

Question on notice: How do 3 tests take 2 years to administer and cost that much?
Information provided by Ms Louise Flynn, AVE Coordinator

- The Australasian Veterinary Examination (AVE) was until September 2019, known as the National Veterinary Examination (NVE). The AVE is a shared Australasian examination under the administration of the AVBC. It is effectively a hurdle examination program designed to assess, for registration purposes, the veterinary knowledge and clinical competence of overseas qualified veterinarians whose veterinary qualifications are not (immediately) recognized by AVBC for the purposes of registration in Australian and NZ.
- It is a pathway for overseas trained vets to full general registration here.
- Veterinary registration in Australia (and New Zealand) is governed by state legislation. Full general registration has its basis in the broad spectrum of veterinary science; the current legislative environment does not allow for species specific general registration.
- The NVE/AVE examination was previously a part of NOOSR (National Office for Overseas Skills Recognition) before NOOSR 'devolved' the responsibility for assessments directly to the appropriate professional bodies in Australia.
- The AVE is therefore in a similar format to the examination programs offered by other Australian professions to provide overseas graduates the opportunity to demonstrate competency/equivalence with Australian (graduate) standards for the purposes of registration. The Australian Medical Council, Australian Dental Council, Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand, Australian Physiotherapy Council, Australian Pharmacy Council are examples.
- Other non-award qualifications which are recognised in Australia for the purposes of registration include the American Veterinary Medical Association ECFVG[®] program and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Statutory Membership Examination. The ECFVG certification program is the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) pathway for foreign veterinary graduates to veterinary registration in the US and Canada. Completion of the ECFVG[®] (BSCE and CPE) plus the NAVLE[®] is also an immediately recognised registrable qualification in Australia and New Zealand.
- A standing committee of the AVBC, the AVE Committee (AVEC) is responsible for assessing the suitability for practice in Australia and New Zealand of persons with foreign veterinary qualifications. For this, it uses the AVE. The AVE is benchmarked against the competences of graduates of Australian and New Zealand veterinary schools. AVEC ensures that the content of the AVE is consistent with the undergraduate veterinary courses and the standard of examinations in Australasian veterinary schools, with an emphasis on the circumstances common in Australasia.
- The AVE Committee (AVEC) is comprised of ten dedicated and well-respected veterinary professionals who are subject matter experts in their fields and experienced veterinary educators and practitioners, including an AVE graduate member.
- There are 3 parts to the AVE:
 1. An eligibility assessment: this is a paper-based assessment of the applicant's qualifications and experience to determine if they are eligible to sit the AVE. An application for an assessment of eligibility must include a current English proficiency test result which meets the AVBC standard.

2. The Preliminary (MCQ) Examination (multiple choice question exam) which focuses on basic and applied veterinary knowledge across a wide range of topics; and
 3. The Final (Clinical) Examination (comprising 9 examination sections) which assesses clinical competence in the main domains of veterinary practice.
- A person is eligible to sit the AVE if they:
 1. hold a degree or diploma awarded after at least four years of study at a veterinary school which appears on the AVMA ECFVG®-listed veterinary colleges of the world or which was part of a college or university listed in the "World List of Universities"; and
 2. are registered, licensed or eligible to be recognised as a veterinarian of good standing in the country in which they studied their primary veterinary degree; and
 3. hold a current pass in an accepted English language proficiency test to the standard required by AVBC.
 - The fees for each of the 3 parts of the AVE are set based on cost recovery. The current fees are:
 1. AVE eligibility assessment \$455
 2. MCQ examination \$3,050
 3. Clinical examination \$8,240

Fee increases are budgeted for 2024 to cater for increases in the costs of delivering the examinations, including increases in the fees charged to AVBC by our exam partners (EPEC and The University of Queensland). Exam fees have, in the main, remained relatively stable over a long period. For example, the last increase in the MCQ examination fee was in September 2010 when it increased from \$2,900 to the current \$3,050.

