# Quality Strategy

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# Preamble

The University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna (Vetmeduni Vienna) as Austria's only academic veterinary education and research facility is fully committed to its mission: teaching with responsibility, research with vision and healing with determination. It fully assumes its responsibility of ensuring veterinary care at the intersection of animal, human and environmental health (One Health). In the national and international context Vetmeduni Vienna positions itself as an excellent institution of education and research, where social challenges and continuous improvement of animal and human health play a crucial role. By establishing preventive measures and better understanding of disease and adaptation processes, the University is contributing to food safety and thus to human health, while safeguarding biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

To reach this objective a comprehensive quality management system (QMS) is being implemented. The present document provides a summary of the quality strategy of the Vetmeduni Vienna, its related tools and applied methods. Its intention is not to serve as a QM handbook, which would have to undergo perpetual updates due to the dynamic structures within a university. The rectorate is responsible for its contents.

# 1. Scope of Application

## 1.1 Definition

The QMS of VetMedUni is based upon wholistic Total Quality Management (TQM) and aims to meet the requirements of national and international standards of quality. These align with the profile of the university, its development plan[1], as well as external and internal performance agreements.

Quality management (QM) is primarily understood as continuous quality assurance (QA) and development and is enthusiastically received and regularly applied by all members of the university in their daily collaborations. Staff and organisational units share the understanding of "quality" not as a static but continuously evolving concept. At the Vetmeduni Vienna "quality" is not seen as predefined as it has different meanings and implications depending on the individual professional and personal development, self-image, socialisation, etc. The Quality Strategy applies to all organisational units in the core and performance areas of the University (teaching and learning, research, international relations, scientific services and services/administration).[2]

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1 See [Development Plan](#).
[2] See organisational chart of the Vetmeduni Vienna in its applicable version.

## 1.2 Essential Documents

The following documents in their applicable versions provide basis for further development of the QMS:

**External Documents**

- Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities 2019–2024 ("Gesamtösterreichischer Entwicklungsplan 2019-2024")

- Federal Act on the Organisation of Universities and their Studies ("Bundesgesetz über die Organisation der Universitäten und ihre Studien – UG 2002")

- Federal Act on the External Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria ("Bundesgesetz über die externe Qualitätssicherung im Hochschulwesen und die Agentur für Qualitätssicherung und Akkreditierung Austria - HG-QSG")

- EU Directives 2005/36 and 2013/55

- Standard Operation Procedures by the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE)

- Bologna Communiqués

- European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

- Quality Standards for Evaluations by the German Evaluation Society

**Internal Documents**

- Development Plan

- Performance agreements with the BMBWF

- Internal performance agreements

- Statutes

- Procedural requirements of the governing bodies

- University gazette

- Internal regulations

- House rules

- Organisational charts

- Process descriptions

- Functional authorisations

- Other documents published on the intranet VetEasy (e.g. guidelines)

# 2. Principles

The fundamental principles of the Quality Strategy ensure that the university fulfils its mission and responsibilities in its core and performance areas as well as securing the freedom of teaching and research. This guarantees an environment for excellence in teaching, research and services.

The QMS aids the university in:

■ maintaining and developing its excellent position as an internationally renowned educational and research institution.

■ enabling a culture of quality as an educational institution which respects the similarities and peculiarities of different teaching and research cultures.

■ fulfilling legal requirements and framework conditions.

■ establishing quality requirements which stand up to regular external and internal evaluation.

Quality can only unfold its full potential if appropriate information, communication, transparency, and participation structures are ensured throughout the university. Thus, room must be made for open discourse, exchange of experiences, and critical self-reflection for all internal stakeholders (i.e. students, teachers, scientists, administrative staff).
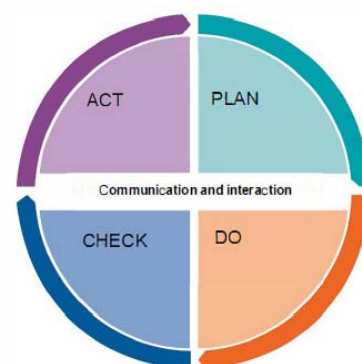


Diagram 1: quality control loop of the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna

The discourse regarding quality emphasizes development and is conducted in closed quality control loops. These loops are coupled according to the principle of subsidiarity, referring to the PDCA cycle (PDCA = Plan-Do-Check-Act). These quality control loops contain many levels from legal agreements to internal performance agreements. Such an approach is necessary to ensure an efficient development of the university as a whole.

