



The Hong Kong Veterinary Association

Introduction

There has been a world-wide trend in opening new vet schools and there is growing evidence of over-supply problems developing [here](#). It has been argued that in spite of this world-wide trend there exists a need in Hong Kong for its own veterinary school. The possible benefits of a local veterinary school are many and have been dealt with in detail in a HKVA subcommittee report [here](#)

The aim of this report is to examine the existing veterinary profession in Hong Kong, possible consequences of a local veterinary school and describe alternatives to a local veterinary school.

The Hong Kong Veterinary Profession

The veterinary profession in Hong Kong is over 30 years old and originally was dominated by western vets. Since then the face of the profession has changed and now consists of approximately 62% Chinese. For a breakdown of the profession please refer to the *HKVA Report on the Hong Kong Veterinary Profession in 2011* where the profession is described in detail [here](#)

Veterinary science is generally practiced at a high standard in Hong Kong and this has resulted from a free-market environment over the past 10 – 15 years which was competitive and profitable enabling clinic owners to reinvest in equipment for their practices and for veterinarians to improve their standards through post-graduate training. Please read the *HKVA Vet Survey 2013* report [here](#).

The difference between a competitive environment and a saturated environment should be stressed. Competitive environments benefit everybody but saturated environments lead to a reduction in profitability resulting in a decrease in reinvestment in equipment and education and then to cost-cutting and an erosion of the standard of practice. It is often difficult to determine when the environment changes from one to the other but in Hong Kong we have seen a stagnation in the growth of existing clinics with the exception of some of the lower priced clinics and some of the charities. The profession has also seen a lowering of wages

particularly of new graduates which is an indicator of a local oversupply problem *HKVA Man Power Survey 2013* [here](#)

There has been an increase in the number of new clinics opening. The number of clinics now stands at 152, up from 132 just 2 years ago indicating an opening rate of almost one per month. The reasons for this growth rate is unclear, it could be argued that the profession is vibrant and experiencing growth but when the above factors are taken into account it is thought that it probably results from a lack of new positions being offered in existing clinics forcing vets to open their own clinics if they wish to stay in the profession. It is thought that the payback time for new clinics is increasing but owing to the difficulty in obtaining this information there is no hard data to back this up.

Studying veterinary science is currently popular with Hong Kong students as seen by the 190 students who were studying veterinary science in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland two years ago *Report on the Hong Kong Veterinary Profession 2011* [here](#)

This number does not include those students studying in Taiwan (the second largest educator of vets in Hong Kong) and North America. It is a troubling fact that the current popularity of studying veterinary science by Hong Kong students may lead to an over-supply of the local profession and it has been suggested that regulation of numbers is required. This is one of the arguments of those in favour of a veterinary school *HKVA Subcommittee Comment on a Vet School 29-6-13* [here](#)

Consequences of Opening a Local Veterinary School

A local school would provide an obvious way of regulating the numbers of veterinarians in Hong Kong through the requirement of all non-Hong Kong trained veterinarians to sit an external examination. It has been argued that from a veterinary point of view Hong Kong is not as difficult to work in as other countries owing to the apartment living and isolation of animals from each other and the environment. Even though it appears to be politically unacceptable the adoption of an AVMA or RCVS examination for all non-Hong Kong residents wishing to work here could be introduced at this point in time without the need for a vet school.

The standard of practice in Hong Kong will be determined by a local veterinary school if one is established here. At present students can study in top schools overseas so there are concerns about the quality of a local degree. Supporters of a local school would argue that the maintenance of standards would be ensured by having a partnership with a top university overseas but in a world which is suffering from a shortage of veterinary academics the partner may not be able to meet the teaching demands. The other problem with this model is that

instead of a local body of academics there is a series of academics on short-term appointments who never really grasp the local situation.

There is always the worry that the local school would succumb to pressures to increase their student intake. Owing to the small size of the local profession which appears to offer 30 new jobs per year of which 15 – 20 are suited to new graduates *Short Update of 2011 Report* [here](#) a small rise in the student intake could easily produce an over-supply of graduates. These figures have been criticized as being too low but at present no other study has been undertaken. There are also concerns that the small size of the profession may not be able to support an undergraduate program of international standard.

A local vet school would make possible research and post-graduate programs. However research and post-graduate studies do not require an under-graduate vet school to be established. *James Cook University Veterinary School* [here](#) started as a veterinary tropical medicine research institute. *The John Curtin School of Medical Research* [here](#) in Canberra offers post-graduate degrees without running an undergraduate program. It should be pointed out that Government funding is only available for undergraduate degrees making the setting up of an independent research and postgraduate institution financially challenging.

The establishment of a local vet school may facilitate the setting up of a welfare centre. Currently there is no local centre in Hong Kong which acts as a independent centre for animal welfare. There are organizations (eg SPCA) which act to promote animal welfare. However, there is still a need for a independent body to support animal welfare and also act as a conduit between the veterinary profession and the Hong Kong public.

One of the big advantages of a veterinary school in Hong Kong, would be that veterinary science would be available to all students based on academic merit rather than those who have the financial resources to study overseas.

It needs to be emphasized that setting up and running a veterinary degree program is challenging and expensive. It will not be an easy task to produce graduates of an international standard of comparable quality to existing veterinary schools of known reputation. It is cumbersome in terms of regulating vet numbers as class sizes cannot be changed quickly. The advantage which this system offers is specialist training. The disadvantages are the cost and size of a vet school required to supply a relatively small number of graduates (15 – 30) per year.

For a veterinary school to be acceptable the quality of its graduates must be equal to or better than the current professional standards. The Hong Kong Veterinary Surgeons Board currently recognizes AVMA and RCVS accredited veterinary schools from around the world as well as graduates from the National University of Taiwan [here](#) (refer to www.hkva.org and www.vsbhk.org.hk).

Alternatives to a local veterinary degree program

The first proposal is to continue with the status quo. The current system allows graduates from schools approved by the Hong Kong Veterinary Surgeons Board to practice in Hong Kong. This system has produced a local veterinary profession consisting of Hong Kong citizens and ex-pats who have been trained by schools of high standard from around the world and has resulted in graduates being able to work and gain experience in the country where they studied before coming to Hong Kong. Competitive pressures, a profitable environment and a demanding public have resulted in a profession of very high standard.

The second proposal is to run a Government scholarship program based upon academic merit which maintains the advantages of the old system while eliminating some of the unfairness of it. The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) provides scholarships for Singaporean students studying veterinary medicine in the UK. Their scholarship covers all tuition fees, living allowance, air travel, visa fees and a one-off payment for pre-study equipment/resources [here](#). These scholarships involve a 6 year bond to the AVA. The proposal being put forward here would be similar but without any bonded service to the AFCD. The advantage of this system is that it is easy to implement, it guarantees the very best of education for Hong Kong vets and will result in one of the best trained veterinary professions in the world within a period of 10 – 15 years. It eliminates the bias towards those students who are financially privileged and allows Hong Kong vets to be trained in 4 – 5 of the worlds' best veterinary schools. It would allow the Government to regulate the number of vets working in Hong Kong in much the same way that a local vet school would. This proposal would allow local students with academic merit to study veterinary science overseas by providing financial support.

The third proposal is to run a 3 or 4 year pre-vet degree in Hong Kong, similar to a pre-vet college degree in the USA and Canada and the first 3 years of the Melbourne University veterinary degree program, with a guaranteed number of full scholarship places in overseas veterinary schools for those students upon graduation who qualify. This system would provide a locally based team of veterinary academics, would enable research and post-graduate programs to be run, would enable the Government to control numbers in response to market demand, would eliminate the financial bias of the current system and would be very easy to implement. The advantage of this option is that it provides a means of obtaining the advantages a veterinary degree program could provide without the difficulties of running one. It would be a natural lead in to a veterinary degree program in the future when the Hong Kong veterinary profession had grown enough to support it or when political

barriers between Asian countries had been removed. At present a degree similar to the one proposed here is being run at *St Georges University in the Caribbean* [here](#)
The University of Wisconsin Veterinary School started with a pre-vet degree and later developed a graduate veterinary degree program [here](#).

Specialist Training

Over the past 20 years specialist surgeons and ophthalmologists have been visiting Hong Kong but it has only been in the last 8 years that the market had grown enough to support full time specialists. At present there is a full time neurologist, general surgeon, cardiologist, internal medicine specialist, general practitioner specialist and ophthalmologist. There is also a visiting dentistry specialist and 2 visiting ophthalmologists as well as two Hong Kong veterinarians studying in local residency programs through the American College, one in general surgery and one in ophthalmology.

The argument that if more specialists were here on a full-time basis more people would use them is valid to a point but in a free market system, which the HK veterinary profession is, they would have to generate enough work to be financially viable. The point that a veterinary faculty would enable more specialists to work here has merit but whether there would be enough work for them is open to debate. To be viable each specialist would need to see 10 cases per day which would need to come from general practice. Apart from running a specialist clinic a vet school would also need to offer a first opinion practice in order to provide student training. This would impact the local profession by up to 5 – 10% which would mean eliminating up to 15 clinics. If the aim of the specialist clinic is to train specialists then this will quickly lead to an over-supply in the local market. If the aim is to train vets from the Asia-Pacific region then it would be feasible though it would give Hong Kong few extra benefits and would lead to sacrificing a part of the local profession in order to support this training.

