POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK

VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH MANAGEMENT

The foot and mouth disease outbreak in the United Kingdom in 2001, together with the bovine spongiform encephalopathy food safety crisis highlighted the need to have systems in place for both surveillance and effective training of veterinarians at post graduate level. To ensure we have the skills needed in the veterinary profession and in response to this urgent need for trained veterinarians to service national and regional livestock industries, the Faculty developed a postgraduate training program in epidemiology and veterinary public health. The project, which is supported by Meat and Livestock Australia, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, the McGarvie Smith Trust and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has received widespread support from industry, government, community organisations and the University.

The program has two major objectives. The first is to develop veterinarians with technical expertise in veterinary epidemiology, food safety, zoonotic diseases, animal health economics, disease control, and animal health policy development. The second is to provide skills focused on teamwork, team leadership and project management. There are recognised needs for veterinarians in animal health industries to work in multidisciplinary teams, and to manage research and policy processes.

The postgraduate program has three articulated award courses at the Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma and Masters levels and is offered by a combination of distance education units of study and short, intensive residential units. Distance education units provide an appropriate learning environment for busy professionals, with small group interaction via a web-based classroom.

Throughout 2003 and 2004, experienced, external unit of study facilitators were recruited and taught alongside academic staff from the Faculty of Veterinary Science. Eight new units of study were developed in 2004 to complement those developed in 2002-2003.

There were 49 students enrolled in VPHMgt units in 2005. The first student, George Hughes, graduated in December 2004 and others graduated in April 2005 having completed a masters thesis in 2004.

The quality of each unit of study was ensured by academic review by a prominent leader in the relevant field as well as by instructional design consultation throughout the development process and for first-time delivery of each unit. Quality assurance systems for all areas of the new program were developed, implemented and are measured against standards.

The high priority given to student support was enhanced in 2004 and 2005 with the development of new and robust systems for admissions, enrolment and induction that are seamless for postgraduate distance students. Student feedback on support in the program, which is assessed each year with a student support and administration survey, is very positive.

Support from key sponsors has been critical to program development – approximately $650,000 for the period 2002 – 2005. This has enabled:

- Consultation and collaboration with representatives of the livestock industries, the veterinary profession and government and academic personnel
- Development of graduate attributes, curriculum, documentation, quality systems, assessment policy and program infrastructure
- Authorship, academic review and instructional design of 18 new units of study over 2002-2005
- Training of new facilitators in online teaching and learning
- Preparation of guidelines, supervision and support schemes for Masters research projects
- Development of systems for ongoing professional development in online teaching and learning for facilitators
- Marketing the new program to both employers and potential students
- Supporting high quality education for a relatively small number of new students during the development period
Units of study now available include:

- Veterinary Epidemiology 1
- Veterinary Epidemiology 2
- Animal Health Economics
- Data Analysis for Policy Development
- Animal Health Data Management
- Hazards to Human & Animal Health
- Leadership 1
- Leadership 2
- Leadership 3
- Project Management
- Aquatic Animal Epidemiology
- Food Safety
- Surveillance, Preparedness and Response
- Risk Analysis

The VPHMgt development project has progressed according to plan, with the successful development and delivery of 16 units of study to date, within budget. Projections for 2005 and 2006 indicate that the program will be fully self-funding from 2006.

VPHMgt is coordinated through the tireless efforts of Hannah Forsyth with assistance from Meg Vost and Renee Fulton. A management team is led by Professor Richard Whittington, academic leadership is provided by Dr Jenny-Ann Toribio and an industry advisory group ensures community linkage.

**National & International Facilitators**

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