

Education of professional ethics

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A core responsibility of Veterinary Statutory Bodies (VSBs) is to ensure the ongoing trust of society in veterinarians through the development of excellence in the professional standards and ethics of the veterinary profession. In part, this is achieved through the determination of minimum standards of initial and continuing veterinary education and through the setting and enforcement of standards of professional conduct and ethics. Accreditation is one of the key methods for monitoring the development of these standards in Veterinary Education Establishments (VEEs).

Education of professional ethics (PE) requires reflection on behalf of all educators on their own values and viewpoints, together with insight into the societal context in which veterinary professionals practise now and in the future.

The paper references both published work and professional experience related to questions about how, when, why and what is currently taught about professional ethics in VEEs. Furthermore, it explores how practising professionals may be remediated if they are found to fall short by a VSB. These questions are considered using the lens of the accreditation standards of the members of the international accreditation working group.

In a future characterised by uncertainty, risks and complex global interconnectedness, a number of challenges for the education of professional ethics in the veterinary profession, and for the accreditation of this education exist. These include: discovering the means by which students may be more engaged in learning PE; mapping PE in curricula; determining prerequisites for student ethical standards at admission; coordinating educational provision with the wider university, the community of professions, VSBs and veterinary professional organisations; identifying specific competences; improving assessment and tracking progress; supporting the development of student consciousness of their own professional ethical development; improving awareness of veterinary ethical standards in society; identifying and resourcing research in PE; supporting the transition from VEE to professional life; and continuing professional development in professional ethics.

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