Final Note

It is surprising to realize how little money the Hong Kong Government has spent on the veterinary profession. Most of the profession would probably agree that the Hong Kong Government needs to take a greater interest in its veterinary profession by firstly listening to what it has to say and secondly by funding the education of its future members.

Dr Tom Mangan
HKVA President



The Hong Kong Veterinary Association

Survey of all Registered Vets in Hong Kong (2013)

In July, 2013 a survey of all registered vets in Hong Kong was conducted by the HKVA. At the time there were 690 registered vets and 174 replies were received of which 160 were from vets currently working in Hong Kong.

From a study of the veterinary profession conducted in 2011 it was found that of the 600 registered vets only 70% of them were working in Hong Kong. It is reasonable to assume that the percentages have not changed so it can be estimated that there are approximately 460 registered veterinarians currently working in Hong Kong. The 160 replies received from vets working in Hong Kong represent approximately 35% of the actual profession.

The breakdown of the replies was as follows:

Area of employment

Small animal practitioners	134
Hong Kong Jockey Club	6
Ocean Park/ Kadorie Farm	4
Government	11
Education	5
Others	5
Not working in Hong Kong	14

Of the 16 new graduates who replied 10 commented that they had difficulty finding employment here and were unemployed for at least 4 months following graduation.

Of the 160 vets who are working in Hong Kong, 81 had completed or were in the process of completing formal post-graduate qualifications and 24 had completed informal courses such as the CVE courses in Sydney. This is a very high percentage and illustrates the dedication of the local profession.

Concerning the veterinary school question, of the 160 vets currently working in Hong Kong 103 vets said that they were against a veterinary school in Hong Kong, 36 were for it and 21 were undecided. Of the vets not working in Hong Kong, 6 were against it, 4 were for it and 4 were undecided. The main reason given by those who were against the setting up of a vet school in Hong Kong was the local oversupply of vets. These figures were similar to those obtained in a previous survey of HKVA members in 2011 where 55 replies were received from the 204 members surveyed.

The HKVA would like to thank everyone who sent in replies for taking the time out of their busy days to do so.

Tom Mangan
HKVA President



The Hong Kong Veterinary Association Ltd

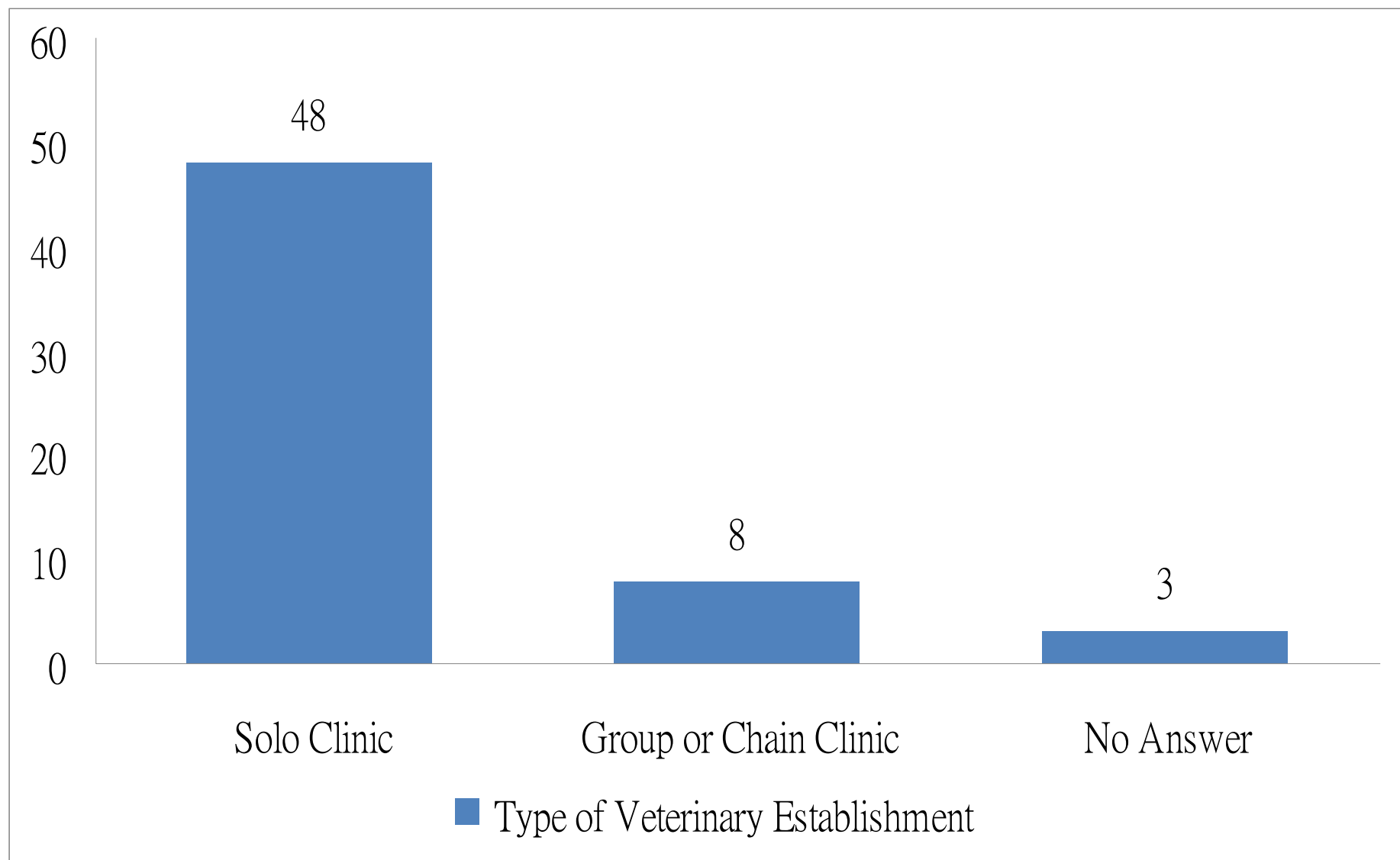
Man Power Survey 2013



Based on numbers provided by pet food company we estimated that there are ~ 100-120 Practice Principals in Hong Kong. This survey is based on 59 questionnaires completed by Practice Principals, making our response rate around 50%.