■ **PLAN:** Analyse the current situation and identify fields of action, determine targets and measures to reach them

■ **DO:** Select appropriate measures and implement them

■ **CHECK:** Evaluate the extent to which the measures were successful, and targets were reached, assess the results and actions to recommend

■ **ACT:** Transfer recommended action into measures, review targets and measures, adapt to the new situation

# 3. Responsibilities

To successfully assume the responsibility for the PDCA loops in all core and performance areas, clear governance structures are necessary. These are established in the organisational chart of the Vetmeduni Vienna (in its applicable version). The responsibilities are based on the provisions of the University Act 2002 ("Universitätsgesetz 2002"). The university council and senate are the key players on the normative level, whereas the rectorate acts as top-level management on the strategic-operating level. The latter has overall responsibility for the university-wide QM system, determines the related targets and framework conditions and decides about the continuous development. Another key body are the department heads who take care of quality assurance within their assigned scopes of responsibility according to the principle of subsidiarity. Members of the Evaluation Circle are actively involved as internal expert in the further development of key evaluations (e.g. course evaluation, alumni, competence check). The staff unit Quality Management, Quality Development & Evaluation (QQE) supports the high-quality development in core and performance areas of the university, according to its strategic goals.

Additionally, the unit designs and implements quality assurance and quality development processes in a strategic QMS together with all staff members and students. Besides individual support services, the staff unit is responsible for the implementation of legal requirements regarding quality assurance as well as the further development of a comprehensive QMS.

# 4. Core QMS Tools

A focal point of Vetmeduni Vienna´s efforts to maintain quality is to link and harmonise the quality measures in the University's core and performance areas. To reach this goal, the university has defined four major tools as the basis of its QM system (in no particular order):

■ Vetmeduni Vienna process map

■ regular external evaluations, accreditations, audits, certifications (i.a. EAEVE, research evaluation, ISO certifications of clinics and institutes) and rankings

■ internal Performance Agreements in combination with (performance) indicators

■ Vetmeduni Vienna evaluation cycle (i.a. course evaluations, competence checks, PhD programmes, alumni)[3]


In order to reach the most adequate results possible to individual challenges, numerous other QM methods and tools, besides those already mentioned, are being applied on different levels and organisational units of the university. Vetmeduni Vienna prefers the needs-oriented implementation of QM methods, giving it the capability to tailor QM methods to specific needs.

Therefore, the QMS is already being implemented (at different stages) throughout the university through:

■ a focus on QA and high quality in developing performance areas

■ specific objectives and performance indicators at all levels and management-relevant indicators (including the Intellectual Capital Report)

■ clear allocation of tasks to members of the organisation, (e.g. organisational charts, role descriptions, agreements on objectives and performance indicators)

■ comprehensive and regular integration of existing committees and bodies into quality-relevant decisions and developments (including the Evaluation Circle, curriculum committee, other committees)

■ structured involvement and provision of information to relevant internal and external stakeholders (including alumni, students, scientific advisory board)

■ transparent documentation and information as the basis for regularly evaluating and continuously improving all processes and activities (including VetEasy, committee minutes and the Vetmeduni Vienna process portal)

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[3] The evaluation cycle is a comprehensive instrument is in development.

## 4.1 Vetmeduni Vienna Process Map

The Vetmeduni Vienna process map, currently in development, is the top-level structural framework used to describe all relevant performance activities of the University. Particular focus is being set on process responsibility and measurable quality indicators. Concurrently, process documentation is undergoing a continuous development, closely linked to the further advancement of the operational and organisational structures and processes.

