme to determine whether that programme complies with the standards—is an accepted quality assurance process. If the standards are veterinary specific and address curriculum and outcomes assessment, then accreditation might be a useful tool to both encourage and assess implementation of OIE educational guidelines. In other countries, educational quality assurance processes may be administered centrally, through the federal government, and may or may not be veterinary specific.

The relationship among the Veterinary Authority, VSB, and accrediting entity in three OIE member countries—the United States of America (USA), New Zealand, and Tanzania—were compared. These countries were chosen, because each has distinct societal needs and expectations, financial and other resources to support educational and animal health infrastructure, and levels of importance placed on companion vs production animal health and public vs private veterinary practice.

In the USA, there are 51 VSBs—one in each state and the District of Columbia. Each VSB defines educational prerequisites for initial licensure of veterinarians, and each largely defers to the accrediting entity to define those prerequisites (6). The Veterinary Authority (the US Department of Agriculture), is a federal agency that also defers to the accrediting entity in defining educational requirements for employment (7). The 30 US VEEs are each accredited by a non-governmental accrediting body (the Council on Education of the American Veterinary Medical Association), with a curriculum and outcomes assessment standard as core components of its accreditation process (8).

In New Zealand, both the VSB and Veterinary Authority are federal entities (Veterinary Council of New Zealand and Ministry for Primary Industries, respectively), and both defer to the accrediting entity when defining educational requirements for licensure or employment (9, 10). There is only one VEE in New Zealand, which is accredited by a non-governmental entity (Australasian Veterinary Boards Council) that also accredits VEEs in Australia. The accreditation standards of the AVBC include both a curriculum and outcomes assessment standard (11).

In Tanzania, the VSB and Veterinary Authority are also both federal agencies, with the VSB (Veterinary Council of Tanzania) established under the Veterinary Authority (Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development) but independent from the Directorate of Veterinary Services (12, 13). The VSB recognizes qualifications, training facilities, training Institution and colleges, but not within a formal accreditation process. It also requires that veterinarians graduate from an approved (recognised) school in order to be registered, and employment with the Veterinary Authority is linked to the VSB regulations. The Tanzania Commission for Universities is the federal governmental organisation that accredits universities and programmes, but it is not veterinary specific (14). As such, aspects of curriculum and outcomes assessment specific to veterinary medicine are likely not assessed.

A summary of the relationship among the accrediting entity, Veterinary Authority, and VSB in each of the three countries compared is provided in Table 1.

	USA	New Zealand	Tanzania
Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Veterinary specific & includes curriculum standard* — Non-governmental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Veterinary specific & includes curriculum standard* — Non-governmental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Not veterinary specific — Government agency, but distinct from VA and VSB
Veterinary Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Educational prerequisite for employment recognizes accreditor* — Provides entry level and continuing education specific to Veterinary Services* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Educational prerequisite for employment recognizes accreditor* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Employment requirements linked to VSB regulations
Veterinary Statutory Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — State government — Separate from VA & accrediting entity — Educational prerequisite for licensure recognizes accreditor* — Examination required* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Federal government — Separate from VA — Represented on accrediting entity — Educational prerequisite for registration recognizes accreditor* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Federal government — Established under VA but separate from veterinary services — Educational prerequisite for registration requires approved program* — Examination required*

No one system described here illustrates the ideal collaboration to best ensure implementation of OIE educational standards and guidelines across all member countries. However, the following are commonalities and key touch points for consideration:

- The OIE educational documents should be part of everything considered when reviewing and refining veterinary curricula, educational accreditation standards or recognition criteria, and regional or national core competencies.
- The Veterinary Authority should include minimum educational requirements within governance documents that define and regulate national Veterinary Services—even if those requirements defer to the educational accrediting or recognition entity.
- Veterinary Statutory Bodies should define educational prerequisites for initial and continued licensure or registration, and may defer initial prerequisites to those defined by the accrediting or recognition entity, with continuing educational requirements developed with consideration to those outlined in OIE professional development guidelines.

The ideal collaboration, then, to ensure implementation of OIE educational standards and guidelines requires cooperation, collaboration, and transparency among all stakeholders, to include educators, private- and public-practice veterinarians, the public, and key governmental agencies.

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