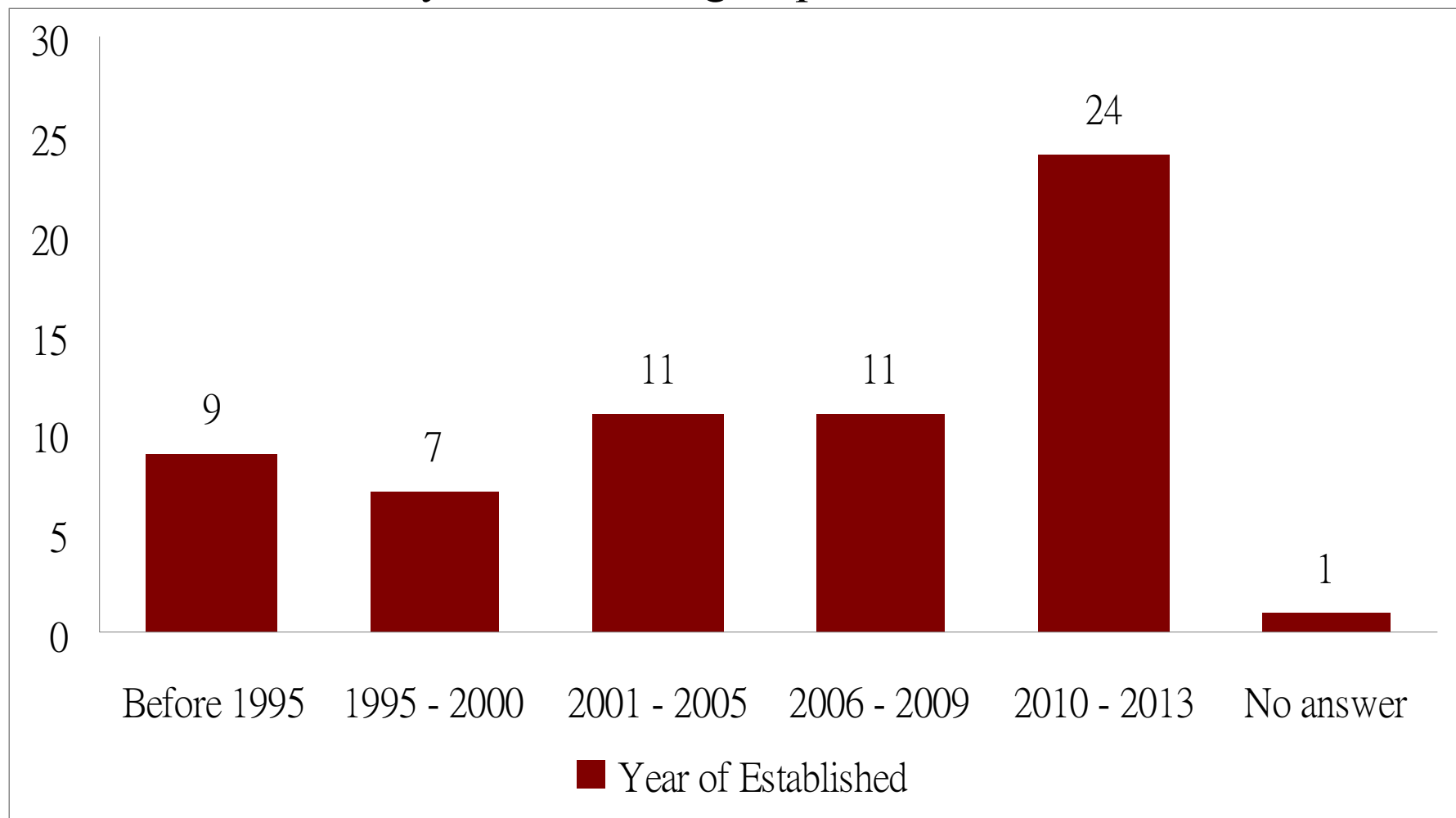


Type of Veterinary Establishment





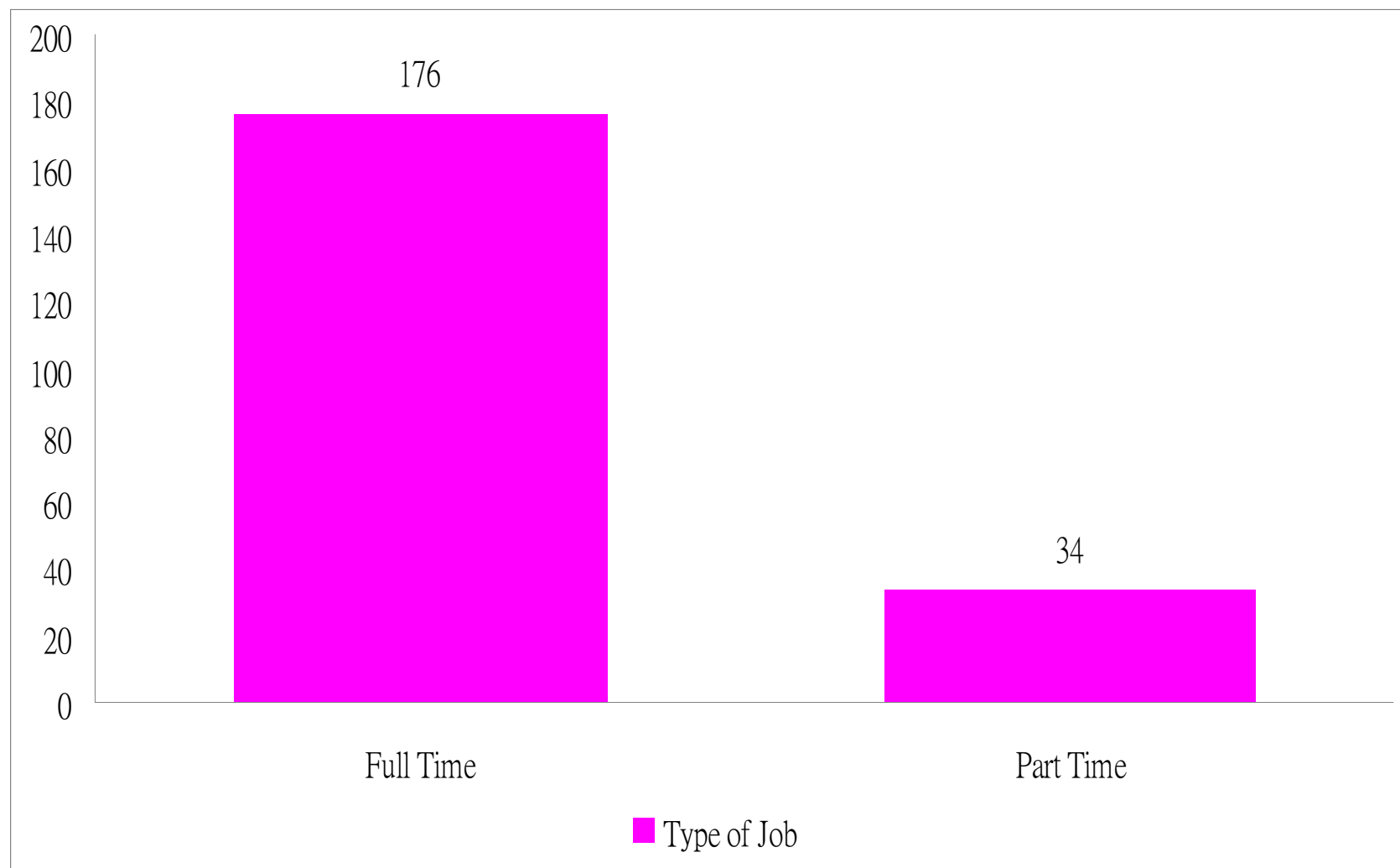
When was your clinic or group of clinics established?



- One Group/Chain Clinic established in Year 2002 & 2004 & 2012
- One Group/Chain Clinic established in Year 1997 & 2010

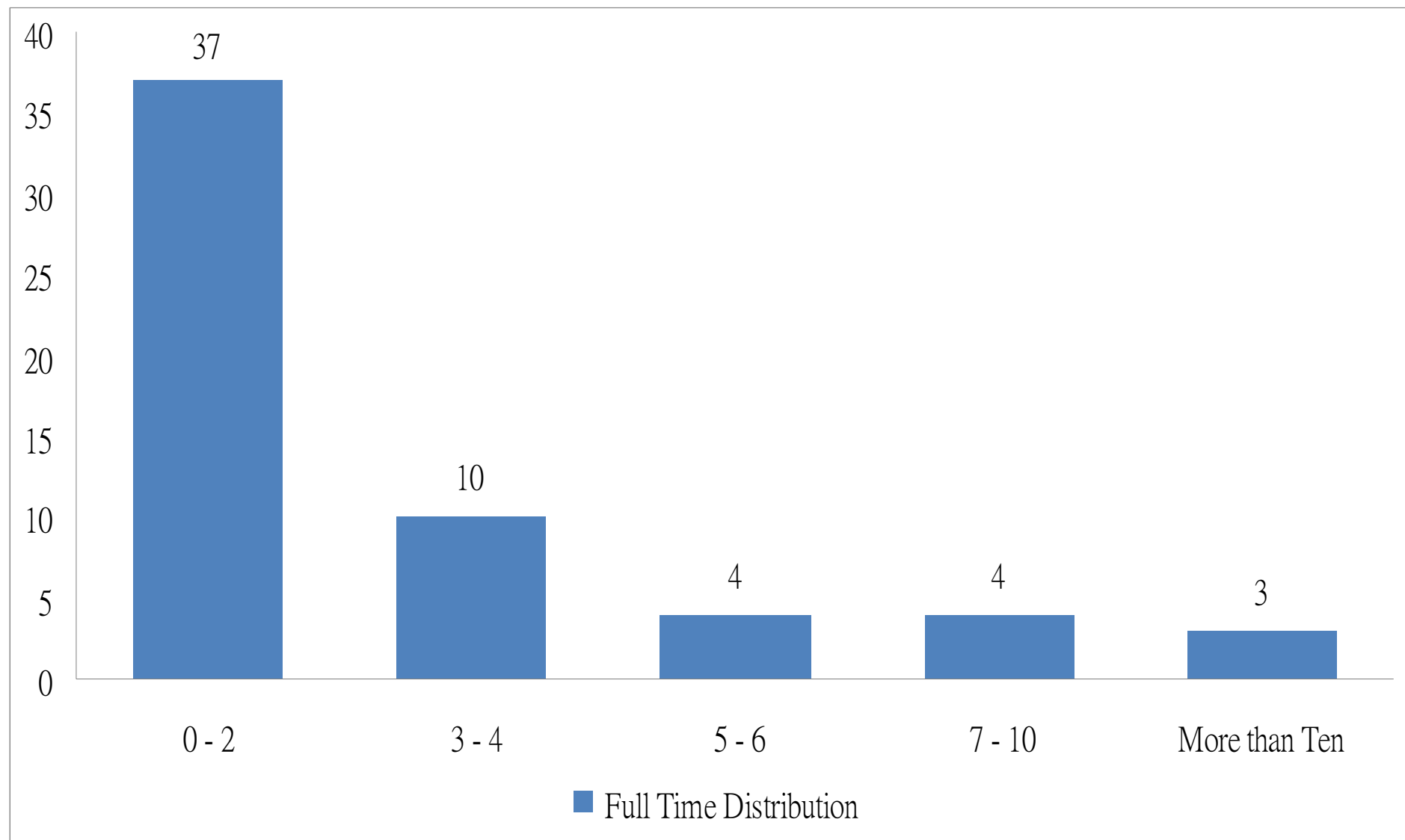


Number of Veterinary Surgeons Working in your clinic/group?



