

The Faculty of Veterinary Science

REVIEW

1999-2005



University of Pretoria

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# The Faculty of Veterinary Science at Onderstepoort, University of Pretoria

## Introduction by the Dean, Prof Nick Kriek

The Faculty of Veterinary Science of the University of Pretoria is a national asset. It is the only faculty of its kind in South Africa, the oldest veterinary faculty in Africa, and it is considered the best on the continent. Its undergraduate degree is formally accepted in the UK, Australasia, and Malaysia for registration purposes to practice in those countries. The quality of the training is such that graduates from this faculty have no difficulty to compete for and enter postgraduate programmes in universities in any country in the world. Our graduates are partners in or principles of private practices, and occupy managerial positions in industry and public service across the world.

Our postgraduate and training programmes are becoming increasingly competitive and they offer opportunities to study to the level of PhD. Post-doc programmes are improving and adding value to the broad strategic drive to improve the postgraduate and research programmes of the Faculty. Its specialist training compares well with those in the developed world and its science-based training attracts partners and funding from across the world. A number of our facilities and training programmes are recognised as specialist training centres for candidates that wish to sit specialist examinations in Europe and the United States of America. An increasing number of our 100 academic members of staff are NRF-rated and they are competing successfully in South Africa for funding to sustain their programmes in molecular biology and other related fields. Increasing numbers of professionals from abroad join our clinical and preclinical programmes for varying periods and the postgraduate student body reflects a good mix of local, other African and European students.

The current faculty is the product of the amalgamation in 1999 of the Faculties of Veterinary Science of MEDUNSA, and of the University of Pretoria. It has positioned itself as a role player in the sub-Saharan region and forged strong ties with a number of Faculties of Veterinary Science in Anglophone Africa and in the developed world. We have particularly strong ties with the Faculties of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands and of the Davis campus of the University of California and have a number of strong cooperative research programmes with the objective of improving the expertise of our professionals and support staff.

Our Faculty is a relative small faculty compared to the Faculty of Veterinary Science of the Utrecht University that is also the only veterinary faculty in that country; they have 3-4 times the number of academic staff that we have in a country with fewer people, and many fewer veterinary challenges. The Faculty here is under constant financial pressure given the way in which it is funded, and it has difficulty sustaining its standards and the scope of the work done here given the diverse needs of the country and the extent of serious economic diseases of livestock that it has to deal with.

The Faculty is well positioned to address the needs of South Africa and countries of SADC within the context of NEPAD provided it could continue its current development and has access to sustainable funding. These are the main challenges for the immediate future for the Faculty, University, and funding agencies. Adequate funding is needed to enable the Faculty to play its role in sustaining the country's self-sufficiency in the provision of safe food from animal origin, enabling commercial agriculture to compete in international markets, attending to the health and welfare of the animals of South Africa, and participating in efforts to sustain the rich biodiversity of the South African fauna.



## Mission of the Faculty of Veterinary Science

The Faculty is an integral part of the University of Pretoria and it conducts its affairs within the context of the institutional mission, vision and policies of the University.

The driving force of the Faculty is embodied in its strategic vision: It aims to be an internationally accredited seat of veterinary excellence and strives to be globally competitive, regionally pre-eminent, and locally relevant. Through extensive networking and partnerships, we provide an effective veterinary interface to Africa. Our training programmes, research and services are innovative, sustainable, relevant and of high quality. All activities are managed within a well-regulated, efficient, and value-driven system. Our graduates are well rounded and innovative, and equipped with essential academic and general life skills.

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### We focus on:

- ◆ Attracting sustainable funding through budget innovation
- ◆ Increasing research outputs through effective postgraduate programmes
- ◆ Actively promoting employment equity and student diversity
- ◆ Recruiting, retaining and performance managing the 'best people'
- ◆ Negotiating competitive remuneration packages
- ◆ Maintaining a suitable infrastructure, and
- ◆ Rendering relevant services



## The Faculty within a strategic context

The Faculty of Veterinary Science is involved in training, research and community programmes within the context of the vision and mission of the University of Pretoria. It trains veterinary and para-veterinary professionals that are indispensable to the country within the context of defined national and international needs. The faculty gives credibility to the notion of the University that it wishes to be a recognised global player.

