

## **REVISIT REPORT**

**Faculty of Veterinary Medicine  
of the Latvia University of Agriculture  
5-6 October 2009**

## **Introduction**

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the Latvia University of Agriculture was revisited at October 5 - 6, 2009 by the team of experts:

Professor Marcel Wanner (Switzerland), chairman of the boards of EAEVE (The European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education) and ECOVE (European Committee on Veterinary Education) committee, expert visitor on training in animal production

Professor Lars Moe (Norway), member of the board of ECOVE, expert visitor on training in clinical sciences

The Evaluation Report on the visiting results of the FVM was approved by EAEVE and FVE Joint Education Committee on 1 November 2003 and published on 2 December 2003.

There were five Category 1 suggestions in the report:

1. Increase the amount of practical/clinical training, based upon „hands on” training by decreasing the number of lectures
2. Develop the provision of full-scale 24hour emergency service on the FVML site, on a regular basis, incorporating duty veterinarians for small and large animals and duty schemes for students, so that both an increased availability of cases can be obtained for the students’ clinical training. In addition it would enable the school to provide adequate professional surveillance during hospitalization of cases at the premises.
3. Create isolation facilities for infected small and large animals.
4. Increase by all possible means the availability of large animal caseloads for teaching students, including pasturing them in the grounds of the FVM.
5. The University and the Faculty must rectify the problem of insufficient numbers of teaching staff in some key areas, notably in animal production and veterinary public health subjects, and in practical/clinical teaching generally

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the Latvia University of Agriculture is the unique veterinary school of this small country with 2.3 million inhabitants and with a small number of farm animals (cattle 390 000, pigs 290 000, sheep and goats 90 000, horses 13 000).

The Faculty has 250 undergraduate students, with 50 to 90 beginners and 20 to 40 graduates every year. The study lasts 6 years.

The Faculty had prepared a Progress Report of 10 pages dated March 2009 signed by the dean Gunars Petersons that was presented to the visiting experts before the revisit.

### **Comments on the category 1 deficiencies**

The Faculty has realized a lot of progress since 2003.

**Ad 1)**

The shift from lectures to seminars do not represent the idea suggested by the evaluation team in 2003 which intended to recommend more hands on training, and practical work by the students. The increased amount of hours that was named practical work in Table 1 (in the Progress Report of the Faculty) in subjects such as pharmacology and immunology was not practical work, but seminars with teacher and students, sometimes in smaller groups.

The main reduction of time used for lectures has been achieved by a new definition of *one lecture*: One lecture was reduced from sixty minutes to the academic hour of 45 minutes.

In this way the number of lectures was kept the same, but the “contact-time teacher/student” was reduced, but that was not the intention of the former visiting team.

They have established an ambulatory clinic from 2009, and that seems to be an important way to give the students better hands on training in farm animal diagnostics and practice. We do not know how this new training possibility will work in the curriculum, but it seems to function well.

The students have more clinical training, clinical work to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students is mandatory and the 4<sup>th</sup> year students have to work in the clinic for one week. These are new positive changes in the curriculum and the right way to increase the “hands on” training of the students.

### **Suggestions**

The teaching load is very high compared to the number of full time equivalent (FTE) teachers, and there seems to be little time for research.

The teaching load of the academic staff is high due to the fact that some seminars and courses, and especially the practical work in groups, are repeated several times for the same class year students. A part of this problem could be solved with one bigger, universal course room (for all relevant subjects) equipped with microscopes and other relevant equipment to be used by the whole class (30-50 students).

Also a reform of the curriculum could be helpful. Due to the low number of teachers, they should cooperate more. An organ-centred training in the first years followed by a clinical-signs-centred-training during the clinical years is one possibility. Such change would give the students a more logic and coherent understanding of what is going on in each organ (e.g. anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, histology), and could reduce the teaching load of each teacher. A learning approach to animal diseases via the clinical syndromes rather than through the systematic disciplines represents a closer resemblance of the real life diagnostic situation for the students. The teachers need the time gained to do research because academic teaching is based on research.

The category 1 deficiency is not fully rectified.

### **Ad 2)**

The Faculty has established a 24-hour emergency service for small animals where students are incorporated. But the clinical service is rarely used in this small town with 65 000 inhabitants; the mean number of patients is one case / visit per night.

The Faculty has recently (2009) signed a contract with four large animals' practitioners in the Jelgava region who is running private mobile clinics. The students are then introduced to "on the farm" animal diagnostic work. This cooperation is new, but is very promising.