- The MCQ exam is held once a year, usually in April. It is computer-delivered at 9 supervised venues, including a number of international locations for easier access for candidates based overseas (Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Auckland, London, Dubai, New Delhi and Singapore). The next available sitting of the Preliminary (MCQ) Examination is scheduled for 19 April 2024.
- The Preliminary (MCQ) examination focuses on basic and applied veterinary knowledge. The exam is in multiple choice format; it is computer delivered at a secure venue and it is held on a single day. There are two papers. Paper 1 tests base (underpinning) veterinary knowledge and paper 2 tests clinical reasoning. Success in the two papers is a strong foundation for success in the later AVE Final (Clinical) Examination.
- The number of candidates sitting the MCQ each year has doubled in recent years from about 35 candidates pre-COVID to now about 75 per year. Our exam partner advises that there is essentially no limit on the number of candidates who can sit the MCQ in a single sitting.
- The MCQ exam is scored by our statistician, EPEC's Prof John Barnard, using Rasch methodology. Following Rasch analysis and linking, a 'pass rate' of between about 42% and 63% has been recorded in the last couple of years for the Preliminary (MCQ) examination, where 'pass rate' is the number of candidates who passed the examination expressed as a percentage of the total number of candidates who sat the examination. With Rasch methodology, where emphasis is placed on the performance of candidates relative to the standard required to achieve a pass (the cut-score), not relative to other candidates, it is more appropriate to refer to a 'pass rate' than 'pass mark'.
- Please note that calculations performed on small sample sizes can show greater variability so with small numbers of enrolments (a small sample size), the raw 'pass rate' can seem to vary considerably but this may just be the result of one or two extra candidates passing or failing in a small cohort.
- The Final (Clinical) Examination involves a series of oral and practical examinations. It is held over 5 days at the Gatton campus of the University of Queensland. There are 9 examination sections, all of which must be passed by the candidate to record a pass in the Final (Clinical) Examination and so the AVE. The sections and the competences which may be examined in each are described in detail in

the Information for AVE Candidates booklet which can be downloaded from the AVBC website www.avbc.asn.au .

- The information booklet and application form contain a Check List of Clinical Skills. This is a list of the minimum hands-on practical procedures that candidates will be expected to perform as part of the clinical examination and which they are expected to have performed before they sit the examination.
- Both mid-year and end-of-year clinical examination sessions were held in 2023 and are planned for 2024.
- The Final (Clinical) Examination has 3 result categories:
 1. Pass - 'Met the required standard of competency' in all 9 sections;
 2. Eligible for supplementary examination – where the candidate 'Met the required standard of competency' in at least 6 full sections. The candidate will be required to re-take the remaining sections as the next available examination session;
 3. Fail – 'Did not meet the required standard of competency' in more than 3 sections. The candidate is required to repeat the entire Final (Clinical) Examination.
 4. Those failing any part of the Clinical Examination receive written feedback from the Examiners to assist in re-taking the examination or in taking any supplementary exam(s). They are also provided with counselling from a member of the AVE Committee; in this case, the candidate is required to provide their 'supervising' Committee member with case logs and a training plan to report their progress and readiness to re-sit.
 5. Candidates attempting the Final (Clinical) Examination may take a few examination sessions to pass all 9 sections, but most with the support of counselling and through their own additional clinical experience and case log recording do eventually go on to pass the clinical exam and so the AVE.
 6. Candidates who prepare well can pass through the examination program uneventfully and while there may be some who stumble (i.e. may have to re-sit an examination), in almost all cases, candidates do go on to complete the AVE assessment process.

Time taken to complete the AVE (see the examples in the table on page 7)

7. There is no prescribed timeframe in which an AVE candidate must attempt the AVE exams. There are a number of time limits which candidates do have to comply with, but essentially once a candidate has been assessed as eligible to sit the AVE, it is up to the candidate to decide the examination offering/s they want to enrol in. This gives candidates control over their progress through the AVE and the flexibility to decide when they are ready to sit. Candidates may decide they need more time to prepare for the exam; they may be busy with work commitments or may need to work to save money for the fees; they may have family commitments to work their study and exam appearances around. Family commitments may delay their attempts. COVID has impacted on candidates' ability to travel to sit the exam (both the MCQ and clinical exams) in recent years and so extended the time some candidates have taken to complete the AVE. Subject to the time limits associated with the AVE, it is the candidate who determines the timeframe they sit the AVE in.
- Time limits associated with the AVE:
 - A candidate must first sit the clinical examination within 3 years of their pass in the MCQ; and
 - A candidate must complete the AVE within 5 years of their pass in the MCQ.