The Faculty is expected to play a leading role in veterinary education in the SADC region and in Eastern Africa. For this reason it has established links with most of the faculties of veterinary science in the SADC region. It has formal links with a number of eminent faculties of veterinary science in Europe, Scandinavia, and the USA and is an active, strong, southern partner participating in sandwich programmes. It is attracting increasing numbers of postgraduate students out of Africa from as far afield as Eritrea and Ethiopia. There is increasing international pressure to develop the Faculty as a regional veterinary training centre.

Veterinary training in South Africa has a history of close to 100 years. During this time, the Faculty has acquired the competency to train veterinarians of international standard. Our degree is recognized for registration purposes by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in the United Kingdom, the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council, as well as in Malaysia. Our students are highly competitive and gain access with ease to academic programmes in Europe, Scandinavia, the UK, and the USA. Veterinary specialists trained at our Faculty, easily pass examinations of specialist colleges in the USA and Europe.

Veterinarians play an important role in the economy of the country. They contribute to the creation of wealth by controlling epidemic diseases of animals and increasing the profitability of commercial and small scale farming enterprises. They also contribute to the production of sustainable sources of safe protein of animal origin and the prevention of transmission of diseases from animals to humans. They attend to the veterinary needs and general welfare of animals of both commercial importance and of those kept as companion animals.

Veterinarians certify the disease (or disease-free) status of animals and the safety of products for local and international trade. Diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or better known as mad cow disease) constitute effective international trade barriers to manipulate international trade to the benefit of specific markets and countries. The ability to diagnose and contain these diseases is critical to the certification of the disease status of animals and of the safety for export of various agricultural products (of animal and plant origin). Sustained training at recognised levels is required to maintain the competency of countries to control diseases of economic importance and to sustain the credibility of its certification.



## Academic offering and training

Currently the faculty offers a two-year undergraduate diploma programme in Veterinary Nursing (DipVetNurs) and a four-year professional degree programme in Veterinary Science (BVSc). The Faculty is also involved in presenting certain modules in the pre-requisite three-year BSc (Veterinary Biology) degree programme. The current six-year programme will be systematically phased out as the new programme was introduced in 2003.

The BSc (Veterinary Biology) degree is a directed degree programme with a number of specific compulsory components required for the subsequent BVSc degree. This approach will add value to the already well-established degree programme by extending its science base. It is also expected to increase the number of postgraduate students who may be interested in pursuing further studies in the Faculty and thus expand the postgraduate and research programmes.

Postgraduate programmes include honours, masters' and doctorate programmes. Postgraduate programmes are generally linked to the various research focus areas identified by the Faculty.

The professional programmes (DipVetNurs, BVSc, and MMedVet) are all recognised by the South African Veterinary Council, while the BVSc degree is also recognised by the statutory registering authorities in Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, allowing automatic registration as a veterinary practitioner.

The honours programme covers all disciplines in Veterinary Science and can be structured on a discipline or species basis, or as a combination of the two options. The MMedVet programmes provide specialist training for veterinarians and currently provide for 21 specialities across all disciplines and species. These MMedVet degrees allow graduates to register with the South African Veterinary Council as veterinary specialists.

The Faculty also offers two recently approved web-based MSc programmes in Veterinary Tropical Diseases and Industrial Pharmacology which should attract a range of national and international students in future.



## Student Profile

As the only Faculty of its kind in the country, it has accepted the challenge of providing veterinary and para-veterinary training to meet the country's needs, taking into account the historical problems of access to all racial groups. The Faculty views student selection as a key component in its endeavours to fulfil this aim and satisfy the specific requirements of higher education legislation. To this end, the Faculty states its intent to actively recruit and select students to ensure that the student body will ultimately reflect national demographics.

The undergraduate student profile reflects a growing international component, which in 2004 was 10,77% of all undergraduate students. These students originate primarily from the southern African region, but a growing number are requesting transfer from European faculties. There is also a steady increase of international postgraduate students at Onderstepoort. In 2004 24.85% of all postgraduate students were from outside South Africa.

### Gender distribution of students registered in the Faculty of Veterinary Science in 2004, compared to 2003:

	2004		2003	
	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Male	192	92	180	85
Female	402	77	379	54
Total	594	169	559	139

### Racial distribution of students registered in the Faculty of Veterinary Science in 2004, compared to 2003:

	2004		2003	
	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
White	538	118	491	98
Coloured	4	1	7	1
Indian	20	7	27	5
Black	32	35	34	35
Total	594	169	559	139

## Student support programmes

The Faculty of Veterinary Science offers a number of student support programmes to ensure that students are able to cope with the demands of the academic and social environment in which they find themselves during their studies.

