

**Submission  
No 105**

## **INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand

**Date Received:** 19 July 2023

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Hon. Mark Banasiak MLC  
Chair  
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW  
Legislative Council  
NSW Parliament

19 July 2023

Submitted online

Dear Mr Banasiak,

**Re: Submission to Inquiry into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage in New South Wales**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this review.

Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand (VSANZ) is a collective voice for the eight Australasian veterinary schools, hosted by James Cook University, University of Queensland, University of Sydney, Charles Sturt University, University of Melbourne, University of Adelaide, Murdoch University and Massey University (NZ).

In 2022, VSANZ commissioned a three-person, independent expert panel to undertake a review of the veterinary science education capability of Australia and New Zealand. The expert panel was led by eminent veterinarian Dr Helen Scott-Orr AM PSM. The report from the review, entitled 'Rethinking veterinary education: Securing Australasia's future in biosecurity, food production, One Health and animal welfare', was released on 17 July 2023.

The focus of the report is on Australasia's capacity to sustainably train veterinarians with the key skills, knowledge and attributes required to meet the needs of a modern society. However, the review panel realised it must inevitably consider the related issues of the veterinary shortage and poor mental health among veterinarians in undertaking its deliberations on the veterinary education sector.

The panel received 69 submissions and held 19 interviews with groups of key stakeholders. It heard from veterinary practitioners, practice owners, professional associations, university senior executives, academics, students, regulators, and users of veterinary services. The panel encountered a very wide range of strongly-held views and noted that these were often (but not always) anecdotal in nature (we suspect your panel will have the same experience). Opinions were sometimes oppositional. One such example was on the fundamental question of whether veterinary students should continue to be taught about all common species – the 'omnicompetent vet' – or given the option to focus only on species of interest (for example, cats and dogs). The panel respected all opinions as having been genuinely contributed, but in some cases came down on one side or the other based on their assessment of the evidence.

The report finds that veterinary education is at a crisis point in Australasia, with inadequate funding to meet the costs of a very expensive teaching program, in the face of deteriorating wellbeing amongst students, staff, and graduates. These issues pose a direct threat to the long-term supply of veterinarians in Australia, exacerbated by the real risk of veterinary school closures as universities face growing challenges to financial and operational sustainability.

The report makes 25 recommendations, addressed variously at veterinary schools themselves, their universities, accrediting bodies, veterinary professional associations, and governments. Among the key recommendations are:

- The establishment of a strategic change fund among the universities to unlock effective veterinary school resource-sharing models;
- Accelerated efforts to reduce the cost burden of school accreditation, and to move from assessing inputs to outcomes;
- An increase in government funding for veterinary students, and a clinical training loading for priority areas; and
- The exploration of veterinary apprenticeship and bonding models.

Because the challenges facing the veterinary profession and the veterinary education sector are inextricably linked, the review report contains a number of recommendations of direct relevance to your inquiry. In particular, the review lists a number of recommendations to increase the supply of vets in rural and regional areas. The recommendations also include several that seek to improve student wellbeing and transition to practice, and another cluster concerning the capacity of the profession to service rural needs, including emergency animal disease preparedness. A summary listing of the recommendations is attached.

VSANZ has accepted the recommendations of the review and has commenced the process of implementing them, in conjunction with its partners, including the AVA. The full report is appended to this submission and I encourage the NSW inquiry to read it in full. I would be very happy to provide any further background as required.

