

Submission to University Accord Review August 2023

I am a veterinary private practitioner and have been closely involved with Skills Impact as a member of the Animal Care and Management Industry Reference Committee (AMC IRC) which is now evolved into the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) organisation responsible for Vocational Education and Training (VET) tertiary training. I have worked as a tutor at Veterinary schools, been on the Veterinary Schools Accreditation Committee (VSAC) evaluating the appropriateness of veterinary training and a lecturer in Vets Beyond Borders programme teaching Indian Veterinarians aseptic surgery. While not an academic, I have been an active member of the profession attempting to promote quality education of veterinarians so they can fulfill their duties in a practical and fulfilling manner that gives job satisfaction and improves animal welfare without creating wellness issues.

The book Rethinking Tertiary Education should be closely studied by the decision makers who will be managing the changes to be implemented when the Education System of Australia is rethought. It is by harmonising the two streams of VET and academic Knowledge acquisition that we will restore balance in society. Civilised society cannot function without people with practical skills doing all the routine everyday jobs required to keep our societies functioning. These are just as important as the tasks being done by the “clever” people, and they should not be treated by society as second-class citizens.

The Education system is currently producing graduates who treat knowledge as a greater path to success than Skills or Applications. The John Dawkins changes in 1987 decreased the value of practical skills in the eyes of the public by tripling the number of universities and crippling TAFE. It is past time the entire system was harmonised to become a unified whole. The use of HECS (now HELP) went a long way to develop the financial viability of universities. It is now time to recognise that the same outcome is possible if the system is extended to VET qualifications.

To increase opportunities for First Nations people it is necessary to have communities in rural and regional areas that are sufficiently large to support campuses. The first step to achieving this will be to immediately cease the practice of “Fly in Fly out” which is depriving source communities of social cohesion and depriving mining communities of social services because everyone there is only temporary. The profits of mining companies should be placed behind the need to develop Australia’s entire continent not just the coastal cities.

Peter Shergold and David Gonski have been marketing the concept of using tertiary campuses for combining both VET and Knowledge acquisition from Cert III to PhD. There is no lack of infrastructure present in Australia to implement every possible qualification desired by society. The limitations currently preventing this are political and bureaucratic so should be surmountable. Making decisions about Tertiary education without considering implications on Secondary and even Primary education would in my opinion be short sighted. So, the use of apprenticeships and training for younger secondary school students who have demonstrated in earlier years their lack of academic ability should be encouraged as being just as valuable as knowledge acquisition. The financial help given to Degree and Diploma students should extend to these students as well.

In the book Rethinking Tertiary Education there are extensive chapters discussing the financing of Universities and TAFE Colleges. There is no mention of the elephant in the room the Administrative Costs of these campuses. I would recommend that the committees making decisions should be investigating the differences in administrative costs and their impact on research and teaching on the different campuses.

References: -



Rethinking Tertiary
Education 14 May 20

[Rethinking Veterinary Education - Discussion Paper \(vsanz.org\)](#)

[2020 Gonski-Shergold in the same sentence: Bringing higher and vocational education together \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

[Day One Competencies - AVBC](#)

Appendix

Veterinary Science makes a very good case study on how professions have changed since the late twentieth century and where unifying the tertiary education system can produce better outcomes for both veterinarians, para-professionals and the animals they service.

Veterinary Science used to be the most practical of the professions but today has become so theoretical, graduates are demonstrating their lack of common sense, and ability to find practical solutions to veterinary problems to the detriment of animal welfare. Animals are suffering because veterinarians are no longer taught practical veterinary science and emerge from school as incapable surgeons. Surgery is a skill that requires at least 6 years to develop. The training starts with instrument handling skills by dissecting preserved specimens, develops later by operating on anaesthetised live animals which subsequently do not wake up, but are humanely killed while under anaesthetic. The final stage involves simple operations on live animals under skilled veterinary supervision. This training is not happening because the animal liberation movement have been successful in minimising the ethical use of animals in training of veterinarians. Today veterinarians are training on paying clients animals and the standard of general surgery is very unproductive. For example - Old vet spey 6 cats/hour compared with young vet 1 cat/hour. This lack of productivity goes a long way to explaining the lack of profitability in veterinary practice and why low wages are paid.

