



FEDERATION OF VETERINARIANS OF EUROPE

## Press Release

1 April 2006

### European Conference on Veterinary Education

A conference on veterinary education in Europe was held on 29 and 30 March in Brussels, organised jointly by the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and the European Commission DG Enlargement (TAIEX).

Over 150 participants from 35 countries attended the meeting, at which delegates discussed topics such as the minimum training requirements for veterinary studies, the future needs for veterinary education and the so-called 'Bologna declaration' which paves the way for the introduction of a Bachelor/Master system for all university studies, including veterinary medicine.

*'The main objectives of the so-called Bologna declaration, signed in 1999 by 29 European countries, are to improve the visibility of European higher education on a global scale and to obtain increased homogeneity and flexibility,* explained Freddy Coignoul (Veterinary Faculty of Liège, Belgium). One of the original objectives of this declaration was the *'adoption of a system with two major cycles'*, commonly known as the 'Bachelor's' and 'Master's' degrees.

The presentations and discussions of the conference revealed an overall lack of consistency in the definition of the terms used across Europe. The currently used Bachelor's degree in veterinary medicine in the UK for example, is equivalent to the final degree upon qualification as a veterinary surgeon – apart from Cambridge, where a Bachelor's degree is obtained after the first three years and a Master's degree after six years. Also the length of time needed for the Bachelor's degree is not the same in every country: although the recommended number of credits (180) for the basic degree would equal three years' full-time study, some faculties have opted for 240 credits (4 years). Several teaching establishments (including Utrecht, Ghent, Brno...) have already prepared an adjustment of their curriculum to the Bologna requirements– but not necessarily in the same manner. Unfortunately, this would seem to undermine the initial goal of cross-border flexibility.

#### **Bachelor's: an academic degree**

Although the Bologna declaration suggests that the Bachelor's degree be *'relevant to the labour market'*, the majority of delegates agreed that, in the case of veterinary studies, it should be considered a purely academic degree without professional value on its own. In other words, the Bachelor's degree would be a first step in obtaining the final veterinary qualification. Some suggested that the adjective 'veterinary' be

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dropped from the Bachelor's degree concerned to avoid confusion, while others argued that it would make it clearer.

Delegates agreed that the second (Master's) level of veterinary education should meet the so-called 'day-one' skills. Peter van Beukelen (Utrecht Veterinary Faculty) presented a document listing in great detail the type and level of day-one skills expected from new graduates at his faculty.

The evolution of the profession over the past decades has shown that the list of subjects leading to these skills and knowledge urgently needs to be updated. The current list dates from the Directives of 1978<sup>1</sup>, and subjects like veterinary public health in all its aspects, veterinary research, epidemiology and management should be included in the annex of the Directive on professional recognition<sup>2</sup>.

Nancy De Briyne, FVE's Deputy Executive Director, furthermore underlined the importance that all EU faculties should allow students to achieve these day-one skills. *'The FVE is concerned that recent evaluation visits have shown that certain veterinary teaching establishments do not meet the current minimum training requirements.'*

### **Tracking: pros and cons**

Regarding the so-called tracking – an in-depth training in certain disciplines or species towards the end of the undergraduate course — Karin Östenson (Swedish Veterinary Association) argued that the core curriculum should lead to a basic veterinary competence — *'producing an omnipotent rather than an omnicompetent veterinarian'*. The advanced study of certain subjects ('tracking') *'should not be obtained at the expense of this basic competence'*. On the other hand, teaching establishments such as the Utrecht Veterinary Faculty, proposed a curriculum that required 'tracking' choices at the very start of the undergraduate studies.

Donal Walsh (Journal of Veterinary Education) noted that similar discussions were ongoing in the United States. *'In the US, some Veterinary Schools supply undergraduate tracking, while others prefer omnicompetency for all graduates, The Veterinary College at Davis, one of the finest veterinary teaching establishments in the US, has a long-standing history of undergraduate tracking. Yet experience has shown that this does not have a negative impact on the omnicompetence of graduates'*, he added.

### **Starting point**

*'A difference should be made between qualifying as a veterinary surgeon and obtaining the licence to practice'*, stressed Stephen Ware (Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, UK). Currently, this licence could be obtained in a straightforward manner in the UK, and was linked to membership of the RCVS. However, changes were underway that might lead to a so-called professional development phase (PDP) which would give support to new graduates during their first year in practice. Eventually, the completion of this additional practical 'PDP-year' could be linked to a licence to practice, he added.

FVE president Tjeerd Jorna congratulated participants on the highly informative meeting and the positive interaction. It was the first time that such a large number of representatives from different backgrounds – academia, professional bodies, policy makers, veterinary specialists and the European Commission – had met to discuss

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<sup>1</sup> Directives 78/1026/EEC, 78/1027/EEC and 78/1028/EEC, to be repealed by Directive 2005/36/EC on 20 October 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Directive 2005/36/EC of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications

veterinary education. But although education remains a national prerogative in the European Union and falls under the subsidiarity principle, a too diverse interpretation of the Bologna declaration would seem to undermine its initial objective.

The Conference should therefore be seen as a starting point, to be followed up by meetings of the European Coordinating Committee on Veterinary Training. The ECCVT is a platform that includes the FVE, the European Association of Establishments of Veterinary Education (EAEVE) and the European Board for Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS). EAEVE will hold a follow-up meeting on the same subject in June.

*Notes for Editors:*

1. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of 43 veterinary organisations from 36 European countries, representing a total of around 200 000 veterinarians.
2. For further information, consult the fve website <http://www.fve.org> or contact the FVE Secretariat on tel +32 2 533 70 20 or by e-mail to [info@fve.org](mailto:info@fve.org)
3. TAIEX is the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument of the Institution Building unit of Directorate-General Enlargement of the European Commission. In operation since 1996, TAIEX provides centrally managed short-term technical assistance in the field of approximation, application and enforcement of legislation. TAIEX offers its services to new Member States, candidates for accession to the European Union, and the countries of the Western Balkans.
4. All presentations given during the conference can be downloaded from the FVE web site ([www.fve.org](http://www.fve.org)).