

Tāwharau Ora – School of Veterinary Science
Massey University
Palmerston North 4410

24 October 2024

By Email

Tēnā koe Jenny,

Submission on behalf of the New Zealand Veterinary Association Te Pae Kīrehe regarding the BVSc5 clinical rosters review

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to review the proposed changes to the BVSc5 clinical training structure. We appreciate the slight extension to the original feedback timeframe, which allowed us to engage all our special interest branch (SIB) committees for a more comprehensive review.

Below, you will find a detailed summary of the feedback gathered from our committees. This feedback aims to offer constructive insights and perspectives that reflect the diverse interests and concerns of our members. We hope it will contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discussions and refinements of the proposed clinical training adjustments.

The proposed changes to the BVSc5 clinical training structure have been met with a mix of support and constructive critique. Respondents broadly agreed with several aspects, particularly the emphasis on Day 1 competencies, streamlined OWNS placements (assuming block bookings are approved), and the proposed balance of clinical experience weeks. These adjustments are seen as steps toward strengthening core skills and better preparing students for practice.

However, several areas warrant further consideration. Concerns include potential limitations for students interested in wildlife, avian or Ministry for Primary (MPI) careers, possible misinterpretation of the 'urban' and 'rural' track labels, and the need to retain special topics that introduce students to niche areas such as consultancy and advanced practices. Additionally, respondents suggested greater support for students accessing OWNS placements, clear communication about the rationale and outcomes of proposed changes, expectations around workload increases on practices, and a better balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

We hope this feedback helps refine the proposal and ensure that the clinical training structure aligns with available resources and the evolving needs of veterinary students. Thank you for your commitment to improving veterinary education. We look forward to continued collaboration on this important initiative.

Nāku iti noa, nā,



Kevin Bryant
Chief Executive Officer
New Zealand Veterinary Association Te Pae Kīrehe

Answers to consultation questions

Which parts of this proposal do you agree with? Please provide details.

- Respondents agree that removing restrictions on OWNS placements will benefit both schools and students. It will simplify the administration process and save time, creating more flexibility for rebalancing focus on key skills.
- There is a strong consensus that focusing on Day 1 competencies and preparing students for practice is more critical than increasing student choice. This approach aims to enhance core skills and readiness for professional roles from the start.
- The changes place a significant emphasis on students making wise decisions about their OWNS placements, as this is where they will be able to exercise choice within the new framework.

Which parts of this proposal do you think should be reconsidered? Please provide details and rationale, and your proposed alternative / solution.

- A minority of respondents believe the new system may limit opportunities for students interested in wildlife, avian or MPI-related careers after graduation.
- There is concern that defining career tracks as either 'urban' or 'rural' will inadvertently create a division that is not representative of New Zealand's veterinary roles. There is a risk that this categorisation could reinforce the perception that companion animal veterinarians only work in urban settings, potentially leading graduates to a perceived bias on suitable job locations and limiting opportunities for rural mixed practice to recruit companion animal veterinarians.
- Additionally, some respondents noted that the term 'rural track' could be misleading, as it may imply insufficient companion animal experience. This could potentially affect students aiming to work internationally in companion animal medicine. A suggestion was made to retain the 'mixed track' label to avoid misinterpretations and maintain broader appeal.
- There is concern about removing special topics from the curriculum. Respondents noted that OWNS placements focus on clinical practice, whereas special topics introduce new ideas and areas such as consultancy work, which are not typically encountered in practice. Respondents suggested rebalancing the placement structure to allow for some special topics, particularly for farm or equine-focused students.
- Respondents suggested increasing the emphasis on writing case reports and exploring the theory behind clinical experiences. They recommended considering approaches from other programs, such as CSU, where students are required to report on practical work, leading to more active engagement. There was also feedback about improving foundational knowledge in pharmacology, microbiology and parasitology, as these areas were perceived to be weak.

Do you agree with the balance of clinical experience weeks provided in the tracks? If not, what would you change? Please provide details and rationale, and your proposed alternative / solution.

- Respondents suggested reducing the State Veterinary Medicine component to one week and increasing the small animal component to four weeks within the rural track. This adjustment would better reflect the higher demand for companion animal veterinarians compared to

regulatory roles.