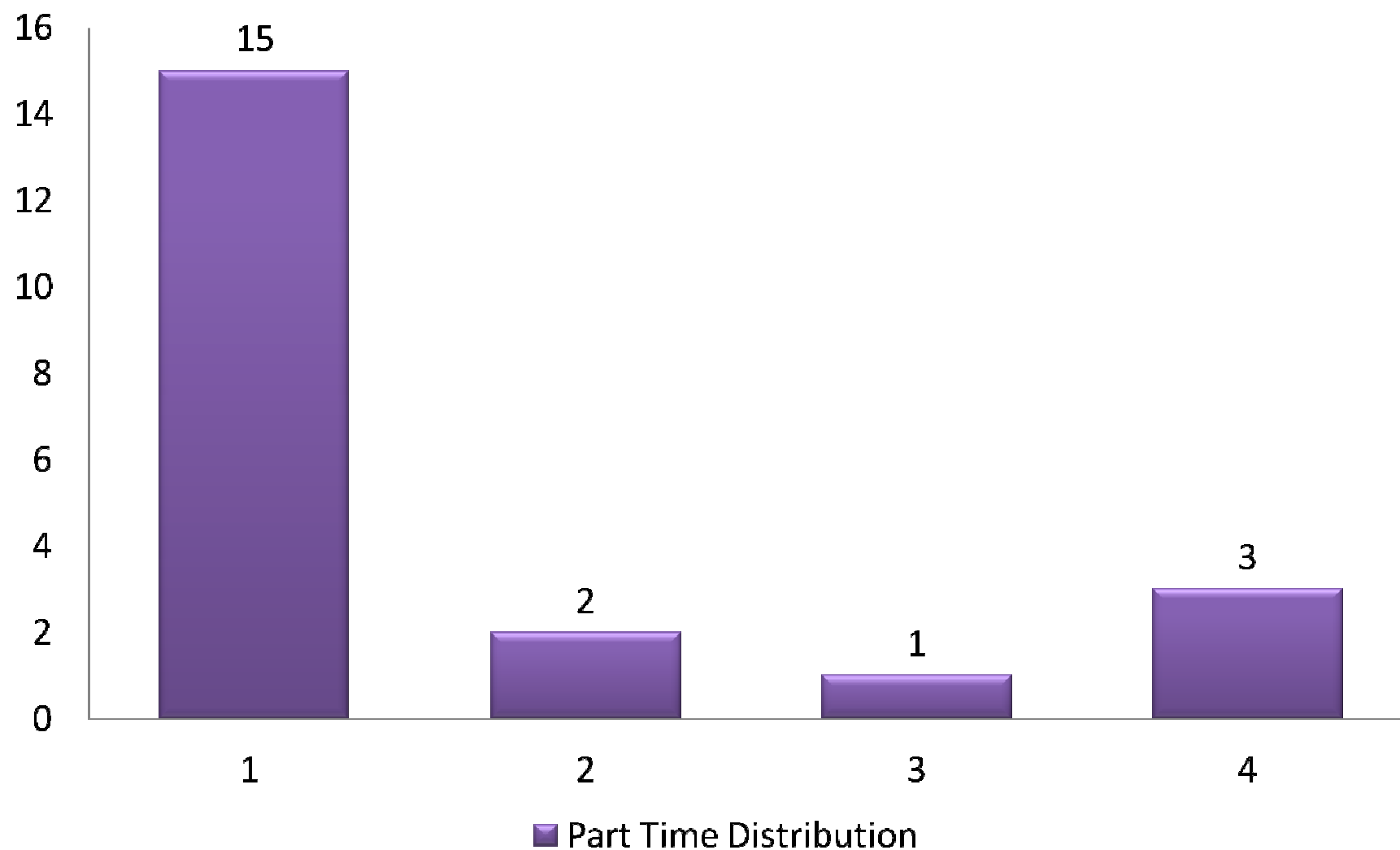


Number of Vets in a Practice – Full Time (Cont)





Number of Vets in a Practice – Part Time (Cont)



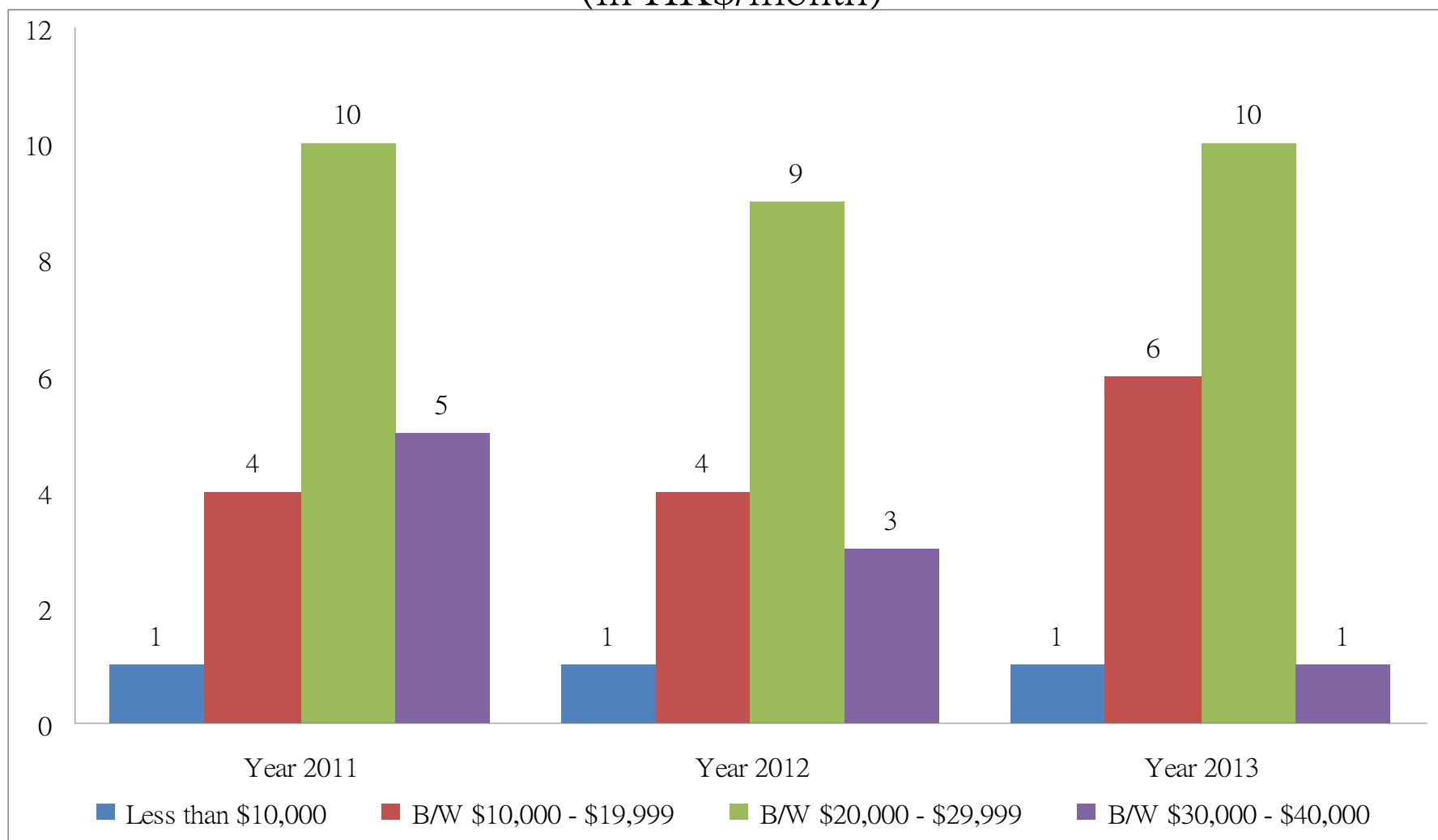


Did your Clinic/Group employ a new vet(s) in Year 2011 - 2013

YEAR	Employ New Vets		How Many				Type of Position			The Employed Vet			New Graduate		
	YES	NO	1	2	3	N/A	New Position	Replacement	N/A	New Arrival	Move from another clinic in HK	N/A	YES	NO	N/A
2011	26	32	15	9	1	1	17	10	8	18	11	8	12	21	2
2012	20	37	13	5	0	1	10	13	1	8	14	2	7	17	0
2013	23	34	15	5	1	1	12	15	2	7	15	7	11	15	0

