

Current approaches to veterinary school accreditation in Latin America

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Summary

This paper describes the development of veterinary school accreditation in Mexico and six South American countries. There is wide variation in the organisation of accreditation systems between countries, with different levels of involvement of national veterinary associations on the definition and/or operation of accreditation processes. There is also variation in the specificity of the standards used to evaluate veterinary education. In addition, the extent of implementation of accreditation mechanisms ranges from a country such as Mexico, where the first accreditation of a veterinary programme occurred more than ten years ago (there are now 15 accredited programmes), to countries such as Peru and Bolivia, which have not yet implemented an accreditation process for veterinary schools.

Keywords

Accreditation – Consejo Nacional de Educación de la Medicina Veterinaria y Zootecnia – Consejo Panamericano de Educación en las Ciencias Veterinarias – Curriculum – Latin America – Mexico – South America – Veterinary accreditation.

Introduction

The United States of America (USA) has a long tradition of school evaluation and accreditation. In the case of veterinary medicine, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) started evaluating schools through the Committee on Intelligence and Education in 1906. This process was later transformed into an accreditation system that, since 1946, has been conducted by the AVMA Council on Education (1). As AVMA states:

‘Through the accreditation process the AVMA Council on Education is fully dedicated to protecting the rights of the students, assisting the schools/colleges to improve veterinary medical education, and assuring the public that accredited programs provide a quality education’ (1).

In Latin America, by contrast, the evaluation and accreditation of professional schools is a recent development that, in some countries, started in the early 1990s, and in others even later (10). Mexico was the first

Latin American country to establish an accreditation system for veterinary programmes. The organisation that implements the process is the National Council of Veterinary Education (CONEVET), which has also had a strong influence on the development of accreditation processes in other Latin American countries (7). For this reason, the author first describes the development and present status of accreditation in Mexico and then examines the accreditation process in Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Bolivia, in order of their experience in accrediting veterinary programmes.

Mexico

The catalyst for initiating a system to evaluate higher education programmes in Mexico was the expansion of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to include services. In 1989, due to the need to demonstrate the adequacy of professional education, Mexico created the National Commission for the Evaluation of Higher Education,

which, in turn, established the Inter-institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CIEES) in 1991 (13). This body immediately began a diagnostic evaluation of educational programmes that included self-evaluation and a diagnostic evaluative visit by academic peers. Over the next eight years, CIEES assessed most veterinary programmes in Mexico, and it became evident that there was great variation in the quality and efficacy of the various courses of study. However, those CIEES evaluations were not yet linked to an accreditation process. Their influence was limited to providing information on the programme being evaluated to the authorities (13).

The North American Free Trade Agreement prompted further action, since Annex 1210.5 on 'Professional services' called upon the 'Parties' (Canada, the USA and Mexico) to 'encourage the relevant bodies in their respective territories to develop mutually acceptable standards and criteria for licensing and certification of professional service providers, and to provide recommendations on mutual recognition', including standards and criteria related to professional certification and to accreditation of schools or academic programmes (12).

Veterinary medicine was the first profession to react to this call, through the concerted action of the Mexican Federation of Veterinary Associations (the professional organisation that represents Mexican veterinarians) and the Mexican Association of Veterinary Schools. In 1995 these two organisations combined to create the National Council of Veterinary Education (CONEVET). The new organisation was given the mandate to accredit veterinary programmes and certify veterinarians (13). Thus, veterinary medicine was the first profession in Mexico to have an accrediting body, years before the Mexican Government devised a procedure for recognising accreditation processes.

Since its creation, CONEVET has aimed to adhere to the best international practices. To do so, it has established close contacts with AVMA, the European Association of Establishments of Veterinary Education and the veterinary associations of several other Latin American countries. It has implemented the practice of inviting international observers to all of its accreditation site-visits, and sends observers to accreditation processes in North America, Europe and, most recently, South America, as these processes were implemented in this region. In addition, CONEVET has become a major promoter of international meetings on veterinary education (2).

In 1997, CONEVET issued its first accreditation of a veterinary programme. Since that year, 16 more programmes have been evaluated. At the time of writing,

15 schools have been accredited. (Indeed, several have been re-accredited, after completion of a five-year cycle as accredited schools.) Three schools that underwent evaluation were denied subsequent accreditation.

The organisation and processes of CONEVET have been described elsewhere (2). In essence, 114 indicators are used to evaluate study programmes. These are grouped into twelve standards:

- foundations
- curriculum
- organisation
- educational processes
- students
- faculty
- continuing education
- research
- infrastructure
- clinical and animal production resources
- finances
- services to society (5).