- A candidate may fail an exam and need to return to re-sit an exam or to sit supplementary exams, so the time taken to complete the AVE will necessarily vary from candidate to candidate and is largely determined by their own uptake of examination offerings and their progress in terms of success or failure of exams throughout their AVE journey.
- Component part offerings:
 1. AVE eligibility assessments are offered all year round.
 2. The Preliminary (MCQ) examination is offered once a year, usually in April at 9 supervised venues, some within Australia and some at overseas locations.
 3. The Final (Clinical) examination runs over 5 days at the Gatton campus of the University of Queensland. There will be a total of 4 clinical examination sessions offered in 2023. To keep up with the current apparent demand for places, AVEC plans to continue to offer at least three full clinical examination sessions per year. The addition of a fourth session in 2024 will be subject to venue and examiner availability, and the demand (and take up) of places offered.
- In terms of why candidates might require different amounts of time to prepare for the examinations:

The standard required to pass may be difficult to obtain by candidates who:

 - qualified a number of years ago, perhaps have worked in a narrow area and who have not undertaken substantial revision of the basic subject matter of the examination.
 - obtained a basic veterinary qualification which does not adequately cover all the subjects covered by the examination and who have not undertaken further study to remedy these shortcomings.
- Specifically, re the clinical exam, candidates are asked to confirm, amongst other things, that they:
 - understand that the animal handling components of this examination will include live animals of various species and that they have had sufficient experience in conducting common clinical procedures.
 - understand that they must have had experience performing small animal surgery and anaesthesia in a clinical setting prior to attempting this examination.
 - understand that it is their responsibility to ensure that they have the necessary skill level to perform at a pass level in this examination.
- Manipulative skills and surgical procedures combined with humane animal handling must be demonstrated by candidates in the clinical examination. These procedures include correct restraint, lifting feet for inspection, jugular venepuncture, tail vein bleeding, aseptic milk sampling, epidural anaesthesia, pregnancy diagnosis per rectum and passing an oro-gastric tube in cattle; proper handling of sheep (catching and holding for examination of feet, jugular venepuncture, etc); proper restraint and handling of dogs and cats for clinical examination including auscultation, palpation, chest percussion, oral examination, to name a few. Confident and competent handling of horses must be demonstrated, and candidates may be asked to perform various procedures on them including catching and applying a halter, taking rectal temperature, jugular venepuncture, picking up feet for examination, etc. Details of all the above and anaesthetic and surgical procedures are given in the Information for AVE Candidates booklet.
- It is the view of AVE examiners that none of these clinical procedures can be satisfactorily performed by a person who has not personally practiced them to the point of competence and confidence. They cannot adequately be learned by watching someone else do them, or from a video.

Examiners in the Clinical examination are obliged to make a priority of the welfare of the animal being used in the examination. So, it is considered essential that candidates have achieved competence in all these procedures if they are to reach the required standard of competence in the clinical examination. Some candidates who have graduated some years ago and who may have specialised in any branch of veterinary science may need to refresh their skills in those areas in which their experience after graduation has been limited. Alternatively, candidates who have graduated recently may not have had time to gain appropriate experience with all the procedures outlined above.

Note that Preventive Medicine is an important examination section where candidates are expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding, including of relevant legislation as it relates either to New Zealand or Australia, depending upon where they are seeking to practice.

- It is important they see practice to prepare for the clinical exam. Regarding employment, candidates may apply for a specific, conditional or limited form of registration with a veterinary registration board here or in New Zealand AFTER they have passed the MCQ which will allow them to work under supervision while they prepare for the clinical exam (providing they can access an appropriate visa and a job). Access to limited registration for AVE candidates helps them to prepare for the clinical exam and has the benefit for potential employers to assess their suitability for employment.
- Recent graduates sitting MCQ in April have passed the clinical exam on their first attempt at the end of that same year so completing the AVE within 8 or 9 months. Some candidates have been assessed as eligible to sit the AVE in January, sit and pass MCQ in April, then elect to get limited registration to work under supervision for 12 months before attempting the clinical exam mid year or at the end of the following year – a completion time of 18mths to 2yrs.
- A recent data table and long term observations, estimates the average completion time at 18mths - 2 yrs (see the recent data in the table on page 6).
- Recent experience has also been impacted by COVID with candidates' progress through the AVE delayed by COVID related disruptions, including examination cancellations in 2020, travel restrictions, border closures and quarantine requirements impacting access to the examinations,
- The AVE is not singularly the solution to the shortage of veterinarians but is importantly contributing effectively a ½ a university cohort of veterinarians eligible to register to practice in Australia or New Zealand each year. There were 50 MCQ passes in 2023. There were 43 AVE graduates in 2022 and another 21 so far this year. There is much to celebrate here. The AVE is an eminently passable examination.