Yours sincerely

**Professor Nigel Perkins**

Chair, VSANZ

Enc. 'Rethinking veterinary education' report

## Veterinary Education Review: Recommendations

1	<p>The Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC) and Veterinary Schools Accreditation Advisory Committee (VSAAC) (along with international regulatory partners where appropriate) work with veterinary schools to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the accreditation process to remove requirements that duplicate the many other accountability and quality assurance processes of Australasian universities.</li> <li>• Review the necessity and cost-effectiveness of each accreditation requirement in the light of the desired learning outcomes, and</li> <li>• Accelerate the transition from assessing teaching inputs to assessing learning outcomes as the principal basis for accreditation of veterinary programs.</li> </ul>
2	<p>Veterinary schools widen their mainstream admissions process to select students on a broader range of excellence, equity and diversity than solely academic achievement, and collaborate on admissions research to evaluate new approaches.</p>
3	<p>Veterinary schools consider supplementing the mainstream admission process with an additional entry pathway targeting applicants committed to rural and/or government veterinary practice, subject to demand.</p>
4	<p>The AVBC establish a universal veterinary registration database in Australia and work with the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) to undertake an annual workforce survey.</p>
5	<p>The core of veterinary curricula remain based on a broad but integrated body of knowledge, principles and skills that equip students with the potential to transition between different career paths within the veterinary profession.</p>
6	<p>Veterinary schools continue to engage in collaborative educational research nationally and internationally.</p>
7	<p>Veterinary schools continue to create space in the curriculum for professional skills development and conversations on wellbeing and self-care. Interventions should be evaluated and results shared across the veterinary education community and wider profession.</p>
8	<p>Veterinary schools progressively expand the proportion of the curriculum devoted to 'tracking' to produce new graduates with higher levels of proficiency (including technical skills) in their chosen early-career paths.</p>

9	AVBC / VSAAC continue to review the extent to which the accreditation standards permit increased tracking.
10	Veterinary professional associations and schools explore veterinary apprenticeship models which might be relevant to Australasia and the cost-sharing options which might facilitate them.
11	Veterinary schools continue to incorporate a more diverse set of career pathways into their structures.
12	Veterinary schools continue to explore further opportunities for explicit constructive and effective collaboration with the wider profession in relation both to the curriculum and transition to the profession.
13	Each veterinary school consider the 'fit' of structural reform opportunities identified in this report with their own strategic context and operating environment.
14	All eight universities with veterinary schools jointly contribute to a shared strategic-change fund to unlock effective veterinary school resource-sharing models.
15	The Australian Government should move quickly to increase the funding rate per veterinary EFTSL by at least 30% – and, where relevant, lift the maximum basic grant funding of universities to accommodate this increase in revenue. The NZ Government should similarly adjust its grant funding for veterinary EFTS.
16	Governments consider providing a clinical training loading for a designated number of veterinary students' clinical training in priority areas.
17	Both Australian and NZ Governments should continue to facilitate international veterinary student access via favourable immigration settings, competitive in-study and post-study work rights, and a clear pathway to residency.
18	Veterinary professional associations should assist employers in taking charge of the workplace issues that affect recruitment, retention, and wellbeing and in developing the business and management experience of their members to help hone veterinary business models.
19	Australasian veterinary boards, the AVBC, NZ Veterinary Association (NZVA) and AVA work together to harmonise their graduate mentoring programs and consider making them mandatory.
20	Veterinary schools collaborate with Animal Health Australia and with governments in both Australia and New Zealand to explore and develop their role in upskilling veterinarians for biosecurity and emergency disease preparedness.

21	Governments consider contracting a network of rural veterinary practices to provide teaching and government services in the regions in collaboration with veterinary schools - including the teaching of livestock clinical practice and government veterinary services.
22	The Australian Government extend to veterinarians the student debt relief provided to doctors and nurse practitioners who live and work in rural and remote Australia, via a rural veterinary bonding scheme.
23	Veterinary professional associations develop a lead role in continuing professional development for the profession in collaboration with other providers including veterinary schools.
24	Governments and industry should increase the amount of full-cost funding in animal and public health sector research priorities and encourage co-location of veterinary schools and government research institutions while actively incentivising collaboration.
25	Australasian veterinary schools and their R&D partners collaborate to develop a complementary set of postgraduate education and research programs to address key national, regional, and global needs.