Every designated activity has a clear position in the process map. This allows for a clear and unambiguous allocation of the responsibilities for the definition and monitoring of quality criteria. Appropriate awareness of this responsibility is ensured by the quality criteria themselves and their inclusion in the annual performance agreements as well as process reviews with persons responsible (starting 2020). Thus, two overarching independent and effective validation activities guarantee that the quality of the core duties is regularly assessed and that the further development of those core duties is promoted with appropriate involvement of the internal and external stakeholders and experts relevant for the respective area of responsibility. The drafting of university-wide job descriptions with an emphasis on executive functions makes quality criteria comparable across departments, even in situations with strong differences in content alignment.

## 4.2 External Evaluations, Accreditations, Audits, Certifications and Rankings

Vetmeduni Vienna regularly undergoes external evaluations, accreditations, audits, certifications and rankings. The results are used as monitoring tools for the internal advancement in the core and performance areas of the University.

Key external quality assurance procedures are the regular accreditation by the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE), the research evaluation, the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), the audit regarding university and family ("hochschuleundfamilie") as well as external certifications of individual clinics and institutes (e.g. ISO 9001). Furthermore, there are regular internal audits (i.e. of the university pharmacy). Where potential for advancement is identified, measures for improvement are deduced and implemented by the rectorate, the heads of departments and the heads of the respective institutes/clinics/units depending on the respective responsibility.

The results of different rankings (e.g. Global Shanghai Ranking for Veterinary Sciences, QS Ranking for Veterinary Sciences) are analysed and deliberated internally. Furthermore, the rectorate determines if and how the results of rankings can be used for questions regarding the quality advancement of teaching and research, structural and developmental planning as well as reporting. The same applies to public relations and the communication of results.

Additionally, Vetmeduni Vienna uses different sector-related data, analyses and benchmarks to deliberate development and performance in comparison to other institutions.

## 4.3 Internal Performance Agreements and Indicators

The internal performance agreements are another central strategic guidance instrument. The main focus is on substantiating quantities, schedules and processes to reach strategic goals of the university. Furthermore, substantiation of the legal and political guidelines as well as concrete preconditions resulting from the development plan are included.

Closely linked to the internal performance agreements are indicators. They reduce the level of complexity and illustrate the quality advancement in the University's core and performance areas. At the same time, they allow for content evaluation and interpretation of the university's performance for strategic planning. The majority of these key figures and indicators derives from the assessment of academic activities and performance, which is well established throughout Europe, and can be found in the Austrian regulations on the collection and monitoring of academic data. The university uses a number of these key figures as strategic indicators and monitors their advancement with the implementation of the development plan, the performance agreements with the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMBWF) and the internal performance agreements.

## 4.4 Vetmeduni Vienna Evaluation Cycle

Previously established evaluations (e.g. course evaluations, competence check, Veterinary Medicine Progress Test [VMPT], graduate survey) will be united in a structured evaluation cycle.

This serves to ensure that the recurrent evaluations of different stakeholder groups (e.g. potential students, students, instructors, staff, residents, graduates) can be carried out in predictable quality and in compliance with deadlines.

Course evaluation by students has been established for many years and comprises a multi-level process from analysis to the definition of measures, fine-tuning and monitoring (e.g. Evaluation Circle) of developments.

Regular evaluations of the curricula are in the planning phase. Currently, tailor-made evaluations are carried out on an as-needed basis, along with the further advancement of study programmes, university training courses, and partly as a quality assurance tool by persons responsible for the respective processes (e.g. surveys among the participants of information events).

# 5. Demand-driven Quality Assurance and Development

Besides the general quality tools (see 4.), Vetmeduni Vienna has adopted the approach of demand-driven quality assurance and advancement. Therefore, comprehensive, coordinated tools and methods for assessment and analysis are in place, both on an individual level (e.g. teachers, researchers, institutes/clinics) and throughout the university.