If successful, the category 1 suggestion has been rectified.

**Ad 3)**

The Faculty built two isolation rooms, one for small and one for large animals. To enter into these rooms people has to change clothes and boots.

This category 1 deficiency is solved.

**Ad 4)**

The Faculty has undertaken a lot of measures to increase the large animal cases for teaching. The number of contacts of the students with large animals has increased both towards normal animals and sick animals:

- the students have to work at the Faculty farm with both cows (400 dairy cattle) and pigs. The farm is, however, situated 60 km away from Jelgava.
- the mobile clinic, although private, is under supervision by the Faculty.
- the students have also to work with other private clinics for one week (extra mural work). The practitioners are selected by the faculty according to some quality standards, and the students have to write a diary and a report from this extra-mural training. The report is evaluated by the academic staff of the Faculty.
- during the semester there are a small number of normal cows and pigs at the Faculty premises in Jelgava that are used for training.

There is a problem that the number of (sick) farm animal patients at the clinic is very low. But this number is of outstanding importance. It is important that the students can learn diagnostic thinking and procedures of both single animal diseases and herd health problems.

The category 1 suggestion is only partially solved.

**Ad 5)**

The Faculty is still understaffed!

It needs more personal (academic and supporting and technical staff). The veterinary curriculum with all the listed objectives in the EU-directive 2005/36 and with all the sub-disciplines and different animal species is cost- and personal intensive. This is a fact that cannot be denied, and it is recognized all over Europe. The training of veterinarians for the common European labour market is one of the most expensive educations in the universities.

Since the visit of experts in 2003 the total number of academic staff has decreased by 3.2 FTE. Today the number of professors is below the critical mass of a veterinary faculty. A professor is responsible for a specific topic or subject, is doing the research in that topic

and is publishing the research results in international peer reviewed journals, located in the ISI Web of Science database or in the PubMed database, favourably in English. A professorship is a full time job.

The funding of the faculties at the Latvia University of Agriculture has to be changed. The number of the professors doesn't depend on the number of the teaching hours given, and the numbers of students. It depends on the needs of the veterinary education. The Faculty needs a minimum number of full time professors that can guaranty the quality of the veterinary education so that the candidates are able to fulfil the duties of a veterinarian in the European Union as well as in Latvia. The local education has to fulfil the minimum requirements so that the candidate can work in a global arena.

The incentive effects of the funding system at the Faculty does not give an impulse to find new and better, as well as cheaper ways to do the teaching. The system stimulates only status quo, and an old fashioned way of teaching, and do not support a more learning-focused training. A reduction in number of hours given by a teacher is not synonymous with a reduced learning output of the students.

The full time equivalents in the clinical department have decreased by 3.2 units compared to 2003. In the same time the FTE in the preclinical department has increased by 3.75 units. This shift is due to the number of students in the first years of the study, but do not reflect the needs of the curriculum where clinical training and food safety is the most important part!

The category 1 deficiency is not at all rectified.

### **Suggestions**

- the Faculty needs more human resources (number of staff; and personal with high scientific quality)
- the University has to change the funding of the Faculty
- the Faculty should be itself responsible for the distribution of funds between the departments and clinics, because the Faculty knows the specific needs of the veterinary education where clinical teaching is the core business
- a tool to increase the number of personal could be that the income of the clinics remains in the Faculty so that it can hire personal and incorporate teaching with this money

### **Concluding remarks**

We are aware of the current financial situation of Latvia, and of the Latvia University of Agriculture and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Nevertheless, the goal of the Faculty must be to reach the minimum requirements laid down in the EU-directive 2005/36 in the next five to seven years. Therefore the Faculty has to renew itself. To be successful it needs some external impulses and help. For this reason we propose that the Faculty establish a steering or a reference committee with external members including a foreign member or two, with all the needed competences to fulfil its goal.

Another problem is the selection and training of young veterinarians willing to start an academic career. They need research facilities and international contacts. They have to go abroad to see the progress of the veterinary research and of the profession. They have to learn the modern methods, to handle sophisticated equipments and to bring back their knowledge to the Faculty for the progress of the Faculty and veterinary medicine in Latvia.

A first step to increase the research quality and output of the Faculty would be to establish a joint and shared research laboratory for several disciplines and departments with modern equipment and with supporting staff able to work with them. Researchers of different disciplines go to work in the laboratory, have contact with other colleagues and can detect and develop common interests. Thus, the researchers can intensify the collaboration.

**ECOVE-decision: NON-APPROVAL**