ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI
FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

Re-visitation SER (RSER)

THESSALONIKI MARCH 2022

Contents of the RSER

Introduction

The last EAEVE Visitation at the School of Veterinary Medicine of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (SVMT) took place from 11th to 15th of October 2021. It was done by physical presence of a designated Visitation Team with experienced experts.

The Visitation Team reported their findings to ECOVE that delivered a Final Report to SVMT in December 2021.

As stated in the Executive Summary of the Final Report, the SVMT delivered a generally well written and comprehensive SER, albeit with certain inaccuracies in some of the data provided. Nevertheless, areas worthy of praise were highlighted in the Report, including the QA approach at university level, the highly qualified teaching and support staff committed to continuous improvement for the benefit of students, the excellent training of students in Food Safety and Quality, Food Technology, and Hygiene and Technology of Milk and Dairy Products, the proportion of qualified veterinarians involved in teaching, and the number of European specialists, particularly in disciplines of food producing animals.

The Final ECOVE report identified the following three major deficiencies:

1. Non-compliance with Substandard 4.6 because of overall insufficient application of the relevant legislation on health, safety, biosecurity and EU animal welfare and care standards.
2. Non-compliance with Substandard 5.2 because of insufficient hands-on training of students in farm animal clinics under the supervision of academic staff.
3. Non-compliance with Substandard 9.2 because the number of qualified teaching and support staff is insufficient in Clinical Sciences, especially in equines, to secure a group small enough to guarantee appropriate training of students.

Furthermore, six minor deficiencies were also identified:

1. Partial compliance with Substandard 2.1 because of suboptimal financing.
2. Partial compliance with Substandard 3.1 because of the inaccurate data addressed in Table 3.1.2 of the SER regarding the hours of training in all groups of subjects addressed on p.20 of the SOP 2016 and listed in the Annex V.4.1 of the Directive 36/2005/EC in order to demonstrate compliance with the EU Directive.
3. Partial compliance with Substandard 5.1 because of insufficient number and variety of cadavers for hands-on training in Pathology and of equines in Propaedeutics.
4. Partial compliance with Substandard 8.9 because of the lack of a record of the individual skills acquired by the student within a logbook in farm animal clinic.
5. Partial compliance with Substandard 9.3 because postgraduate students used for training undergraduates do not receive proper training in teaching and assessment methods and they receive nil or small payment for delivering clinical teaching activities.
6. Partial compliance with Substandard 11.8 because of the suboptimal SER, which contains a number of inconsistencies and inaccuracies, and requires a substantial revision, since this document will be publicly available.

The SVMT, examined carefully all the points raised in the ECOVE final report regarding both major and minor deficiencies. Hence, following an intense internal consultation decided to request a Re-Visitation based on the continuous commitment for compliance with the ESEVT

Standards. The latter decision was also based on the fact that the SVMT had already commenced actions to rectify the shortcomings identified by the group of experts during their onsite visitation and then outlined in detail in the Visitation Draft B document.

In the current document (RSER), we provide a comprehensive description of all actions taken to address each point raised in the ECOVE final report. Regarding the identified major deficiencies, we describe the exact changes in structures, facilities, and procedures that have been done. Furthermore, we provide a detailed description of actions completed as well as those scheduled to correct the identified minor deficiencies.

Finally, we provide several documents as appendixes to RSER with supporting evidence to all changes that have been implemented as well as a revised SER (December 2021) containing corrections of all factual errors.

1. Correction of the Major Deficiencies

1.1. Major Deficiency 1: The VEE is not compliant with Substandard 4.6 because of overall insufficient application of the relevant legislation on health, safety, biosecurity and EU animal welfare and care standards.

1.1.1. Factual information

Five emergency eye wash stations with safety showers have been ordered and will be installed the second week of April in laboratories (Laboratories of Animal Nutrition, Pathology, Physiology, Biochemistry and Food Hygiene) where hazardous materials are being handled and such devices were missing. Signs will be placed to indicate their location. In the meantime, portable eye wash stations have been purchased and distributed to those laboratories where practical training of students involves handling of hazardous materials.

First-aid boxes have been installed in all laboratories and signs placed to indicate their location. First-aid boxes and fire extinguishers are checked and serviced on a regular basis by the Civil Protection and Environment Office of the University. Evacuation plans, EXIT signs, and vertical and horizontal signalization are now installed in all facilities where needed.

Expired consumables that are used for teaching purposes are now kept in designated cupboards and have been labelled “for teaching purpose only”. All vials and boxes of medical drugs that are subject to use are labelled with the date of opening (first use).