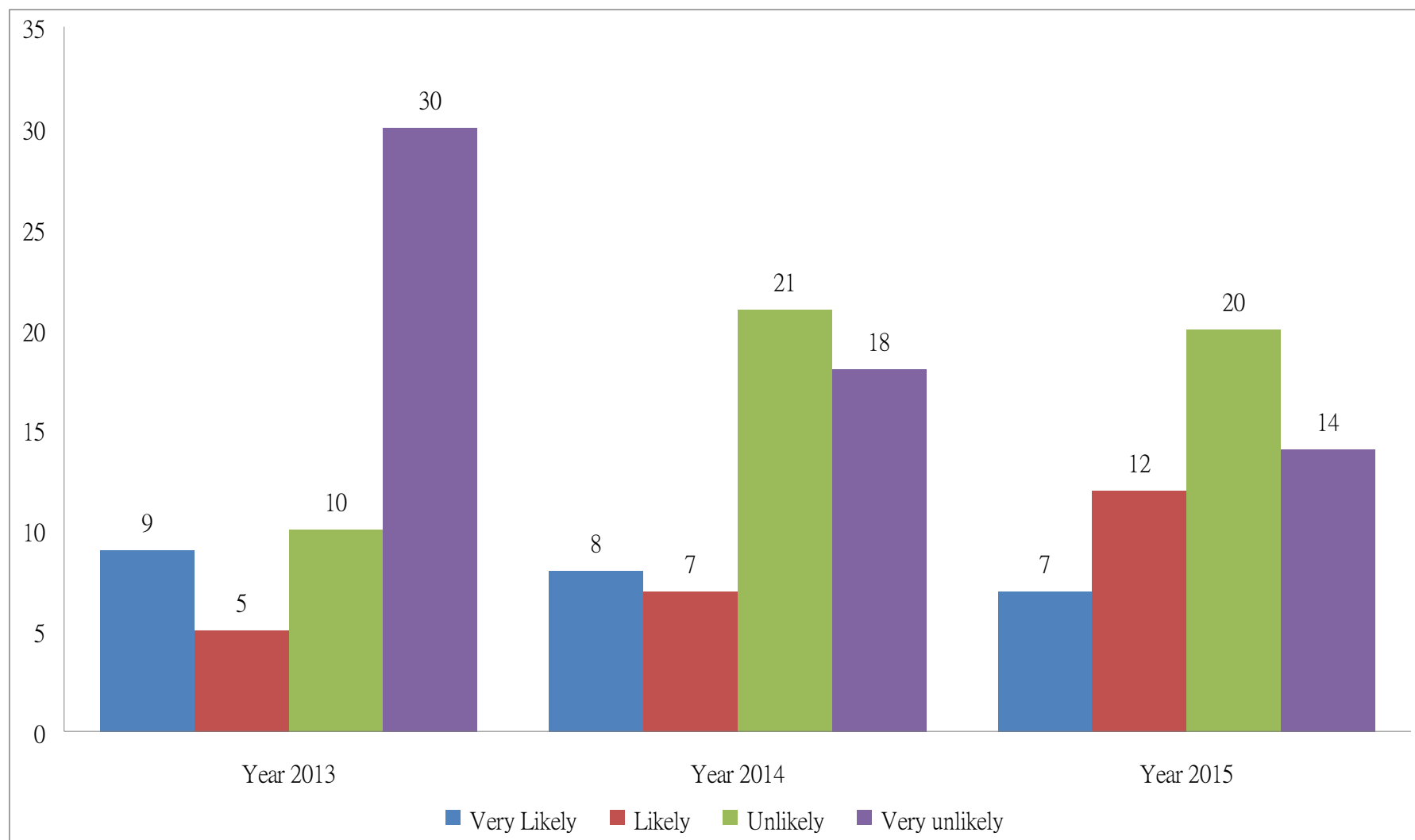


IF new graduates were employed, what was the starting Salary ?
(in HK\$/month)



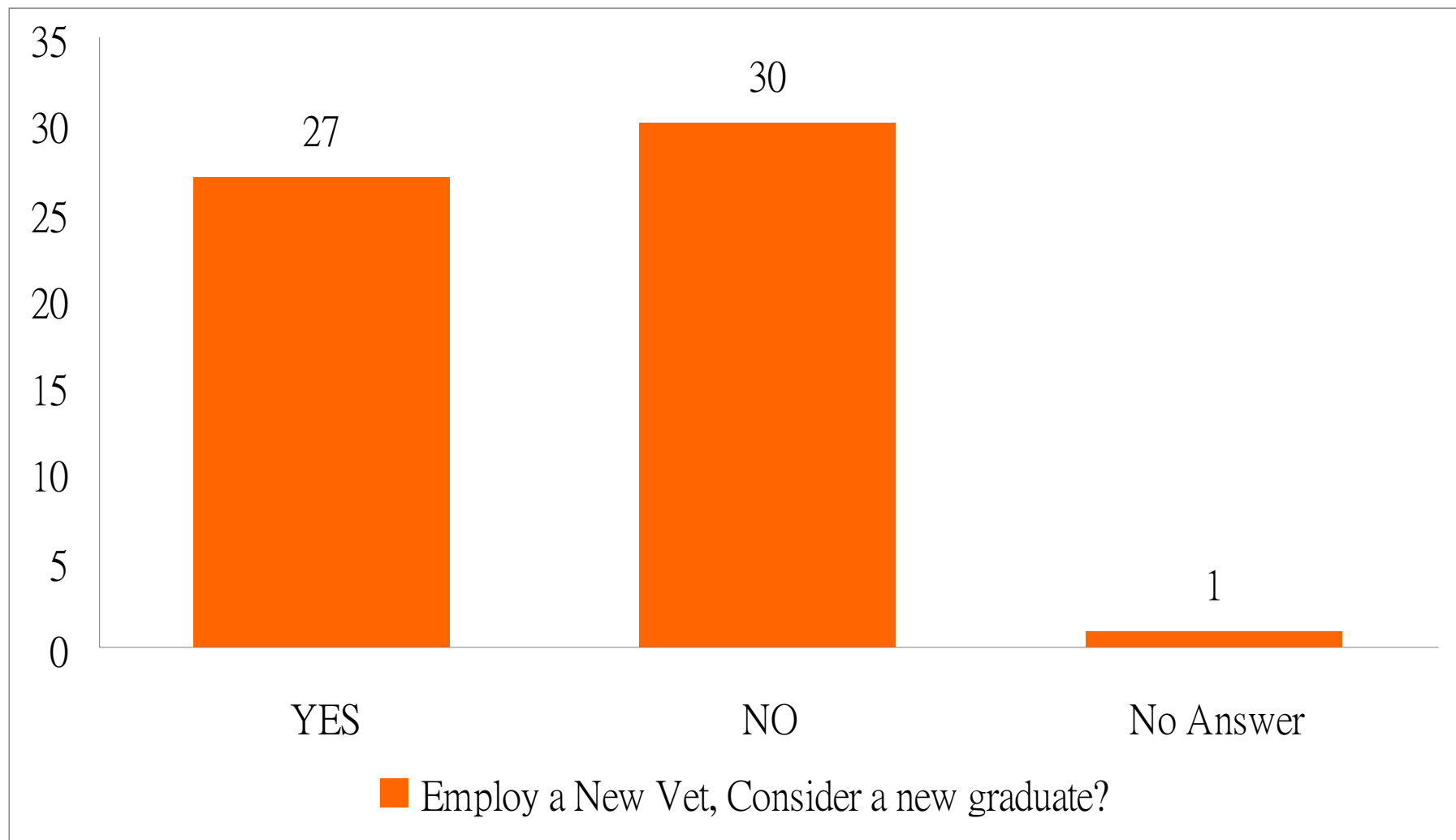


How likely will you be employing an extra vet (not a replacement) in the near future?





If you were to employ a new vet, will you consider a new graduate?





Comments & Feedback

“If you were to employ a new vet, will you consider a new graduate?”

1)

NO to consider a new graduate:

“I receive many applications from new graduates desperately looking for work. The reality there is not enough work for my vets here in HK, even the experienced ones”

2)

YES to consider a new graduate:

“But 1st preference for someone with experience. Overall, less likely to employ a new graduate”



Special thanks to the team at Royal
Canin Hong Kong for helping the HKVA
on the survey



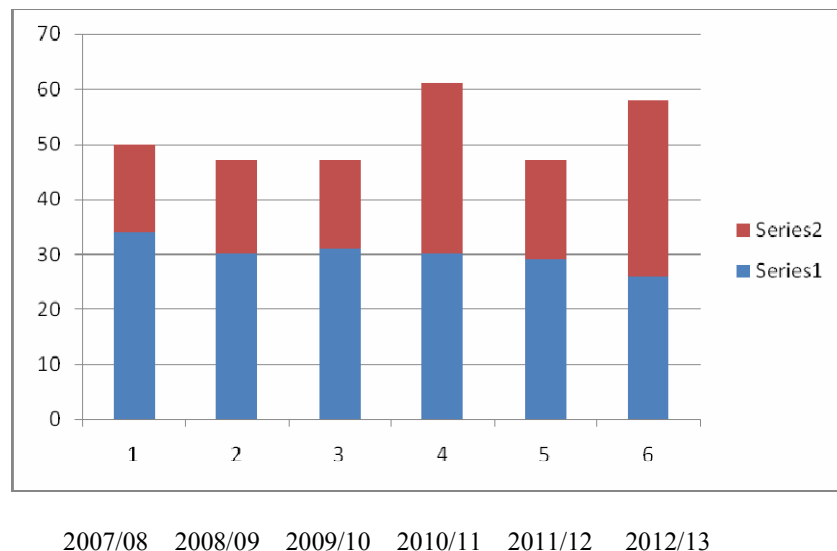
The Hong Kong Veterinary Association

In 2011 the HKVA produced a report on the Hong Kong veterinary profession titled ‘Report on the Hong Kong Veterinary Profession in 2011’ which can be found on the HKVA website in the ‘Hong Kong Veterinary School’ section under ‘Reports Surveys.’