Question

JULIE STROUS: Yes. If you were just coming here for a holiday to consider doing the Australasian Veterinary Examination would be prohibitive. It's expensive and it really does require—

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: How much is it? For a typical foreign trained vet, what would it cost from start to finish?

JULIE STROUS: It's completely cost recovery. I think it's in the order of \$7,000. Louise back in the office might be—I would have to give you the exact example separately.

Answer

\$8,240 for the clinical examination.

Eligibility assessment: \$455

MCQ: \$3,050

<https://avbc.asn.au/for-veterinarians/australasian-veterinary-examination/>

The information in the table below is from some of the candidates who have completed the AVE since June 2022. The responses are those of the AVE graduates, including references to COVID delays. In practice, almost all of the candidates below will have been impacted by COVID and so their progress through the AVE delayed.

Age (yrs)	Gender	Country of training (primary vet'ry qual)	Times sat the MCQ	Times sat the clinical exam	Sat supps exams?	How long did it take you to complete the AVE from the time you first applied? This could be a calculation from confirmation of their eligibility	assessed as elig to sit the AVE	1st sat MCQ	passed the AVE	time since elig to AVE pass (yrs)	time since 1st MCQ to AVE pass (yrs)
32	F	Colombia	1	1	No	3 yrs (delayed by COVID)	Dec-19	Apr-21	Jun-22	2.5	1.2
45	M	Iran	1	1	Yes	1.5 years	Nov-19	Apr-21	Dec-21	2.1	0.7
35	F	Israel	1	1	No	1.5 years	Feb-21	Apr-21	Jun-22	1.3	1.2
37	F	Argentina	1	1	No	2.5 yrs	Jul-20	Apr-21	Nov-22	2.3	1.6
37	M	South Korea	3	2	Yes	4 yrs	Feb-18	Apr-18	Nov-22	4.7	4.6
38	F	Denmark	1	1	No	1 yr	Dec-21	Apr-22	Dec-22	1.0	0.7
38	F	Spain	2	1	No	3+ yrs (delayed by COVID)	Jan-19	Apr-19	Nov-22	3.8	3.6
32	M	Argentina	1	1	No	18 mths	Jul-21	Apr-22	Dec-22	1.4	0.7
32	F	Germany	1	1	No	5 yrs	name withheld				
30	F	Denmark	1	1	No	3 yrs (delayed by COVID)	Feb-20	Apr-21	Dec-22	2.8	1.7
34	F	Germany	1	1	Yes	2 yrs (delayed by COVID)	Feb-20	Apr-21	Dec-22	2.8	1.7
37	M	Nepal	1	1	No	3 yrs (delayed by COVID)	Feb-20	Apr-21	Dec-22	2.8	1.7
33	F	Germany	1	1	No	1 yr	name withheld				
34	F	Argentina	1	1	No	2.5 years	Feb-20	Apr-21	Nov-22	2.7	1.6
30	F	China	1	1	No	2 yrs	Oct-20	Apr-21	Nov-22	2.1	1.6
37	F	Chile	1	1	No	~ 1.5 yrs (delayed by COVID)	Sep-20	Apr-21	Nov-22	2.2	1.6
32	F	Sweden	2	1	No	3 yrs	Jan-19	Apr-21	Jun-23	4.4	2.2
34	M	Argentina	1	1	No	1.5 yrs	Jul-21	Apr-22	Jun-23	1.9	1.2
32	M	Philippines	1	2	Yes	1.5 yrs	Sep-21	Apr-22	Jun-23	1.7	1.2
38	F	Sri Lanka	4	2	Yes	6 yrs	Feb-17	Apr-17	Jun-23	6.3	6.2
35	F	Argentina	1	1	No	15 mths	Jan-22	Apr-22	Jul-23	1.5	1.2
31	F	Argentina	1	1	No	1.5 - 2 yrs	Nov-21	Apr-22	Jul-23	1.7	1.2