The Laboratory of Anatomy has purchased sodium chloride and is currently proceeding with the replacement of formaldehyde solution for the fixation of animal cadavers used in gross anatomy teaching. The alternative method employed involves the initial perfusion of cadavers in a saturated salt solution of sodium chloride (SSS) followed by immersion in the same embalming solution. For dissection classes, fresh cadavers will be used and then maintained after each practical session for 2 weeks in SSS in the cadaver refrigerator.

Blood donors are no longer housed in the Companion Animal Clinic. The Companion Animal Clinic has recently communicated and agreed to purchase blood products for transfusion purposes from an authorized animal Blood bank (BSA, Banco de Sangue Animal Lda, Portugal, www.bsanimal.co.uk).

Healthy companion animals are no longer housed in the Companion Animal Clinic for propaedeutic training. The Clinic signed agreements with Animal Charities that will provide healthy dogs and cats for propaedeutic training during the relevant (5^{th}) semester (Annex 1). The Clinic as a compensatory measure will undertake clinical examination, spays and neuters free of charge for those animals. Furthermore, the Companion Animal Clinic has arranged the hiring of three additional horses on a regular basis, so a total of four horses will be used for Propaedeutics. Those horses will be housed in the stables of the SVMT and will stay there throughout the duration of students’ training (Annex 2).

Finally, the necropsy room has been remodelled according to the EAEVE suggestions to improve and facilitate the working and teaching biosafety conditions. All corrective actions have been taken, including a separate entrance/exit for students, new changing rooms equipped with thirty-six lockers as well as coat hangers, banquettes, cleaning and disinfection devices and a brand-new necropsy table for large animals.

1.1.2. Comments

The training of SVMT students on biosafety issues, starting from the academic year 2022-2023, includes: i) two asynchronous e-learning seminars with General Guidelines for Biosafety Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), of mandatory attendance and examination, as prerequisite skill before the Laboratory and Clinical practical courses (at the beginning of the 1st and 6th academic semester, respectively) and ii) presentation of Specific SOPs concerning each Laboratory and Clinic (at the beginning of the respective practical courses).

For the collection, transportation and disposal of the biohazard and chemical wastes, SVMT follows an approved (General Assembly No 490/10-1-2012) "Health-Care Risk Waste Management Guidance Note" supported by contracts with licensed and specialized private companies signed by Aristotle University (Annex 3).

All biosafety guidelines and recommendations are available in the new page "Health and Safety" on the SVMT website. (https://www.vet.auth.gr/%cf%85%ce%b3%ce%b5%ce%b9%ce%b1-%ce%ba%ce%b1%ce%b9-%ce%b1%cf%83%cf%86%ce%b1%ce%bb%ce%b5%ce%b9%ce%b1/).

At present, the two separate rooms with toilets for the on-duty students are provided as changing rooms into the KTH premises. The SVMT in collaboration with the Dean of the Faculty of the Health Sciences have started planning the reconstruction of designated area on the ground floor of the KTH where student lockers and toilets will be installed. First-aid boxes are also available in KTH.

As previously mentioned, companion animal blood donors are no longer used at the Companion Animal Clinic. All animals owned by the Clinic and housed in its premises, have a complete archive of medical history. This has been a standard practice at the Companion Animal Clinic.

Regarding animal welfare, the SVMT has adopted a modified protocol for the practical training of students. In particular, the protocol is based on the outcomes and SOPs developed in the European Animal Welfare Indicators Project (AWIN; Grant agreement ID: 266213 - Funded under FP7-KBBE). All students are now trained in assessment protocols by the staff of the Laboratory of Animal Husbandry during farm visits and in KTH dairy sheep farm.

1.2. Major Deficiency 2: The VEE is not compliant with Substandard 5.2 because of insufficient hands-on training of students in farm animal clinics under the supervision of academic staff.

1.2.1. Factual information

Aiming to provide more sufficient hands-on training at the Farm Animal Clinic, as of the spring semester of 2022, the 4th year students are trained separately from those of the 5th year. Moreover, the size of the 5th year students' groups has changed: the 5th year students are now divided into 8 small groups (instead of the 4 groups previously) of 5-6 students per group (Annex 4). All this training is under the supervision of the academic staff aided by sufficiently trained Ph.D. students.

A logbook for training at the Farm Animal Clinic has now been created to record all the clinical procedures performed by each student (Annex 5). The logbooks have already been distributed to the students of the 8th and 10th semesters (currently attending the spring semester of studies). At the final exam, the logbooks will be screened by the teachers, who will ensure that sufficient hands-on training and skills have been obtained by every student. The presentation of these logbooks is mandatory for the participation of students in the final exams at the end of the 10th semester.