The process involves self-evaluation by the school, a visit to the site, a report of the visit, and a decision by the accreditation committee, with a system for reconsideration and appeal. Accreditation is granted for five years (5).

During the first five years of CONEVET, there was no system for officially recognising accrediting bodies in Mexico. Thus, accreditations granted by CONEVET served only as *bona fide* feedback to veterinary schools, and as a source of information to prospective veterinary students and the public. However, in the year 2000, the Ministry of Education, the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education, the National Academy of Sciences, and several professional associations (including the Mexican Veterinary Association) created the Council for Accreditation of Higher Education (COPAES). This body is officially recognised by the Ministry of Education as the organisation that recognises accreditation bodies, such as CONEVET (10). The Ministry of Education has also created several funding programmes that are directly linked to the accreditation status of educational programmes, thus giving a strong impetus to the accreditation process.

When COPAES was created, CONEVET was the most experienced and sophisticated accrediting body in Mexico. As a result, the procedures and standards developed by CONEVET were, in great measure, adopted by COPAES. For the same reason, CONEVET was the first accreditation body accorded recognition by COPAES (2). Today, COPAES recognises 23 accrediting bodies that cover the whole spectrum of higher education (www.copaes.org.mx).

As a result of its experience and international status, the procedures and standards of CONEVET were also adopted

by the Pan American Association of Veterinary Medicine (PANVET), the organisation that coordinates the national veterinary medical associations of the American continent, and the Pan American Federation of Veterinary Schools. These two organisations combined to create the Pan American Council of Veterinary Education (COPEVET), which adopted a professional-academic approach similar to that of CONEVET, but at the pan-American level. Thus, COPEVET was given the task of overseeing continental efforts at school accreditation, professional certification and curricular harmonisation (6). The standards and processes of CONEVET were also used to define, in great measure, the criteria used by COPEVET to recognise national veterinary accreditation bodies (6).

Chile

In 1999, the Chilean Government created the National Commission for Pre-grade Accreditation (CNAP), a public body that advised the Ministry of Education. The commission was aided in its functions by technical committees, such as the Technical Committee on Veterinary Medicine. The commission announced its accreditation process for veterinary schools in the year 2001 (9), and – between 2003 and 2006 – four veterinary schools were accredited. However, CNAP was criticised for being a governmental organisation with insufficient independence. This was one of the primary reasons that prevented it from being recognised by COPEVET.

In 2006, the Chilean Government passed the Act for Higher Education Assurance (4), which, in turn, prompted the establishment of the National Commission for Accreditation (CNA) (www.cnachile.cl). The CNA is an autonomous organisation which authorises accreditation agencies. These accreditation agencies can be Chilean, from a foreign country or an international organisation, and each agency can accredit higher education programmes from as many areas as it is authorised to do so. The first six such agencies were authorised between May and August 2008. Two of these agencies are authorised to accredit veterinary programmes (www.cnachile.cl). No veterinary accreditation process has yet been conducted under the new law.

Some problems can be perceived with the new Chilean process. First there is the problem of representation. None of the 15 members of CNA is a veterinarian, although other professions are quite extensively represented (for example, four members are engineers, two are lawyers and two are medical doctors). Secondly, the authorised agencies are private or non-governmental enterprises that have no formal links with professional associations, thus they may well lack understanding of the particular features of any given profession. In addition, the site visits are carried out

by teams composed of people from various professions. Thus, teams visiting a veterinary school can, for example, include agronomists or other such professionals. In contrast to the American and Mexican systems, the accreditation process for veterinary schools in Chile does not have the strong participation of the national veterinary associations. On the positive side, however, evaluations are based on standards specifically developed for each profession by a technical committee composed of distinguished members of the profession.

One recent development has been an initiative to create a National Council of Veterinary Education, modelled on CONEVET in Mexico. This council would then apply for authorisation as an accreditation agency specifically for veterinary medicine. If this initiative is pursued and is successful, Chile will have an accreditation body that conforms to COPEVET recommendations.

Colombia

The Colombian National Council of Accreditation (CNA) was established by legislation in 1992. The council conducts the accreditation process, but accreditation itself is granted by the Ministry of National Education. Thus, the whole system can be described as a system of governmental accreditation. The first accreditation of a veterinary programme occurred in 1999 and, as of 2009, ten veterinary programmes have been accredited. As in the case of Chile, the Colombian system is not directed by professional associations. Authority rests on the CNA, which currently comprises two physicists, a philosopher, two sociologists and a medical doctor. Furthermore, the council uses general guidelines to accredit programmes (14), so that there are no specific standards for veterinary medicine. On the positive side, the site-visit teams are always composed of distinguished members of the same profession as the study programme under evaluation.

