

What is the role of AVBC?

The mission of AVBC was affirmed at the 2018 strategic planning session as:

To ensure the quality (recognised nationally and internationally) of the Australian and New Zealand veterinary profession.

AVBC's constitution describes the purposes of the Council as:

- (1) to encourage co-operation among the veterinary boards in Australia and New Zealand;
- (2) to advise and make recommendations to the veterinary boards in Australia and New Zealand in relation to:
 - (a) the accreditation of veterinary schools and of courses leading to a degree in veterinary science or medicine;
 - (b) assessment of the suitability for practice in Australia and New Zealand of persons with foreign veterinary qualifications; and
 - (c) uniform criteria for recognition of qualifications for registration;
- (3) to provide advice on matters concerning the occupational regulation of veterinarians*, including general and specialist registration;
- (4) to encourage standardisation and quality assurance of veterinary services to the community in all jurisdictions; and
- (5) to communicate and co-operate with international veterinary organisations and other professions, both nationally and internationally

How does AVBC relate to its member boards?

The member boards are the statutory regulators for the veterinary profession responsible for applying the relevant veterinary legislation of each local jurisdiction.

The veterinary boards, through the AVBC Council *set the standards* for the profession on the advice of the committees of AVBC and then the staff and committees of AVBC *apply these standards* through processes such as examinations and accreditation.

How does this compare to the situation in the UK, Nth America and Europe?

Our closest international partner is the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). It is a single veterinary regulator for the United Kingdom and fulfils the roles of regulator and veterinary standards organisation. The American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB) has as its members most of the Nth American boards however it does not have a role in accreditation or specialist registration and only a minor role in providing statutory examinations for veterinarians. AAVSB provides a forum for discussing matters of mutual interest to veterinary boards. In Europe there is no association of veterinary statutory authorities.

How does this structure impact quality assurance of the profession and accreditation of veterinary schools?

What positively differentiates AVBC and RCVS from the Nth American model is the separation but close relationship between standards and statutory authority. In our region this means that accreditation decisions are made by the group of independent legislators. In Europe, potential conflicts of interest arise where the veterinary schools themselves oversee their own accreditation. This EAEVE system is recognised by very few regulators. In Nth America the Council on Education, overseen by the professional association AVMA, administers high quality veterinary accreditation. Accreditation is not by itself recognised by the regulators and all but a few require an additional examination, the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE).

Similarly, for the examination for foreign veterinary graduates (NVE) and for veterinary specialists, it is the veterinary boards that make the decisions about standards of practice which are consequently uniform among all Australian states and territories and in New Zealand. The equivalent examination in Nth America is insufficient for registration and requires that the NAVLE is also successfully completed. Veterinary specialists in Nth America are supervised by their training and examining organisations and are not assessed to be registered specialists by veterinary boards.

What are the potential consequences of VSBSA departure?

Specialist registration

The work on standards setting and standards application by the Advisory Committee for the Registration of Veterinary Specialists (ACRVS) will continue. The number of highly trained veterinarians applying for specialist registration through all of the boards is steadily increasing. The veterinarian must apply through their veterinary board in Australia and the advice of the committee goes to the board, not the applicant. As yet, there is no understanding as to how the VSBSA plans to assess new applications for specialist registration.

AVBC publishes a list of qualifications that would normally be recognised for the purpose of veterinary specialisation in Annexe A of its Minimum Standards Document (MSD). Fellows of the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Specialists (FANZCVS) would normally fall into this category as would many North American or European Diplomates. However, even if the qualification is recognised, the individual applying may not meet the requirements of the ACRVS. For example, applicants who have not stayed up to date nor maintained specialist level practice would need to be closely scrutinised, the a committee chosen by Council, as to their suitability for registration.

The evolution of new specialities continues apace and balancing the aspirations of veterinarians with the high expectations demanded by the profession and the wider community of those with specialist registration is requiring more time and resources. Each new training program is individually assessed by the committee using processes agreed by Council. VSBSA will no longer be involved in any of these decisions.

Accreditation

The differentiating strength of AVBC accreditation has as its source the nine veterinary jurisdictions of Australia and New Zealand. The standards that are set through the Veterinary Schools Accreditation Advisory Committee and applied through accreditation site visits are all decided directly by the members of AVBC. The accreditation system built on this synergy is a world leader and veterinarians qualified in Australia and New Zealand are respected internationally.