1.2.2. Comments

The main hands-on training is provided via farm visits, in addition to sessions at the KTH facilities, each week, from Mondays to Thursdays, in small groups of students.

The process for assessing the student logbooks is an issue to be decided by the Education Committee. The proposal is to use a grading system of 1 to 5 points for each section of the logbook that describes actions done by the student.

As previously mentioned, training in farm animal welfare assessment is performed during the Animal Production practical sessions.

The registration of animals as acute vs. chronic, first- vs. second opinion, and outpatient vs. hospitalised cases will be implemented in the newly established electronic record system (i-vet). Importantly, approximately 65% of the caseload in the Companion Animal Clinic are second-opinion admissions with a substantial percentage of them being chronic cases.

Following the strong recommendation of the Visitation Team, the Laboratories of Pharmacology and Physiology are now using the existing software packages for interactive computer-assisted learning courses. This is in accordance with 3R legislation aiming to replace the laboratory animals involved in practical training sessions by alternative procedures. In addition, non-invasive, non-painful procedures (e.g., electrocardiogram) will be performed on dogs and cats owned by the academic staff or students, after their informed consent.

1.3. Major Deficiency 3: The VEE is not compliant with Substandard 9.2 because the number of qualified teaching and support staff is insufficient in Clinical Sciences, especially in equines, to secure a group small enough to guarantee appropriate training of students.

1.3.1. Factual information

A new faculty academic post in Equine Medicine and Surgery has now been approved by the University Senate and the SVMT General Assembly (Annex 6). The new faculty member will be appointed by the start of the next academic year (2022-2023).

Furthermore, the Companion Animal Clinic has already employed an equine clinician, who is assisting the existing member of staff in running the ambulatory clinics and the emergency service (Annex 7).

Finally, nine new posts for clinical teaching staff (one post-doc and eight Ph.D. students) have been opened and allocated to the Clinics for the current academic year (Annex 8).

1.3.2. Comments

Innovative training programs ("Training the trainers" classes) were introduced by the University (https://www.diaviou.auth.gr/) and are available to all teaching staff.

As described above, when addressing the second major deficiency (substandard 5.2), the training of the 4th year students was separated from the training of the 5th year students and the size of the students' training groups was drastically decreased.

The selection of Ph.D. students involved in teaching activities is based on their merit and marks. Prior to their involvement in teaching activities, all postgraduate students receive one-month training by faculty members to improve their teaching competency.

Finally, we wish to re-iterate on a point raised during the first visitation and mentioned in the SER. The SVMT does not have the autonomy to control generation of new posts and appointments, which is under the authority of the Ministry of Education. We continue our lobbying efforts to ensure an appropriate number of qualified staff, both for teaching and support, is hired and maintained.

2. Correction of the Minor Deficiencies

2.1. Minor Deficiency 1: The VEE is partially compliant with Substandard 2.1 because of suboptimal financing.

2.1.1. Factual information

Since the last visitation, the funding of SVMT from the Faculty of Health Sciences has been increased, in response to a relevant SVMT's request (Annex 9).

2.1.2. Comments

Additional funding is pursued via increases in clinical case load and by expanding the range of the offered diagnostic services.

Similarly, to securing staff positions, as previously described (Substandard 9.2), State funding, which represents most of our finances, is not under the control of SVMT, or even the University, and is dictated by the annual Governmental Budget dedicated to Higher Education. While efforts are constantly being made to ensure our needs are well understood by the Central Government, the ongoing strategy also includes solicitation of alternative forms of funding.

2.1.3. Suggestions for improvement

Product promotion activities contracted between the Companion Animal Clinic and selected Pet Food Industries will contribute towards additional funding.

2.2. Minor Deficiency 2: The VEE is partially compliant with Substandard 3.1 because of the inaccurate data addressed in Table 3.1.2 of the SER regarding the hours of training in all groups of subjects addressed on p. 20 of the SOP 2016 and listed in the Annex V.4.1 of the Directive 36/2005/EC in order to demonstrate compliance with the EU Directive.

2.2.1. Factual information

The SVMT has performed substantial amendments in Table 3.1.2 of SER regarding the hours of training in the subjects addressed in SOP 2016 (Annex 10). The curriculum is now mapped accurately in the revised SER.

2.2.2. Comments

2.2.3. Suggestions for improvement

Reallocation of teaching hours including possible decreases in Basic Sciences and increases in Clinical Sciences, Animal Production, and Food Safety and Quality is under consideration by the Education Committee of the SVMT. Those changes will be also discussed with External stakeholders that the SVMT will formally involve in the development, implementation, assessment, and revision of the curriculum starting in May 2022.