At the time of the Dawkins changes the animal welfare lobby were agitating to prevent the use of animals in research, teaching, and commerce. Universities, Research Institutes, and Veterinary schools responded by forming Animal Ethics Committees (AECs.) and decreased the use of animals in teaching. This lessened the exposure of veterinary students to normal animal behaviours, animal handling techniques, and manipulative skills in handling dissecting instruments. So, when reaching the later years of training, the standard of surgical techniques plummeted. Today AECs allow the use of animals for teaching purposes but vet schools are not maximizing the opportunities they present.

Veterinary Science used to be considered the most practical and best problem-solving profession because so little was known about the diseases and how to treat them. Vets were expected to use their common sense, practical skills and senses of sight, hearing, touch and smell together with knowledge gained through study and experience to solve any issue. This resulted in about 87% of cases being resolved (1967 data).

On facing the public many young vets demonstrate to the client their inability to handle distressed and frightened animals both large and small. This does not bring comfort to the client and faith in veterinary skills if the vet does not even know as much as the client about animal behaviour.

Exposing these students to VET courses being held on the same campus will enable them to gain practical skills not currently taught at vet school.

These days graduates are taught how to use sophisticated technologies to diagnose disease which is very high cost and is resulting in veterinary fees being too high for most clients to be able to afford on a regular or even intermittent basis. The success rates of treatments have not significantly changed from before the use of modern technologies. In 2023 the Australian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC) released their Day One expectations of a graduate veterinarian which comprehensively covers all aspects of services but does not expect them to be even able to spey a cat. This is expected to happen on paying clients animals under the supervision of an experienced veterinarian. (This is like the intern system conducted by the medical profession) The difference between the two professions is that Veterinarians do not publicly acknowledge the existence of the need for internships.

By the late 1990s veterinary science overtook medicine as being the most difficult undergraduate course to enter so prospective graduates were selected from the highest scoring ATAR results at high school. This has transformed the profession from being highly practical to mostly theoretical in delivery of solutions to veterinary problems. It has also changed the gender balance from mainly male to mainly female. It has also made it very difficult for these graduates to handle real life problems in veterinary practice. These students have never failed an examination in their life. They graduate mostly with an honours degree, and, when faced with upset clients and inadequate training, find themselves unhappy and leave veterinary practice with all sorts of wellness issues.

These complicated causes are causing veterinary practice closures, increased suicide rates, decreased profitability, and low wages for the best academic minds in the country. Simultaneously the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) and Veterinary Practitioner Boards (VPBs) are resisting the use of very well qualified para-professionals who can deliver veterinary services because “only veterinarians have the intellectual capacity to perform these services” (Letters to the Editor AVJ 2008 Authors Liyou, Twentyman, Wilson, and Fitzpatrick) It is only in 2023 in a report to the NSW Parliament that the AVA has recommended regulation of the entire Veterinary Team which translated means regulating veterinary nurses and veterinary technologists. (Western Australia regulated veterinary nurses 30 years ago but it hasn’t happened in other States)

Changing restrictive current legislation to allow properly qualified Cert IV and Diploma animal care graduates, who are fully regulated, can enlarge the workforce treating animals, and leave the decimated veterinarian numbers to concentrate on the highly technical specialist services they currently wish to practice and continue to charge high prices for. This will result in more clients being able to source a lower cost service for their animals with a better outcome than they are currently receiving. Governments removing student debt loans from veterinarians who have been inadequately trained is not the best answer to the profession’s problems. It would be much better to have VET and Knowledge acquisition courses being held alongside each other so students can choose which suits them better and change midstream if needed.

Currently it is estimated that the retirement of one old vet requires more than eight new graduates to replace them. The fact that Veterinary Science is the most expensive of all tertiary courses to deliver makes it a priority to get right as this will have a significant difference to the subsidies required to be supplied by government.

Changing “Fly-In, Fly-out’ legislation will increase regional populations with their associated expanded services so first nations peoples and other national groups will have greater access to services at a much lower cost to government.

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