

28 August 2023

Australian Universities Accord Panel
By online submission

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand submission

Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand (VSANZ) thanks the Accord Panel for the opportunity to comment on its interim report. Attached to our previous submission, made in response to the Panel's discussion paper, we provided the final report of our own review into the veterinary science education capability of Australia and New Zealand ('Veterinary Education Review'). We highlighted nine of the 25 recommendations of the Review that we felt were of greatest relevance to the Accord's deliberations.

VSANZ writes to express our support for the broad intent of the Accord Panel's interim report, and for a number of specific 'potential proposals' flagged by the Panel for inclusion in the final report. Specifically:

Section 2.2 Meeting Australia's future skills needs

Section 2.2.2 Serving the professions

The Panel has rightly identified the 'significant skills shortages' in 'critical professions'. VSANZ and the Australian Veterinary Association both identified the serious shortage of veterinarians in Australia in our earlier submissions to the Accord. This is a global problem and seems to reflect both supply and retention issues. The underfunding of veterinary education (see below) presents the real risk that one or more veterinary schools will close, exacerbating the shortage of veterinarians.

We agree with the summary dot points at the bottom of page 47, including recognition of the importance of professional bodies as stakeholders in higher education. The point that 'changing technologies, including artificial intelligence, will impact on both the nature of professional skills and the delivery of education for these occupations' is also notable. This insight provides support for increased focus on outcomes rather than inputs when managing the accreditation of professional courses such as Veterinary Science.

Section 2.2.4 Supporting students to undertake placements

We noted, in our previous submission, the heavy reliance of the veterinary education system on industry to provide placements for students. Veterinary schools do provide their own clinical training to students. However, students must also complete placements with private veterinary practices (and

on farms in the pre-clinical years). These extramural studies are required under the accreditation standards of the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council.

The reliance of schools on extramural partners has grown and become increasingly challenging for schools to manage as student cohorts have grown in size and as expectations for managing, supporting, and documenting student learning experiences have also grown.

Both farmers and veterinary practice owners make enormous and largely unpaid contributions to the training of veterinarians. Recognising the particularly acute shortage of veterinarians in rural practice, the Veterinary Education Review recommended that 'Governments consider contracting a network of rural veterinary practices to provide teaching and government services in the regions – including the teaching of livestock clinical practice and government veterinary services'. The Review also recommended that 'Governments consider providing clinical training loadings [paid to the university] for a designated number of veterinary students' clinical training in priority areas'.

As the interim report observes, students too incur significant costs, as they must pay for their own travel and accommodation, as well as forgoing the opportunity to earn income from part-time employment while they are travelling. VSANZ is highly supportive of any initiatives to support students undertaking industry placements.

We also note and endorse the sentiments of section 2.2.4.1 of the interim report, 'that options to enter and stay in valued occupations should be explored. One example could include covering a proportion of HELP debt for every year they stay'. The Veterinary Education Review made a similar recommendation, that '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'.

Section 2.2.5 Increased industry engagement in learning

VSANZ notes and supports the Panel's commentary on new models of work integrated learning such as Advanced Apprenticeships. Again, we refer to a recommendation of the Veterinary Education Review, namely that 'Veterinary professional associations and schools explore veterinary apprenticeship models which might be relevant to Australasia and the cost-sharing options which might facilitate them'.

Section 3.3. Sustainable funding and financing

3.3.1 Guiding principles for a new funding model

VSANZ believes that the guiding principles developed by the Panel provide a sound basis for the design of a new funding model. All are relevant, but in particular we commend the principles 'the cost of university activities (teaching, research and community engagement) should be accurately measured and made transparent', 'universities receive sufficient funding to produce world-class education and research and to be effective contributors to their communities', and 'both collaboration and competition mechanisms are features of the funding system'.

3.3.4.2 Funding a high-quality education, and

3.3.4.3 Discipline funding rates

From the VSANZ perspective, these are the most critical sections of the review.

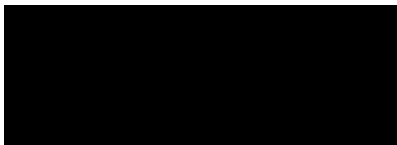
Figure 3.3-3 shows in stark relief the underfunding of veterinary education. Veterinary science is at the extreme right of the graph. As we noted in our previous submission, in 2018 the average cost to deliver the veterinary undergraduate course, per Equivalent Full Time Student Load (EFTSL), was 148% of the funding received by the university from government and student fees for each domestic student. In 2019-20 the ratio had dropped to 135%, but this was likely a temporary fall due to pandemic-related under-expenditure. Veterinary schools continue to operate only because they are cross-subsidised by their universities from the surpluses generated by other courses.

The Veterinary Education Review recommended that 'The Australian Government 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'.

We wholeheartedly endorse the statement in the interim report that 'To ensure all higher education students receive a high-quality education, it is important that per-place funding rates are appropriate...These funding rates need to be informed by accurate and ongoing analysis of costs and resourcing requirements and be sufficient to support continued improvement in quality'. Further, we support the Panel's potential proposals for 'exploring new and regular approaches to activity-based costing and pricing to provide transparent and independent advice in relation to funding and expenditure', and to 'regularly revise pricing to reflect changes in teaching and research costs and delivery and promote efficiency and quality outcomes.'

VSANZ thanks the Accord Panel for a very promising interim report and looks forward to seeing the detail of the final report.

Yours sincerely



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Chair, VSANZ