In addition, as previously mentioned (Substandard 4.6 and 5.2), students are being exposed to farm animal welfare assessment protocols during training at the Laboratory of Animal Husbandry. The latter has implemented SOPs in practical training of students and all those documents are available (Annex 11). It should be noted that Animal Welfare Assessment is being performed individually by all students using the protocols developed within the European Animal Welfare Indicators Project (AWIN; Grant agreement ID: 266213 - Funded under FP7-KBBE).

2.3. Minor Deficiency 3: The VEE is partially compliant with Substandard 5.1 because of insufficient number and variety of cadavers for hands-on training in Pathology and of equines in Propaedeutics.

2.3.1. Factual information

The actual problem relates with a gradual decline in the number of available cadavers of farm animals for student training. Government legislation and regulatory restrictions have made the flow of farm animals for necropsy difficult for producers and referring veterinarians. After the last EAEVE visitation, the SVMT initiated discussions with the government veterinary authorities to facilitate the acquisition of more farm animal cadavers from commercial farms. Furthermore, following the suggestion of one of the experts of the Visitation Team, discussions are also scheduled to take place, before the revisitation, with private contractor companies that collect cadavers from farms, with the view to provide SVMT with additional suitable material.

Moreover, in agreement with the suggestion of the Visitation Team, the number of necropsies performed, and the corresponding animal species, are now recorded for each student. Plans are also being put in place to include these data in the Pathology student logbooks.

Finally, as previously mentioned (Substandard 4.6), the Companion Animal Clinic has already contracted the hire of three additional horses on a regular basis for the Propaedeutics in equine. These horses will be kept in the stabling facilities of the SVMT for the duration of the student training (Annex 2).

2.3.2. Comments

According to Table 5.1.5, the average first-opinion companion animal caseload is at 35%. We believe that this constitutes sufficient material for the familiarization of students with first-opinion cases, including vaccinations. Importantly, the Companion Animal Clinic encourages first-opinion case admissions, by offering an affordable pricing policy for the provided services, comparable to private practices.

2.3.3. Suggestions for improvement

2.4. Minor Deficiency 4: The VEE is partially compliant with Substandard 8.9 because of the lack of a record of the individual skills acquired by the student within a logbook in farm animal clinics.

2.4.1. Factual information

As previously described when addressing Substandard 5.2, a logbook (Annex 5) has now been created to record all farm animal clinical procedures, where each student is involved. In February 2022, the logbooks were distributed to all students of the 8th and 10th semester of study. In October 2022 logbooks will also be distributed to the students of the 5th semester. The logbooks will be regularly screened by teaching staff to ensure that participating students acquire sufficient hands-on training and skills. The presentation of the logbook is mandatory for the participation of students in the exams at the end of the 10th semester.

2.4.2. Comments

Grading procedure of logbooks is under consideration by the Education Committee.

2.4.3. Suggestions for improvement

Similar logbooks will also be created for training in Food Safety and Hygiene, and Pathology.

2.5. Minor Deficiency 5: The VEE is partially compliant with Substandard 9.3 because postgraduate students used for training undergraduates do not receive proper training in teaching and assessment methods and they receive nil or small payment for delivering clinical (and other) teaching activities.

2.5.1. Factual information

Please refer to our comments to Substandard 9.2 (major deficiency 3) regarding the training of postgraduate students.

2.5.2. Comments

All postgraduate students are purposefully chosen at the end of every academic year (end of August). This allows new postgraduate students to receive one-month training (optimal clinical and hospitalization practices, client management, biosafety principles, acquaintance with the collaborating national or international laboratories), prior to the start of the new semester in early October. This process largely ensures a smooth educational interaction with the students.

Post-graduate students receive sporadic payment for participation in undergraduate training. Furthermore, in exchange, these students receive tuition-free post-graduate clinical training.

2.5.3. Suggestions for improvement

2.6. Minor Deficiency 6: The VEE is partially compliant with Substandard 11.8 because of the suboptimal SER. which contains a number of inconsistencies and inaccuracies. and requires a substantial revision, since this document will be publicly available.

2.6.1. Factual information

Inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the original SER were corrected in the revised version of November 2021. Additional refinements in the SER have been introduced in the most updated version, which is submitted together with this document (Annex 10).

2.6.2. Comments

The SVMT QA procedures are fully aligned with those of the University, which undergo continuous refinements and improvements.