AVBC is a co-founder of the International Accreditation Working Group (IAWG) and is an equal partner with USA/Canada and the UK in all joint accreditation visits. The Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) allowing free flow of veterinarians between Australia and New Zealand and the UK was formulated in 1999 and has been renewed every 5 years since.

The resignation of VSBSA may not have an impact on the strength of the decisions made however the situation is being closely monitored by our international partners. Particularly concern voiced by the RCVS regarding the MRA raises questions as to the plans for mobility of South Australian veterinarians and the recognition of the University of Adelaide veterinary program.

Veterinarians Qualified Overseas – migration and examinations

AVBC is the organisation gazetted by the federal Department of Home Affairs for the skills assessment of potential migrants with the occupation “Veterinarian”.

It is the organisation to which the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) now the federal Department of Education and Training devolved the setting an examination for overseas graduates whose degrees are not recognised for registration.

These requirements of the Australian government were the impetus for the incorporation of AVBC and similar organisations constituted for each of the regulated professions and other occupations.

AVBC members delegated to AVBC the setting of minimum standards for all veterinarians wishing to practice in Australia and New Zealand. The Chair of the Board of Examiners, the committee responsible for overseas qualified veterinarians, reports to every AVBC meeting so that every board has oversight of its standards and processes.

As a member of AVBC, the Veterinary Council of New Zealand also uses the National Veterinary Examination (NVE) for New Zealand's overseas qualified veterinarians.

The Federal Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Education and Training will be notified of the VSBSA resignation. They will be informed that until a new funding model is established, that foreign graduates residing in South Australia will still be able to access the NVE and skills assessment for migration. In the short term at least, foreign graduates with South Australian registration will be able to access a skills assessment provided they meet all of the relevant requirements.

Regional Mobility

Mobility of veterinarians in our region is governed by the Australian Mutual Recognition Act (MRA), National Recognition of Veterinary Registration (NRVR) and Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement (TTMRA).

Although sovereign entities, state veterinary boards and the Veterinary Council of New Zealand have agreed on uniform standards for registration as described above. This agreement relies on good will and regular exchange of information through the meetings of Council every two months, with at least one face to face meeting each year.

If one board makes a change to veterinary registration standards, this effectively changes the standards for all boards as each jurisdiction must allow a veterinarian to register if successful in obtaining registration in another jurisdiction. If the direction of VSBSA legislation and decisions diverge from those of the other jurisdictions it would be concerning for all boards. AVBC runs workshops to develop competences in veterinary regulation in areas such as complaints handling and board governance. VSBSA may fall behind the current practice of the other boards if representatives do not participate in AVBC workshops.

Similarly, VSBSA would no longer have a say in the development of Australian and NZ veterinary standards and moves towards harmonising legislation.

The Primary Industries Ministerial Council endorsed National Recognition of Veterinary Registration (NRVR) in 2008 and the committee may need to be notified that one of the jurisdictions party to this agreement has resigned from AVBC.

Foreign Affairs and Trade

AVBC has an excellent relationship with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Australia and equivalent organisations in New Zealand directly and through the respective Chief Veterinary Officers (CVO). The AVBC also works with the International Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) through its involvement in the development of standards for education and for veterinary statutory bodies. DFAT has recently allocated funding for AVBC to develop an OIE-sanctioned twinning relationship with the Veterinary Council of Thailand and through it the newly formed ASEAN Veterinary Statutory Bodies Network (AVSBN). Issues such as antimicrobial resistance, transboundary disease and food security require close collaboration and AVBC is working on behalf of the boards to help improve veterinary standards in our neighbouring countries.

The Chief Veterinary Officers of Australia and New Zealand will be alerted that VSBSA is no longer a member of AVBC and thus not a contributor to partnerships that have strengthened our reputation with international veterinary statutory bodies.

Impact on Veterinarians and the Public

AVBC has determined that it will do all within its powers to minimise the impact of the VSBSA resignation on veterinarians, whether registered in South Australia or elsewhere in Australasia. Protection of the public remains the key principle. Until a new model can be formulated, the AVBC will continue to provide its services to stakeholders as if the VSBSA had not resigned.