# Decision Regarding the Assessment of the Veterinary Study Programme Group

## Estonian University of Life Sciences

**13/06/2016**

**The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Veterinary study programme group in the integrated first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian University of Life Sciences in seven years, with a secondary condition**

On the basis of subsections $12^2$ (1) and 10 (4) of the Universities Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') and points 47 and 55 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes; the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of EKKA (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 24.09.2013 the Estonian University of Life Sciences submitted a request to EKKA to use the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) instead of EKKA, to perform the quality assessment of the Veterinary study programme group.

2. On 23.10.2013 the Council decided to grant the request by the Estonian University of Life Sciences and to recognise the EAEVE as a competent assessment authority to conduct the quality assessment of the Veterinary study programme group at the University.

3. The quality assessment of the study programme group was conducted by an assessment committee (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee') composed of the following members:

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| **Dr. Bertil Douw – Chair** | Visitor on Training in Clinical Sciences (Practitioner), DVM, Cork, Ireland |
| **Till Ruemenapf** | Professor, Visitor on Training in Basic Sciences, Vienna, Austria |
| **Niksa Lemo** | Professor, Visitor on Training in Clinical Sciences (Academic), Zagreb, Croatia |
| **Wim Kremer** | Professor, Visitor on Training in Animal Production, Utrecht, Netherlands |
| **Maria Fredriksson-Ahomaa** | Professor, Visitor on Training in Food Safety, University of Helsinki, Finland |
| **Pim Polak** | Student, Utrecht, Netherlands |
| **Dr. John Williams** | EAEVE Coordinator |

4. The Estonian University of Life Sciences submitted the following programmes for evaluation under this study programme group:

   **Veterinary Medicine (integrated BA/MSc)**
   **Veterinary Medicine in English (integrated BA/MSc)**

5. An assessment visit was made to the Estonian University of Life Sciences during 16–20.11.2015.

6. A final assessment report was completed on 11.05.2016 and on 20.05.2016 the European Committee of Veterinary Education (ECOVE), based on that report, adopted the decision to grant the status of 'CONDITIONAL APPROVAL' because the following major shortcoming was identified:

   ***Inadequate biosecurity and biosafety procedures in several areas, including controls for drug management and the necropsy hall.***

7. These documents were forwarded to EKKA on 27.05.2016. Both the assessment report by the EAEVE and the decision by ECOVE are integral parts of the decision by the Council, and are available on the EKKA website.

8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the final assessment report to the Council members on 31.05.2016.

9. The Council with 9 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 13.06.2016 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, recommendations and areas for improvement regarding the Veterinary study programme group in the integrated first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian University of life Sciences.

Strengths

- The University ensures sufficient needs-based funding for its Institute of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences, clearly taking into account the high cost of training in veterinary medicine while preparing the budget. Additional funds allocated from the Ministry of Rural Affairs would allow the University to increase expenditures on clinical training within the existing excellent infrastructure.
- The study programme is fully in accordance with Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications and as amended by 2013/55/EU.
- The general concept of teaching basic subjects and sciences is fully in accordance with international standards.
- Students are provided with a learning environment that facilitates achievement of the objectives of the study programme. Most of the buildings have been renovated within the last decade. Teaching facilities (lecture rooms, laboratories, facilities for practical teaching, including the anatomy, pathology and necropsy halls and clinics) are relatively new, in a very good condition and well equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. All of these facilities are kept exceptionally clean. The facilities for anatomy practical classes are excellent. A sufficient quantity of anatomical material is provided for teaching. The library is of good quality.
- Students are offered ample opportunities for practical clinical work. A well-equipped experimental farm is at the disposal of students and is used extensively for teaching and learning. The excellent clinical training facilities, combined with theoretical and practical courses in the programme and small working groups, create a suitable environment for the training of prophylactic and clinical treatment of diseases. Within the framework of clinical training, each student participates in at

least four herd health visits, which are great opportunities for students to encounter farm animal cases.