The following report is a short update to that report.

1. Examination of the job advertisements listed on the HKVA website over the previous 18 months revealed that there were approximately 15 – 20 jobs suitable for new graduates per year.
2. The following section deals with the number of vets registering with the Hong Kong Veterinary Surgeons Board each year since 2008 and the number of those vets who were able to find employment.

Unemployed /employed subsets of vets registering with the VSB over the period 2008 - 2013



Red + Blue - represents the total number of vets registering with the VSB for each 12 month period
Red - represents unemployed vets
Blue - represents employed vets

Important notes:

The information concerning the name of the veterinarian and the year of registration was obtained from the Hong Kong Veterinary Surgeon Board list of registered vets in Hong Kong which can be downloaded off the VSB webpage www.vsbhk.org.hk . The employment status of each vet was determined through advertisement, consultation with representatives of the pet food industry and word of mouth.

Of the 106 vets who registered in 2011 – 2013, 55 were confirmed to be working in Hong Kong, 20 were confirmed to be overseas and 31 could not be contacted. The figures for the last 2 years therefore have a greater error because of this but in a profession as small as the Hong Kong veterinary profession if a vet is unknown then there is a high probability that he/she is not working in Hong Kong.

Even though the collection methods used to obtain the above data can be criticized as being inaccurate and subjective the figures do show a consistent trend concerning the job openings for vets in Hong Kong and reflect upon the small size of the veterinary profession here. The small size of the profession has always been a concern to the Association in terms of whether the establishment of a veterinary school here is the wisest course of action.



Dr Tom Mangan
HKVA President



The Hong Kong Veterinary Association

The State of the Hong Kong Veterinary Profession in 2011

The recent announcement by the City University of Hong Kong that it plans to open a Veterinary School in Hong Kong in 2013 has raised concerns within the veterinary community about the impact which this school would have on the Hong Kong veterinary profession.

The number of veterinary surgeons registered with the Veterinary Surgeon's Board of Hong Kong between 1998 and June 2011 can be obtained from the VSB website www.vsbhk.org.hk I have reproduced it in Appendix 1. It shows that the number of registered veterinarians has quadrupled over that period of time.

However it should be pointed out that not all of these veterinarians are currently working in Hong Kong. Appendix 2 shows the breakdown of the registration list into those working in Hong Kong and those who are not. The group of veterinarians currently working in Hong Kong is further broken down to show which sector of the profession they are employed in. Of the 600 registered veterinarians in Hong Kong only 335 are employed full-time in small animal practice. A total of 184 veterinarians are either known or assumed to be not working in Hong Kong at present.

The current list of registered veterinarians was then broken down to show in which country veterinary degrees were obtained. The results are shown in Appendix 3. The two most popular places to study veterinary science were Australia (239) and Taiwan (139).

The Hong Kong veterinary profession is often thought of as being dominated by western vets however Appendix 4 shows that 345 of the 600 registered veterinarians are Chinese and 255 are from other races.

Many practice owners that I have spoken to recently have told me with some concern of the number of applications they are receiving from new graduates looking for work. Appendix 5 shows the number of veterinarians who registered with the VSB in each of the past four years

(2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011) and compares the number who are working in Hong Kong with the number who are not. The reasons why people may not be working here are quite varied but it is concerning that the graph shows an almost identical picture for years 2008, 2009 and 2010 however in 2011 both the total number of registrations and the number of veterinarians who are not working here increased significantly.

Government census figures have shown that the number of animals being kept as pets has increased by 39.7% (refer to Appendix 6). However the number of registered veterinarians has increased by 66.2% over the same period of time (refer to Appendix 1). The number of clinics has increased by 47% over the same period of time (refer to Appendix 7). These figures show a disturbing trend towards an oversupply of veterinarians in Hong Kong.

The increase in the number of registrations received by the VSB in 2011 raised concerns about the number of Hong Kong students currently studying veterinary science abroad. Veterinary schools where Hong Kong students traditionally studied were contacted and the results have been tabulated in Appendix 8. It can be seen that at present there are between 180-190 Hong Kong students studying veterinary science. This is obviously disturbing as it indicates that over the next five years these students will graduate and may be looking for employment opportunities in Hong Kong.

This year showed an approximate 25% increase in the number of registrations when compared to the previous three years. However the number of these individuals who were able to find work stayed the same resulting in a doubling of the number of those unable to find work here in Hong Kong.

The data collected would appear to indicate that the Hong Kong veterinary profession is heading towards an oversupply problem which can only be expected to get worse over the next five years as the impact of the current students coming into the work-force is felt.

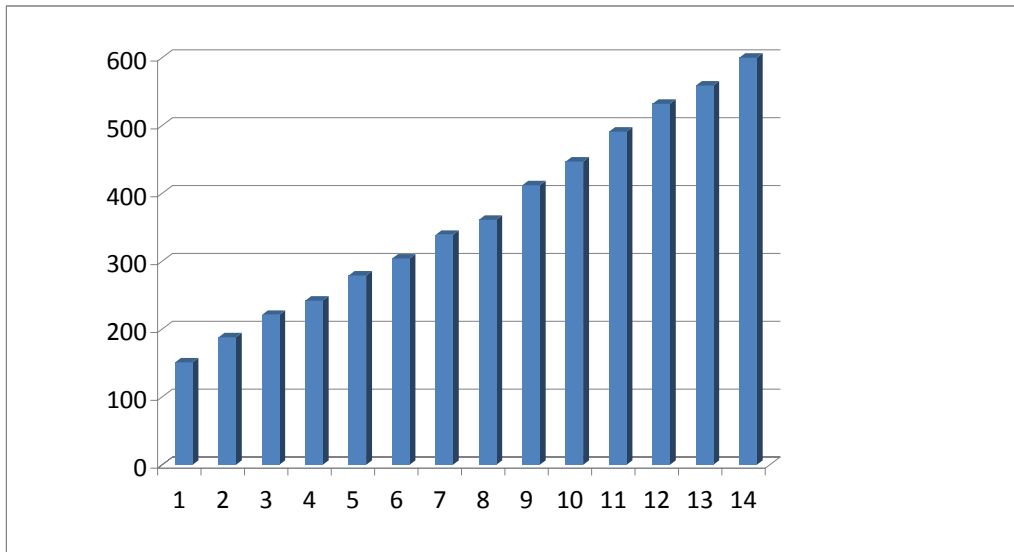
The HKVA views the plans to open a veterinary school in Hong Kong with grave concerns.



Dr Tom Mangan BVSc BAppSc MRCVS
HKVA President

Appendix 1

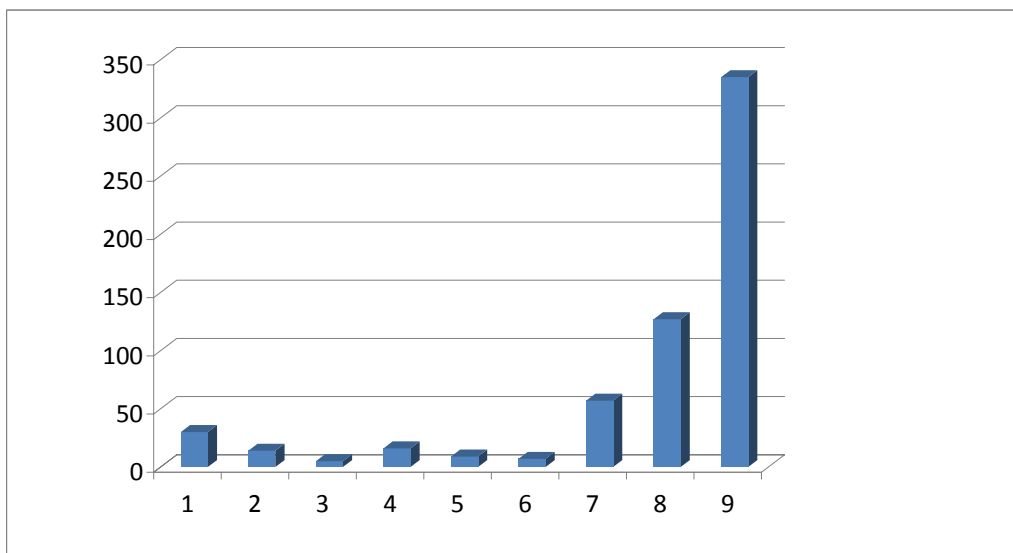
The Number of Registered Veterinarians with the VSB from 1998 to 2011



	Year	No. of Veterinarians
1	1998	151
2	1999	188
3	2000	221
4	2001	242
5	2002	279
6	2003	304
7	2004	339
8	2005	361
9	2006	412
10	2007	447
11	2008	491
12	2009	532
13	2010	559
14	2011	600

Appendix 2

Areas of Employment for Veterinarians Currently Registered in Hong Kong with the VSB

