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### **Response to Inquiry into skills recognition, upgrading and licensing**

The Australasian Veterinary Boards Council Inc is the gazetted body for assessing skills of those who wish to work as a veterinarian in Australia.

To be eligible to apply for registration without further examination and for skills assessment, ("Type A") candidates must either

- have obtained their primary veterinary qualifications in Australia or NZ
- have obtained their primary veterinary qualifications from an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accredited veterinary school AND have passed the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination;
- have obtained their primary veterinary qualifications from a Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) accredited veterinary school in United Kingdom or South Africa;
- have been registered with the RCVS by examination; or
- have successfully completed the New Zealand National Veterinary Examination
- have successfully completed the Australian National Veterinary Examination

Some Australian boards recognise applicants who

- have successfully completed the (North American) Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG) examinations.

All other candidates ("Type B") must successfully complete the National Veterinary Examination.

For the past two years, candidates have been able to access information on the AVBC website, [www.avbc.asn.au](http://www.avbc.asn.au) . Candidates also use migration agents or contact the

AVBC after contacting a state registration authority. The office is open every day for phone and email enquiries. Only twenty enquirers per year visit the office in person.

Candidates are told that it may take six weeks for applications to be processed, however, if all required verifiable evidence is presented with the application a straightforward application can be processed within a week.

All staff are trained to manage enquiries although one staff member is the key reference point and information channel.

The AVBC has received many warm responses from candidates in this process, mainly relating to the energy put in to communicating requirements, networking with support agencies, finding mentoring for those needing to gain local skills upgrading, and generally listening to their stories with empathy. Our staff have many years experience dealing with the range of English language skills and abilities of applicants and bureaucratic hurdles that are commonly encountered.

## **Response to the Terms of Reference**

### **1. Current arrangements for overseas skills recognition and associated issues of licensing and registration for:**

#### Skills stream migrants who obtain assessment prior to migrating

“A” (see above) if can obtain registration from a State or Territory registration authority

“B” (see above) migrants are required to complete the National Veterinary Examination. Visa restrictions can place significant hurdles in the way of practising under Australian conditions.

#### Families of skill stream migrants, etc seeking assessment/ registration/ upgrading after arrival

“A” as above

“B” applicants are able to practise their skills in Australian conditions, which is highly advantageous to gaining a positive skills assessment. Some registration boards will provide limited registration after the theory examination of the NVE is successfully completed. With limited registration candidates may practise under supervision. More on skills upgrading below.

#### Temporary residents

Type “A” can receive skills assessment within a fortnight providing all documents are supplied. Type “B”, providing they are in Australia for at least four months (depending on the time of the year), may have the opportunity to complete the MCQ and clinical phases of the examination.

## Australian citizens returning after significant time overseas, with overseas qualifications

Type "A" qualifications as above.

Type "B" qualifications as for family of skill stream migrants. Specialist qualifications gained overseas are assessed by the Advisory Committee on Registration of Veterinary Specialists who recommend that a candidate be registered as a specialist or not depending on the standard of qualifications acquired overseas. This process is separate to assessment of the primary "occupational" degree.

### **2. How do Australia's arrangements compare with those of other major immigration countries?**

Australia and New Zealand use almost the same examination at the theory stage and have similar examinations at the clinical stage of the respective NVE's. Cross Tasman examiner exchanges and examination comparisons ensure that the skills assessed are equivalent.

The AVBC (Australia and New Zealand) has studied the arrangements for assessing foreign veterinary graduates who wish to practise in North America. The AVBC is satisfied that the process is of sufficient quality and depth that veterinarians who have successfully completed this certification process should be considered for registration without further examination in Australia and New Zealand.

### **3. Identify areas where Australia's procedures can be improved including in terms of:**

- Communication of processes to users

General queries have decreased by 50% since development of the AVBC web site. Callers now have more specific questions, and because all staff at AVBC are experienced with the NVE and skills assessment, information is readily available. The website is controlled by staff and information can be updated immediately. The Candidates Handbook is published as required. Print runs are limited to minimise the risk of redundant information.