- ◆ Orientation programmes for new students are offered at the beginning of each academic year.
- ◆ A mentor system, run by students and staff, provides social support to new students at the Onderstepoort campus – especially during the initial period of adaptation for the time required to find their way around the campus and its facilities.
- ◆ A student tutor system is in place for students in the first year of the professional veterinary component as well as in the first year of the veterinary nursing programme. The tutors are senior students who assist fellow students in specific academic courses under supervision of the relevant Heads of Department. Additional assistance in time management, study methods, etc. is available as required.
- ◆ Counselling and medical services are available on the campus by appointment.
- ◆ An annual leadership and management awareness workshop is offered by the Faculty in conjunction with sponsors from the private sector to improve “people skills” in order to achieve the desired quality of interaction with colleagues and customers.

The student body, in liaison with Academic Administration, and Marketing and Communication is responsible for orientation, social, cultural and sporting activities.



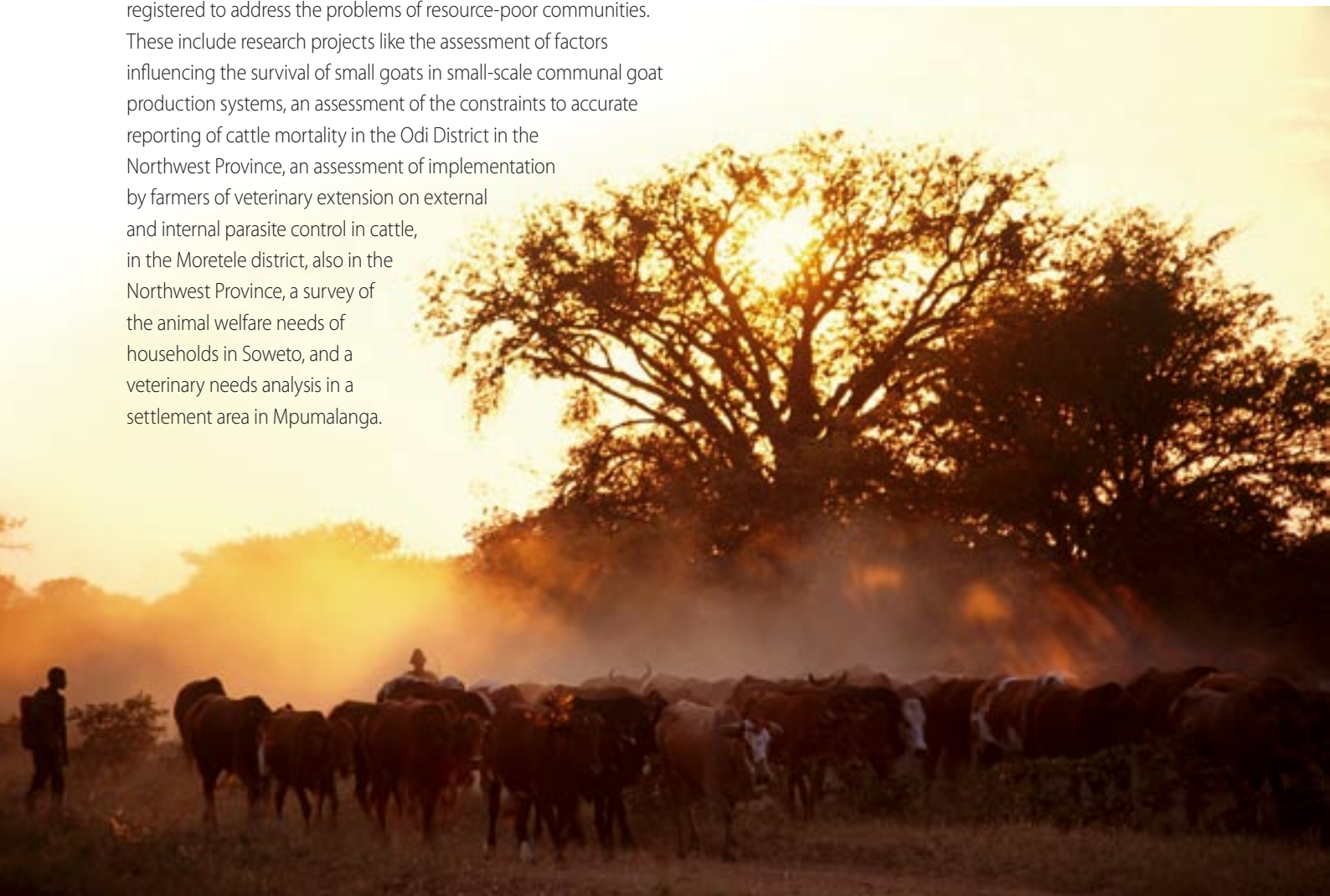
## Reaching out to the community

The Faculty of Veterinary Science of the University of Pretoria's involvement in the commercial and non-commercial agricultural sectors must be seen against the background of its community outreach programmes that are fully integrated with the training programme of the Faculty at under- and postgraduate levels. These activities are deemed essential as part of the training programme and in terms of rendering a service to the broad community that this Faculty serves. Formal activities include referrals from all over the country and from neighbouring countries as well as specialist diagnostic services and consultations at specialist level.

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The other component of community service relates to the Faculty's involvement in resource-poor communities by way of rural clinics, short courses, and continuing education. Students and staff engage with previously-disadvantaged communities in a holistic, collaborative and sustainable manner, resulting in the empowerment of communities, so that they become the centre of their own development. Through these activities students learn and staff members are encouraged to apply their professional knowledge and research skills to practical situations.

Committed to doing socially relevant research, the Faculty believes this increases both local relevance and international competitiveness. A number of research programmes have been registered to address the problems of resource-poor communities. These include research projects like the assessment of factors influencing the survival of small goats in small-scale communal goat production systems, an assessment of the constraints to accurate reporting of cattle mortality in the Odi District in the Northwest Province, an assessment of implementation by farmers of veterinary extension on external and internal parasite control in cattle, in the Moretele district, also in the Northwest Province, a survey of the animal welfare needs of households in Soweto, and a veterinary needs analysis in a settlement area in Mpumalanga.