- A minimum of three weeks in small animal practice was strongly recommended, ideally in settings like Massey University. Long consultations and student-led general practice cases are seen as critical to preparing students for first-day competency. It is believed that this 'sink-or-swim' approach during training will better equip students for independent consults after graduation.
- Feedback highlighted that the production animal track curriculum has two weeks of sheep and beef cattle training and only one week to address dairy cattle health. Respondents believe there should be a heavier focus on dairy practice in the new rural roster schedule, as this would be more reflective of actual employment prospects upon graduation.
- Overall, respondents felt that the proposed balance in the curriculum is as optimal as possible, acknowledging the challenge of creating a perfect distribution given varying demand.

Any other comments you would like to make.

- Respondents requested more details about the weekly schedule for the urban track. There was positive feedback about the inclusion of a shelter medicine week, particularly from a shelter veterinarian who asked if this would take place at the Palmerston North SPCA.
- Some respondents expressed concerns about the clarity of the proposed changes. They felt it was unclear what issues the changes address, how effectiveness will be measured, and whether the modifications align with improved teaching and learning outcomes, or are primarily driven by resource constraints at Massey University.
- There is concern that the increase in student numbers could place significant strain on both Massey University and the businesses involved in providing externships and OWNS placements. This document does not address this issue or consider the impact of additional requirements on clinical veterinary practice. The concern is heightened by the fact that most students are expected to be drawn to the rural track, as many aspire to mixed practice roles. Given the seasonal nature of rural veterinary work, practices may find it challenging to balance their workload at the same time students are seeking practical experience.
- Respondents asked whether Massey University would be communicating with practices and potential placement providers about the projected workload and the impact that a larger student class size will have on private practices. Additionally, they asked for clarification on Massey's expectations about how this increased cohort size will affect student learning opportunities while on externships and OWNS.
- Historically, the majority of final-year veterinary students have chosen production animal or mixed practice tracks, with many reporting they accepted or sought mixed practice roles upon graduation. According to the Veterinary Council of New Zealand (VCNZ) Workforce Report 2022-2023, the average age of mixed practitioners is significantly younger than those in other areas of practice, supporting the trend that new graduates are particularly drawn to mixed animal roles (Appendix I). As noted in the survey document:

“Whilst veterinary work in New Zealand remains much more balanced between companion animal and large animal work compared to many other countries, the most significant trend over the last 15 years has been the increase in the number of vets working solely with companion animal.”

Given that new graduate roles often differ from long-term career pathways, Massey should consider using the most likely new graduate destination as the measure of professional need, rather than basing decisions on broader trends within the veterinary profession.

- Respondents questioned whether students would receive sufficient support to pursue desired OWNS experiences, especially to fill gaps in core course offerings. They emphasised the importance of guidance and support to ensure balanced learning outcomes.
- Removing restrictions on OWNS provides opportunities for longer periods of time at the same practice, yet final year scheduling often does not accommodate multiple weeks of OWNS in a row. Does Massey envision allowing for block OWNS scheduling to help reduce the costs of travel and challenges in coordinating OWNS for both students and practices?
- The survey document states, “BVSc5 – A minimum of 40 weeks total, composed of at least 20 weeks of School-controlled rosters and at least 12 weeks of OWNS (AVBC Standards)2.” However, there are only 10 OWNS weeks (including two calving weeks in BVSc4) attributed to BVSc5. When referring to Figure 1 in the document, there are 14 weeks of OWNS between year 3–5 that are attributed to accreditation requirements; however, the footnote on page 5 states that six weeks of OWNS are required between years 3–4. Will Massey be adjusting the number of OWNS to meet the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC) standards?
- Respondents expressed appreciation for the efforts put into developing the proposal and acknowledged the work done so far.

Appendix I

Figure 3 and Table 9 provide a summary of the age distribution of veterinarians by aggregated area of practice and gender. Veterinarians working in mixed animal practice were significantly younger than the average population of veterinarians while those working in regulatory and miscellaneous roles were significantly older.

Figure 3: Age distribution of veterinarians in New Zealand by aggregated area of practice and gender