- Efficiency of processes

The form with its requirement for a large number of documents appears as a tedious bureaucratic barrier to some applicants. The requirements have been refined by the Board of Examiners who have pared the requirements to the most valid indicators of competency. Having established the requirements, the verified evidence is checked against AVBC standards. In most cases some unique follow up is needed. Despite the best communication methods, there is often misunderstanding which is to be expected given the range of English ability and cultural backgrounds involved. (And the inability of veterinarians to fill in forms.)

The National Veterinary Examination is expensive. It costs the same to administer as an examination held for a larger profession with large numbers of applicants, in that

- a) all questions in the MCQ need to be validated by trial testing by a minimum number of graduates and final year students
- b) the item bank of questions needs to be maintained
- c) examinations need to be produced

When the NVE was devolved to the profession by NOOSR, the databases ceased to be supported or maintained by NOOSR. Five years after devolution, new staff training and major software upgrades are required.

There is potential to utilise testing centres for the MCQ stage of the examination and this is currently under investigation.

AVBC is a member of a clearing house conducted by the Australian Pharmacy Examining Council (APEC). This saves staff time organising invigilators and examination venues.

The clinical examination is expensive to run because live animals and costly clinical facilities are required in the examination process. The AVBC has offset this cost in part by grouping candidates to optimise resources, and theoretically some may need to wait for up to two years for a chance to sit the clinical exam.

Because a great deal of work has been done in the area of accreditation within the veterinary profession, the AVBC is able to participate in and have confidence in the accreditation of veterinary schools by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (UK and Sth Africa). An Australian representative participated in the accreditation of the veterinary school in Dublin and its graduates (2004 and beyond) can be registered without further examination in Australia. The USA accreditation system has been studied and found to be equivalent to Australian accreditation standards. It certainly speeds the process for individual applicants if their veterinary school has been accredited by a recognised system.

#### Early identification and response to persons needing skills upgrading (eg bridging courses)

Although it is not difficult to identify those requiring skills upgrading, it is difficult to help candidates obtain training. The University of Queensland in the past provided a bridging course for overseas graduates and a high correlation between participation and clinical examination success was observed. However, currently there is no bridging course available in Australia because it has proven financially unviable for any university to provide the resources required for such low demand.

The University of Sydney runs a two year diploma targeted at overseas graduates. Coordinators have experienced low demand and completion rates. Murdoch University has indicated it will accept full fee paying candidates into some subject areas in the clinical years of its degree course.

Library access is available to varying degrees at the veterinary teaching universities. Candidates are informed of helpful resources in the Candidates Handbook and through the website.

Mentoring by practitioners is an excellent method for skills upgrading. However, insurance has proved to be a barrier. Because candidates are not able to obtain appropriate insurance, practitioners must bear the risk of allowing overseas trained vets to participate in their practices.

Awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers

The AVBC is unaware of any candidate who has not been able to obtain employment however we have no objective information.

Achieving greater consistency in recognition of qualifications for occupational licensing by state and territory regulators

The AVBC is pleased to report that, barring the occasional delay in state legislation, there is a very high level of unity in the recognition of qualifications for registration in all state and territory jurisdictions.

Alternative approaches to skills assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications

There is opportunity to widen the scope of accreditation of overseas veterinary degrees. A cost/ benefit analysis would need to be carried out. There may be some arrangement possible with a school which would benefit from having its graduates recognised in Australia.

Special visa considerations for those wishing to practise skills under Australian conditions would certainly improve the examination success rate.

Assistance with insurance and other incentives would encourage Australian practitioners to mentor overseas graduates.

A bridging course would have the highest impact on the success of NVE candidates.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Yours faithfully

Julie Strous  
Executive Officer