## Research

The Faculty has developed a comprehensive strategic plan that is structured to stimulate future research in the various disciplines it encompasses. This plan also contains a detailed guideline according to which research will be managed to ensure optimal utilisation of the Faculty's scarce resources to achieve its goals.

The Faculty aims to develop dynamic, innovative research programmes that are globally competitive and locally relevant and will ensure a continuous high-quality output so that its researchers are able to attract sustainable outside funding to further develop its programmes. This plan aims to facilitate the development of multi-disciplinary teams aligned to the various focal areas, foster strategic alliances with other local and international institutions and attract increasing numbers of local and international postgraduate students.

The following five focus areas serve as the driving force behind all research and postgraduate programmes:

- ◆ Wildlife health and production
- ◆ Veterinary problems of developing communities
- ◆ Economically important conditions/diseases of livestock in the sub-Saharan region
- ◆ Veterinary public health and environmental safety
- ◆ Important conditions of companion animals in the sub-Saharan region

These focus areas were chosen to establish, achieve and project an African uniqueness and to bond with external expertise and technology. They are reviewed and refined on an ongoing basis.



## Critical issues

There are a number of critical issues which have been identified by the Faculty in pursuit of its vision and mission. These issues are contained within the strategic plan of both the University and the Faculty and have been under consideration for some time.

They include the following:

- ◆ Sustainable funding – the cornerstone of all the activities of the Faculty in ensuring maintenance of standards and meeting the diversified service needs of the country
- ◆ Equity targets – in line with strategic imperatives as identified in Faculty plans
- ◆ Research competency – increase in research output and simultaneous expansion of research networking – includes postgraduate as well as *bona fide* research
- ◆ Alliance with the ARC – Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute
- ◆ Recurriculation – one of the most critical areas in terms of an ongoing response to market and social needs in all undergraduate as well as postgraduate programmes
- ◆ Appropriate balance between livestock and companion animals – a critical area in terms of the existing perceptions of overemphasis of companion animals in the undergraduate programme at the expense of livestock.
- ◆ Wildlife – the Faculty is in a unique position to play a leading role in the provision of suitable training, research and services in veterinary wildlife programmes linked to the activities of other role players in this expanding industry. The Veterinary Wildlife Unit facilitates the Wildlife Programme in the Faculty. These activities comprise formal and informal training programmes, research and community service. These activities are supported by formal agreements with SANParks and the Peace Parks Foundation.





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