2.6.3. Suggestions for improvement

3. ESEVT Indicators

3.1. Factual information

ESEVT Indicators are given in the relevant Excel file and are also presented here:

Table 1. Raw data from the 2 full academic years preceding AY 2019-2020

	Raw data from the 2 full academic years preceding AY 2019-2020	2019	2018	Mean
1	n° of FTE academic staff involved in veterinary training	96	95	95.5
2	n° of undergraduate students	500	602	551
3	n° of FTE veterinarians involved in veterinary training	85	86	85.5
4	n° of students graduating annually	72	80	76
5	n° of FTE support staff involved in veterinary training	27	27	27
6	n° of hours of practical (non-clinical) training	949	949	949
7	n° of hours of clinical training	935	935	935
8	n° of hours of FSQ & VPH training	300	300	300
9	n° of hours of extra-mural practical training in FSQ & VPH	48	48	48
10	n° of companion animal patients seen intra-murally	3653	4008	3830.5
11	n° of ruminant and pig patients seen intra-murally	136	70	103
12	n° of equine patients seen intra-murally	115	107	111
13	n° of rabbit, rodent, bird and exotic patients seen intra-murally	205	198	201.5
14	n° of companion animal patients seen extra-murally	0	0	0.0
15	n° of individual ruminants and pig patients seen extra-murally	800	665	732.5
16	n° of equine patients seen extra-murally	252	271	261.5
17	n° of visits to ruminant and pig herds	113	107	110
18	n° of visits of poultry and farmed rabbit units	104	100	102
19	n° of companion animal necropsies	348	313	330.5
20	n° of ruminant and pig necropsies	155	165	160
21	n° of equine necropsies	14	11	12.5
22	n° of rabbit, rodent, bird and exotic pet necropsies	708	540	624.0
23	n° of FTE specialised veterinarians involved in veterinary training	19	19	19
24	n° of PhD graduating annually	10	3	6.5

Table 2. Calculated indicators from raw data

	Calculated Indicators from raw data	Establishment values	Median values[1]	Minimal values[2]	Balance[3]
I1	n° of FTE academic staff involved in veterinary training / n° of undergraduate students	0.173	0.15	0.13	0.047
I2	n° of FTE veterinarians involved in veterinary training / n° of students graduating annually	1.125	0.84	0.63	0.495
I3	n° of FTE support staff involved in veterinary training / n° of students graduating annually	0.355	0.88	0.54	-0.185
I4	n° of hours of practical (non-clinical) training	949.000	953.50	700.59	248.410
I5	n° of hours of clinical training	935.000	941.58	704.80	230.200
I6	n° of hours of FSQ & VPH training	300.000	293.50	191.80	108.200
I7	n° of hours of extra-mural practical training in FSQ & VPH	48.000	75.00	31.80	16.200
I8	n° of companion animal patients seen intra-murally / n° of students graduating annually	50.401	62.31	43.58	6.821
I9	n° of ruminant and pig patients seen intra-murally / n° of students graduating annually	1.355	2.49	0.89	0.465

I10	n° of equine patients seen intra-murally / n° of students graduating annually	1.461	4.16	1.53	-0.069
I11	n° of rabbit, rodent, bird and exotic seen intra-murally / n° of students graduating annually	2.651	3.11	1.16	1.491
I12	n° of companion animal patients seen extra-murally / n° of students graduating annually	0.000	5.06	0.43	-0.430
I13	n° of individual ruminants and pig patients seen extra-murally / n° of students graduating annually	9.638	16.26	8.85	0.788
I14	n° of equine patients seen extra-murally / n° of students graduating annually	3.441	1.80	0.62	2.821
I15	n° of visits to ruminant and pig herds / n° of students graduating annually	1.447	1.29	0.54	0.907
I16	n° of visits of poultry and farmed rabbit units / n° of students graduating annually	1.342	0.11	0.04	1.297
I17	n° of companion animal necropsies / n° of students graduating annually	4.349	2.11	1.40	2.949
I18	n° of ruminant and pig necropsies / n° of students graduating annually	2.105	1.36	0.90	1.205
I19	n° of equine necropsies / n° of students graduating annually	0.164	0.18	0.10	0.064
I20	n° of rabbit, rodent, bird and exotic pet necropsies / n° of students graduating annually	8.211	2.65	0.88	7.331
I21*	n° of FTE specialised veterinarians involved in veterinary training / n° of students graduating annually	0.250	0.27	0.06	0.190
I22*	n° of PhD graduating annually / n° of students graduating annually	0.086	0.15	0.07	0.016

[1]Median values defined by data from Establishments with Accreditation/Approval status in May 2019.
[2]Recommended minimal values calculated as the 20th percentile of data from Establishments with Accreditation/Approval status in May 2019.
[3]A negative balance indicates that the indicator is below the recommended minimal value.
*Indicators used only for statistical purpose.

3.2. Comments

3.3. Suggestions for improvement