The related quality portfolio (see Diagram 2) covers the whole spectrum of quality-enhancing elements of the University's core and performance areas and is applied by the staff unit QQE.
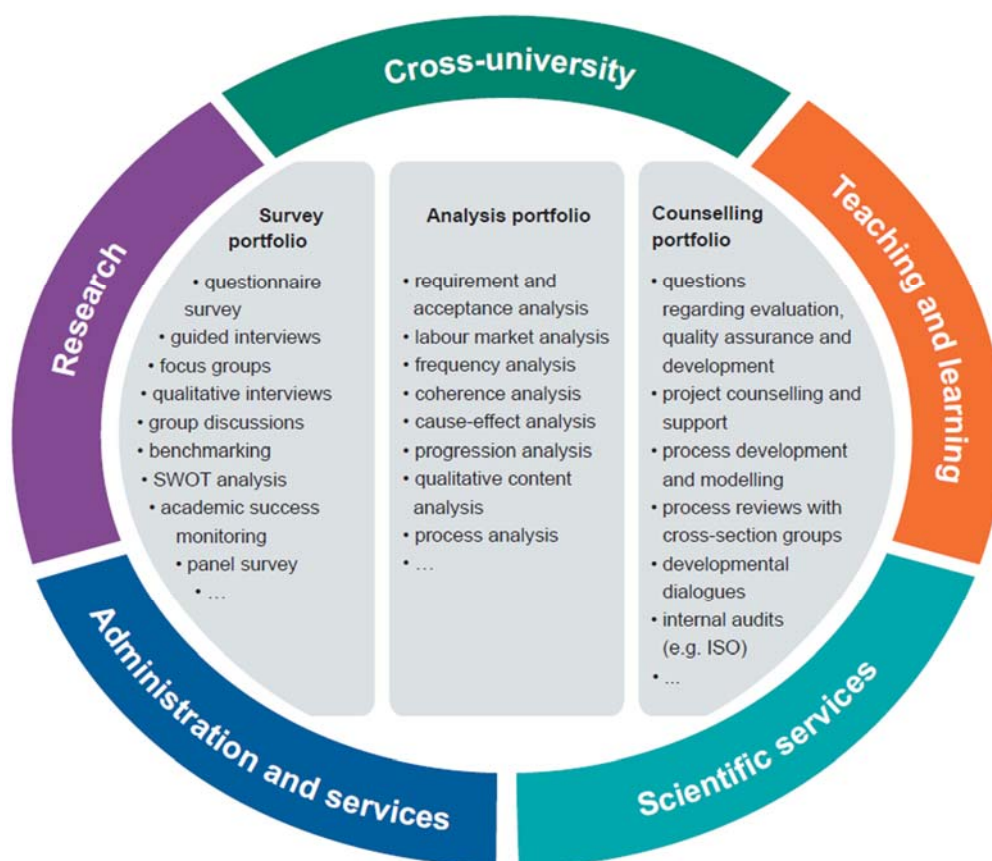


Diagram 2: Quality portfolio of the Vetmeduni Vienna

# 6. Summary and Outlook

Due to a history of high autonomy among its organisational units, Vetmeduni Vienna's QM system consists of numerous well-established individual QA tools (e.g. regular internal and external evaluations, internal performance agreements, indicators) and several recently developed overarching structural elements (e.g. quality portfolio). The well-established individual tools will undergo intensive further advancement by the relevant units and bodies in the years to come (e.g. inclusion of all central evaluations in an evaluation cycle). This will lead to an even broader and more relevant use, for example for the reinforcement of quality assurance in lifelong learning activities (Lifelong Learning School and Graduate School).

The mentioned structural elements such as the Vetmeduni Vienna process map (currently in development) or the extension of monitoring accompanying measures and impact assessment are starting to show effects. However, these instruments need further establishment and reinforcement over time to develop their full potential.

In accordance with its development paradigm the Vetmeduni Vienna sees itself as a continuously learning system. Consequently, the QMS itself is subject to systematic (self-)observation and regular critical assessment to ensure that it follows its premises, adapts premises if necessary and reliably serves the university, its staff and units. Following the conclusions of the QS, advancement of the QMS is currently focused on several areas:

- design of the evaluation cycle and extension of the monitoring of certain measures and impact assessment by the staff unit QQE (services for clinics and institutes by the quality consultant and the consultant for central analyses and statistics)

- further development of the Vetmeduni Vienna process map (development of a process maturity level model, support in identifying, modelling and implementing decentralised processes, further development and optimisation of central processes)

- harmonisation and consolidation of centrally conducted surveys and evaluations, of the use of indicators and of central reporting

- advancement of joint culture of quality

- further development of the allocation of responsibilities for quality assurance

- further development of existing QA tools for a more relevant and broader application