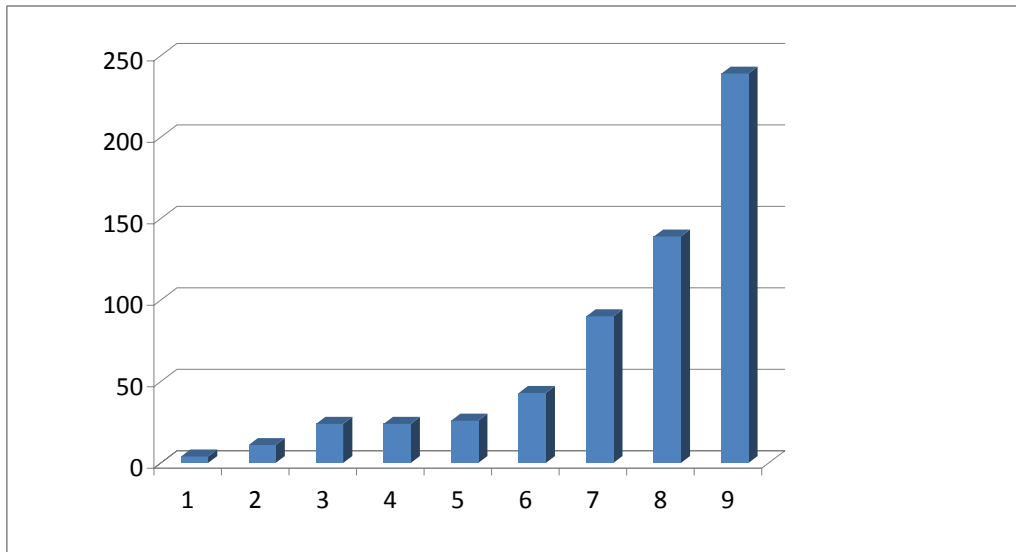


1	Government	30
2	Jockey Club	14
3	Ocean Park/ Kadorie Farm	5
4	University/Education/Industry	16
5	Locums	9
6	Visiting Specialists	7
7	Unknown	57
8	Not working in Hong Kong	127
9	Working in small animal clinics	335
	Total number of Veterinarians Registered	600

Note It would be logical to assume that the vets listed in the Unknown Group are not working in Hong Kong

Appendix 3

The Country of Graduation of the 600 Veterinarians Currently Registered with the HKVSB

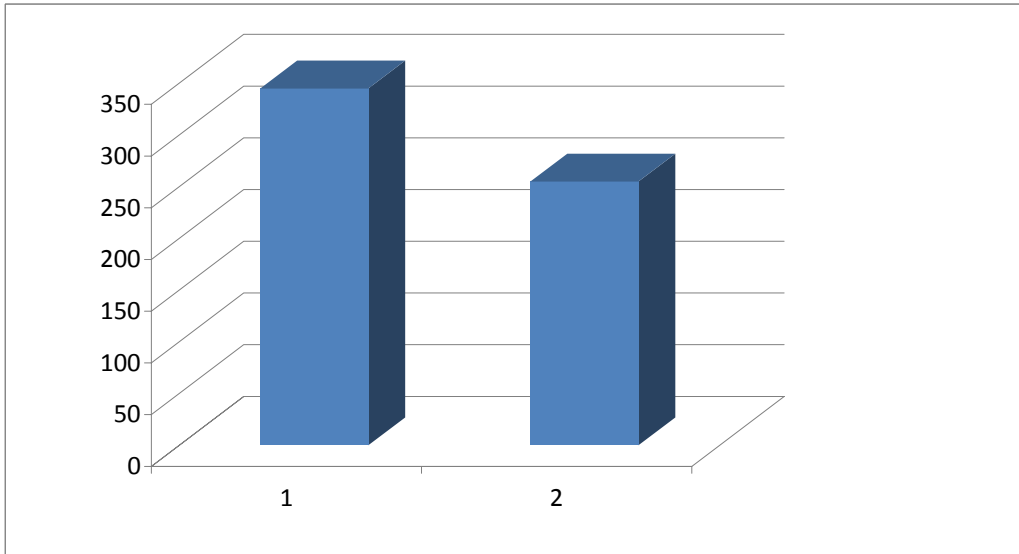


	No. of Vets	Country where Veterinary Science was Studied
1	4	Ireland
2	11	Others
3	24	Europe
4	24	New Zealand
5	26	USA and Canada
6	43	South Africa
7	90	United Kingdom
8	139	Taiwan
9	239	Australia

Note: Others included graduates from China, Zimbabwe, Philippines, Malaysia Japan, Kenya, Burma and Nigeria

Appendix 4

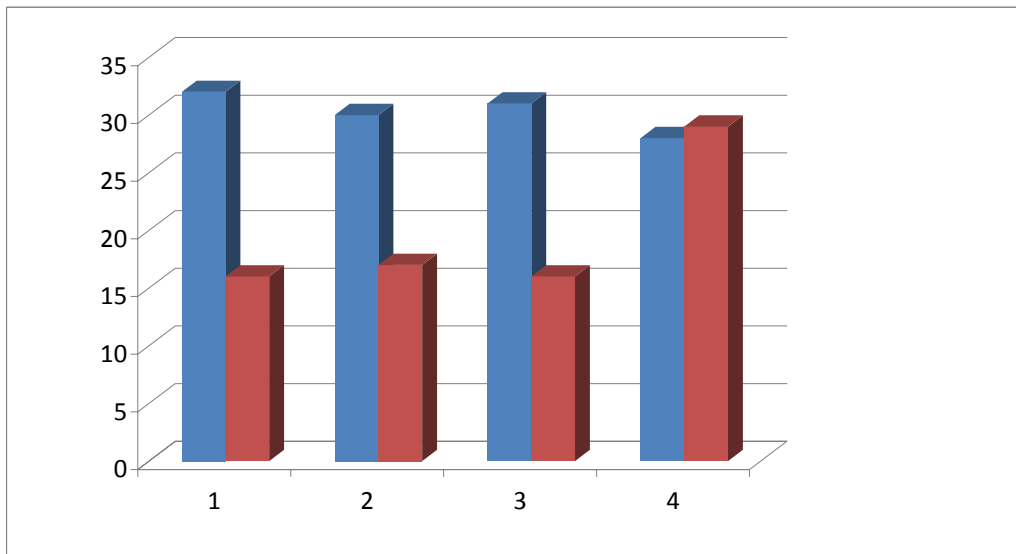
The Ethnic Mix of the 600 Veterinarians Currently Registered with the HKVSB



1	Chinese	345
2	Non-Chinese	255

Appendix 5

Employment Status of Veterinarians Registering with the VSB from 2008 to 2011



Year of Registration

1 2008
2 2009
3 2010
4 2011

Series 1 (Blue)

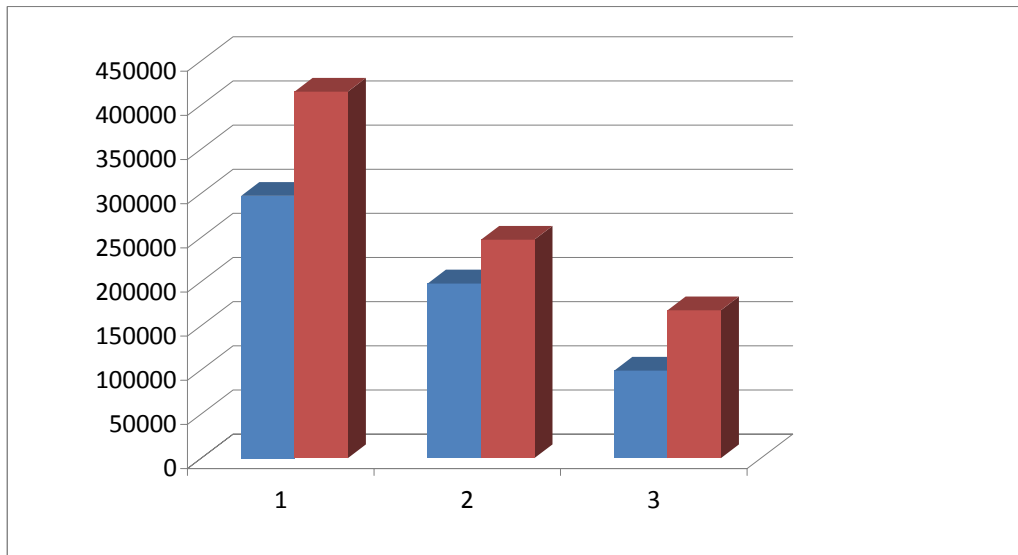
Working in Hong Kong

Series 2 (Red)

Not working in Hong Kong

Appendix 6

The Number of Pets in Hong Kong Obtained from Government Census Data measured in 2005/06 (Blue) and 2010/11 (Red)