- The practical training in meat inspection, as well as food hygiene and technology, is very well organised.
- During the last seven years the University has actively developed its teaching methods, including e-learning courses in the Moodle environment. Teaching staff is encouraged to use more interactive methods and the University offers members training opportunities to further develop their teaching skills and methods.
- Good student progress proves the appropriate selections made at admission time. Approximately 70% of the students graduate within the standard time frame of 6 years; the average duration until graduation is about 6.5 years. The dropout rate is steadily decreasing.
- Student-staff ratio is very good (4.1).
- Practitioners are pleased with the variety and the content of in-service training courses which sometimes involve professional collaboration at an international level.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- According to the decision by ECOVE, the biosecurity and biosafety procedures are inadequate in several areas, including controls for drug management and the necropsy hall. On several occasions the Committee found that the drug cabinets/rooms in the clinics were freely accessible to anyone, and the usage of drugs was poorly documented (especially in the small animal clinic). In some laboratories, eyewashes for staff and students were absent or out of date. Emergency showers were also absent in some laboratories. In the opinion of the Committee the entrance into the necropsy hall is not adequate for safeguarding hygiene and preventing contamination. There were no written instructions or protocols on bio-security upon entering or leaving the necropsy hall. It is advisable to increase hygiene awareness among staff and students in the entire Institute, including building an effective hygiene barrier for the necropsy hall, and preparing clear instructions and protocols regarding biosecurity.
- In order to obtain additional sources of income, it is recommended that the Institute review its fees for clinical services and promote its facilities for diagnostic testing to veterinary practitioners.
- Given the importance of research in Estonian university funding and the responsibilities of veterinarians for animal welfare, a course in laboratory animal care and welfare should be included in the programme as a compulsory element. At least the basics of exotic animal and wildlife medicine, currently taught as an elective, should also be included in the compulsory part of the programme.
- Specialists (veterinary pharmacologists, virologists, bacteriologists) from other educational and research institutions should be more involved in the teaching process.
- It is advisable to apply interactive and problem-based teaching methods more extensively.
- An anaesthesiology service should be available to all relevant clinical departments (the equine clinic, ophthalmology).
- The laboratories for food microbiology and food hygiene are too small for a group of 15 students. At present, there are no facilities for meat technology laboratory work.
- Since 2013, the sixth year students can choose only between two field modules, not including Food Hygiene nor Veterinary Public Health. This may limit the choices of topics for students' final theses. To advocate for the Institute as a centre of excellence, and to obtain additional investments, it is recommended that the sixth year field module in Food Hygiene and Veterinary Public Health be reinstated in the programme.
- Visiting lecturers should be used more often for specific seminars in food and food production hygiene. The laboratory facilities should be improved.

- Some species (especially pigs, sheep, poultry, rabbits and exotic animals) are insufficiently represented in the teaching.
- It is essential for student learning to be provided with sufficient oral and written feedback on their works and performance during clinical rotations and internships.
- Oral examinations are usually conducted by only one examiner, which may, under certain conditions, jeopardise the objectivity of assessment results. It is advisable to conduct examinations with at least two examiners present. The Institute should also encourage students to write and defend a thesis instead of taking a final examination.
- Integration between Estonian- and English-language study groups should be supported.
- Mechanisms that facilitate identifying and helping students who experience difficulties with their studies should be formalised, and voluntary peer support should be encouraged.
- Being the only isolation unit for large animals and equines in Estonia, it should be upgraded, including the installation of a new ventilation system and facilities for collection, filtration and disinfection of effluents. The facilities for the care of wildlife and birds should also be improved.
- It is recommended that the Institute increase the number of clinical staff to ensure the students have appropriate availability and quality of practical teaching. At present all clinical teachers are also engaged in the teaching of theoretical subjects. The teaching staff should be provided with proper job descriptions, and it should be verified that all teaching, clinical, and management related responsibilities are adequately covered. Young staff members' internships or residencies abroad should be promoted.
- A diploma from the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS) should be recognised as a certificate of professional qualification when applying for academic positions of lecturer or associate professor at the University.
- In order to enhance its image and attract additional investments, the Institute should develop some 'areas of excellence' that are of international interest and offer trainings to a wider public.
- In order to involve students in research to a greater extent, final examinations should be replaced by research-based theses and students should be given sufficient time to prepare them.

**10.** Point 47 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', establishes that when assessing the quality of study programme groups, it is possible to take into account assessment reports approved by international professional organisations or other competent assessment authorities which include the analyses and opinions described in point 34. Point 55 of the same document prescribes that if it is possible to make a final decision that would be in accordance with this procedure, the Quality Assessment Council shall approve the assessment report, weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations pointed out in the assessment report, and then shall decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven years or, in justified cases, in less than seven years.

**11.** The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations referred to in point 9 of this document and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements if the University eliminates the following shortcoming:

***Inadequate biosecurity and biosafety procedures in several areas, including controls for drug management and the necropsy hall.***

**12.** The Council found that, without a secondary condition, the next quality assessment of the study programme group should be conducted in less than seven years, and

**DECIDED**

**to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Veterinary study programme group in the integrated first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian University of Life Sciences in seven years with the following secondary condition:**

**No later than 13.06.2018, the Estonian University of Life Sciences shall submit to the Council an overview of activities for eliminating the shortcoming referred to under point 11 of this document along with the assessment by ECOVE on the elimination of the shortcoming.**

The Council also proposes that, no later than 13.06.2018, the Estonian University of Life Sciences submit an action plan to EKKA on how the University is handling the other areas for improvement and recommendations detailed in the EAEVE assessment report.

The decision was adopted by 9 votes in favour. Against 0.

**13.** A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. A judicial challenge to the decision may be submitted within 30 days after its delivery, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

**Tõnu Meidla**
**Chair of the Council**

**Hillar Bauman**
**Secretary of the Council**