Argentina

The National Commission of University Evaluation and Accreditation (CONEAU) was established in 1995 by the Act of Higher Education, 24.521. The standards for accrediting veterinary programmes were established by Resolution 1034 of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology on 7 September 2005 (11). These standards are specific for veterinary programmes and compatible with the procedure recommended by COPEVET for veterinary accreditation bodies in Latin American countries. A special complication of the accreditation process in Argentina is that the legislation requires that all the programmes of a given discipline must be evaluated

simultaneously. Thus, multiple site-visit teams must be coordinated and must undertake the process at the same time. The first accreditation procedure for veterinary programmes was conducted during 2007.

Brazil

Before 2003, higher education in Brazil was primarily evaluated through National Examinations for graduates from every school. The results obtained by graduates in any given discipline from the various institutions were then compared to measure the relative efficiency of the different schools. In 2004, Brazil created the National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education, which proposed an assessment procedure that included self-evaluation and external evaluations (8), coordinated by the National Commission of Evaluation. The following years were devoted to developing the methodology for evaluation, and external evaluations were scheduled to begin at the end of 2008. At the time of writing (September, 2009), no further information could be found about evaluations of veterinary programmes.

Peru

In the year 2005, following the model of CONEVET in Mexico, the Peruvian Association of Veterinary Schools and the Peruvian Association of Veterinary Medicine combined to create the National Council of Veterinary Education of Peru (CONEVET-Peru) (www.cmvpe.org.pe/images/conevet_peru_b.jpg). In May 2006, Peru passed legislation for a National System of Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Certification of Education. This Act established the Council of Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Certification of Higher Education (CONEAU), which finally became operational in November 2007 (3). Since CONEAU is mandated by the act to register specialised accreditation bodies, CONEVET-Peru could, at least in theory, become the authorised accreditation body for veterinary medicine programmes in Peru.

Bolivia

Bolivia does not yet have a national system for evaluating and accrediting higher education programmes.



Les diverses modalités d'agrément des écoles vétérinaires en Amérique latine

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Résumé

Cet article décrit l'évolution des procédures d'agrément des écoles vétérinaires au Mexique ainsi que dans six pays d'Amérique du Sud. L'organisation des systèmes d'accréditation varie beaucoup d'un pays à l'autre, ainsi que le niveau de participation des associations vétérinaires nationales dans la définition ou la mise en œuvre des procédures d'agrément. Les normes spécifiques utilisées par les pays pour évaluer l'enseignement vétérinaire sont également très différentes. De même, la mise en œuvre des mécanismes d'agrément est plus ou moins aboutie selon les pays : ainsi, au Mexique, le premier programme vétérinaire a été agréé il y a plus de dix ans et il existe aujourd'hui 15 programmes agréés, tandis que des pays comme le Pérou ou la Bolivie n'ont pas encore mis en œuvre de programme d'accréditation de leurs écoles vétérinaires.

Mots-clés

Accréditation vétérinaire – Agrément – Amérique latine – Amérique du Sud – Consejo Nacional de Educación de la Medicina Veterinaria y Zootecnia – Consejo Panamericano de Educación en las Ciencias Veterinarias – Mexique – Programme d'enseignement.



Líneas de trabajo actuales en cuanto a homologación de estudios veterinarios en América Latina

L. Zarco

Resumen

El autor describe el proceso de homologación de las facultades de veterinaria en México y seis países sudamericanos. Los sistemas de homologación están organizados de forma muy diversa en los distintos países, con diferentes niveles de participación de los colegios nacionales de veterinarios a la hora de instituir y/o aplicar este tipo de procesos. También son muy variables los criterios utilizados para evaluar la enseñanza veterinaria. Además, el grado de implantación de mecanismos de homologación varía desde casos como el de México, donde hace más de diez años que se homologó el primer programa de estudios veterinarios (actualmente hay 15 de ellos homologados), hasta el caso de países como Perú o Bolivia, que todavía no han instaurado ningún tipo de proceso de homologación.

Palabras clave

América Latina – América del Sur – Consejo Nacional de Educación de la Medicina Veterinaria y Zootecnia – Consejo Panamericano de Educación en las Ciencias Veterinarias – Homologación de estudios veterinarios – México – Programa de estudios.

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