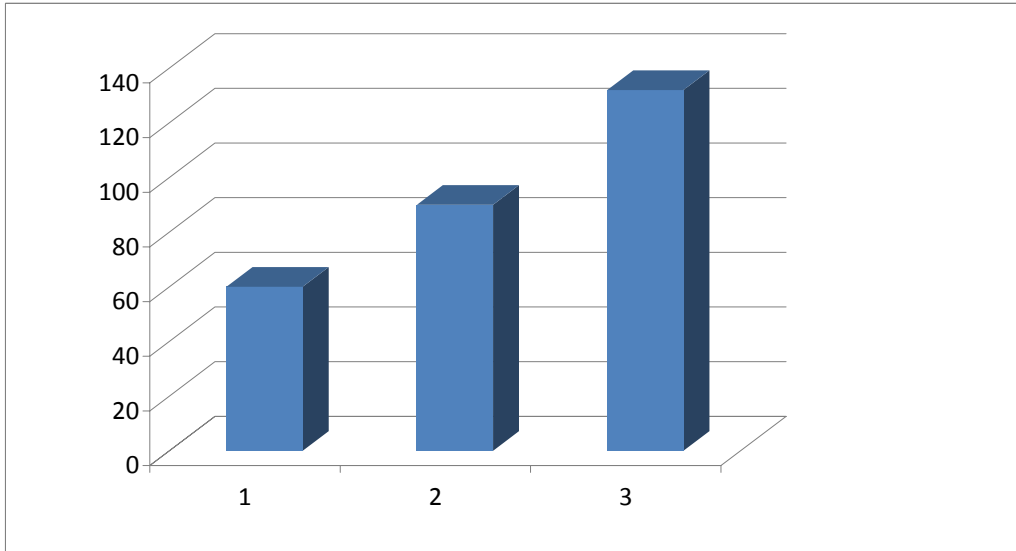


Series 1 (Blue) Pet population 2005/06
Series 2 (Red) Pet population 2010/11

	2005/06	2010/11
1 Total numbers of Dogs and Cats	297100	415100
2 Number of Dogs	197900	247500
3 Number of Cats	99200	167600

Appendix 7

The Number of Veterinary Clinics in Hong Kong in the Years 2000, 2005 and 2011



Year	No. of Clinics
1 2000	60
2 2005	90
3 2011	132

Note These figures are estimates obtained from the pet food industry

Appendix 8

Summary of Current Numbers of Hong Kong Students Studying Veterinary Science Overseas

University	Year					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Sydney	11	14	18	7	5	55
Melbourne						18
Murdoch						15
Brisbane		8	7			30-40 (See note 1)
Adelaide						2
Charles Sturt Uni						0
James Cook Uni						No Reply
Edinburgh	7	6	7	3	2	25
Glasgow	5	2	2	0	2	11
Liverpool						8 (See note 2)
RVC						1
Cambridge						No Reply
Nottingham						10
Bristol						1
Dublin						0
Pretoria						0
Massey (NZ)	2	0	1	2	0	5
Canada						(See Note 3)
USA						(See Note 4)
TOTAL						181-191

Note 1 - Brisbane officially said that they had 130 overseas students and did not state how many were from Hong Kong. I spoke to a student in 2nd year and one in 3rd year and obtained those numbers. One of my vet friends lectures at UQ Vet School and he estimated there were 30-40 Hong Kong students in the faculty.

Note 2 – Liverpool did not officially reply. At the meeting with Cornell Uni and CityU one of the Cornell representatives said that Liverpool had told them that they had 8 Hong Kong students

Note 3 – Only one of the Canadian vet schools replied and said that Canadian vet schools only accepted Canadian citizens. This does not help as we all know that there is quite a large number of Hong Kong citizens who have dual citizenship.

Note 4 – I did not contact any of the US schools because there were so many and very few Hong Kong students have studied there in the past.



The Hong Kong Veterinary Association

City University Veterinary School Survey Summary

This is a summary of the survey conducted by the HKVA on the subject of City University of Hong Kong's proposed veterinary school which is currently being planned in conjunction with Cornell University, USA.

	Total	Private practice	Other areas
The total number of replies received:	55	46	9
The number who were in favor of the vet school:	11	5	6
The number who were undecided:	7	6	1
The number against the proposed vet school:	37	35	2

Of the 55 replies, 46 came from vets in private practice and 9 came from vets working in other areas. Of the 11 vets in favor of the proposed veterinary school 5 came from private practice. Of the 7 vets who were undecided 6 came from private practice and of the 37 who were against the idea, 35 came from private practice.

The main reasons given in support of the veterinary school:	No. of people saying it
1. Provide good quality laboratory services; pathology, histopathology, cytology	2
2. Post-graduate studies, specialization, diversification	7
3. Stop non-Hong Kong residents working here	1
4. Provide a world class research centre	4
5. There is a worldwide shortage of vets	1

6. Provide more Continuing Education for vets in Hong Kong	2
7. Improve the clinical standard of veterinary practice in Hong Kong	7
8. Provide an academic resource centre including a veterinary library	3
9. Improve animal welfare in Asia	1
10. Will occur sometime so it may as well be now	1
11. Stop the need for HK residents to travel overseas to study	3
12. Provide a regional Centre of Excellence	3
13. It will allow for the control of the supply of vets to Hong Kong	1
14. It will provide a source of specialists in Hong Kong	1

The main reason given against opening a veterinary school in Hong Kong:

1. Massive oversupply of vets in Hong Kong	41
2. Massive oversupply of vets world-wide	8
3. Massive oversupply of vets in Taiwan, HK second largest supplier of vets	2
4. Contracting local vet market due to:	1
1. improved Government control of illegal puppies	
2. improved awareness of animal welfare	
3. introduction of welfare laws e.g. leash laws for dogs being walked	
5. Concerns that the degree will be substandard	26
a. Concerns that the degree will be substandard because of a lack of production animal and horse work available in Hong Kong	
b. Doubts over how world-class large animal veterinary science can be taught in China due to its stringent drug laws	
c. Doubts over the University's ability to produce a degree that is as good as degrees offered overseas	
d. Lack of recognition internationally including China and Asia in general	

- e. The vet school will not be financially viable
6. Hong Kong already has a high standard of veterinary practice which is equal to the standard of general practice in the USA, UK or Australia. How will a vet school raise it higher? **2**
 7. Internships, residencies etc can be obtained through a Government scholarship program which would be a more effective use of public monies. The Singapore Government already runs such a scheme. Why cannot the Hong Kong Government do the same? **4**
 8. Lowering of practice standards in Hong Kong if clinics are forced to employ sub-standard local graduates **2**
 9. Simply unnecessary **1**
 10. The University Vet Clinic would compete in an already saturated market **1**
 11. Hong Kong is better suited to a graduate/research veterinary institute which overcomes a large number of the objections raised and provides the resources which proponents of the vet school have listed as benefits **2**

This letter and all the original replies can be found on the Homepage of the HKVA website www.hkva.org in the **General Veterinary Information** Section under the **Reports, News Articles** sub-section.

For enquiries and comments concerning this letter please forward them to secretariat@medcom.com.hk

Regards,

Tom Mangan

HKVA President



The Hong Kong Veterinary Association

Dear Reader,

Earlier this year the HKVA Executive Committee advertised the setting up of a subcommittee with the aim of producing a report outlining the pros and cons of having a vet school in Hong Kong. All HKVA members were eligible and all volunteers were accepted.

The members of the subcommittee are listed below.

The report reflects the views of the majority of the subcommittee. The HKVA Executive Committee recognizes that this view may not be representative of the general view of the profession.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Mangan', is written in a cursive style.

Tom Mangan
HKVA President

Members of the subcommittee who contributed to “**Comment On A Proposal To Establish A Veterinary School In Hong Kong By A Subcommittee Of The Hong Kong Veterinary Association**”.

Name	Affiliation	Conflict of interest statement
Ann-si Li	Private practice	None stated
Arthur Lee	Private practice	Hong Kong Veterinary Association executive committee
Barry Bousfield	Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (part-time)	None stated
Chris Brackman	Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department	As part of my employment I am involved with range of veterinary related matters. However, any opinions expressed through this subcommittee are my own and do not reflect any view that may be held by my employer
Chris Riggs	Hong Kong Jockey Club	None stated
Florence Chan	Private practice	Hong Kong Veterinary Association executive committee
Frank Low	Hong Kong Jockey Club	Hong Kong Veterinary Association executive committee
Howard Wong	Hong Kong City University	I'm Executive Director of Life Science Programmes of City University of Hong Kong
Ian Urquhart	Private practice	Private practice and Veterinary Surgeons Board member
Jane Gray	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals	Hong Kong Veterinary Association executive committee City University Animal Research Ethics Sub-Committee
Jane McNae	Royal Veterinary College (Hong Kong Veterinary nursing degree co-ordinator)	None stated
Lip tet Ng	Hong Kong City University	I'm Associate Director (Development) of Life Science Programmes of City University of Hong Kong
Tom Mangan	Private practice	I, Tom Mangan am the current President of the Hong Kong Veterinary Association as well as being a small animal veterinarian currently working in Hong Kong. For these reasons I may be perceived as having a conflict of interest in my involvement in the HKVA sub-committee set up to study the idea of a veterinary school in Hong Kong and acknowledge this.
Vidja Bhardwaj	Private practice	None stated

Comment On A Proposal To Establish A Veterinary School In Hong Kong By A Subcommittee Of The Hong Kong Veterinary Association.

A Hong Kong Veterinary Association (HKVA) sub-committee has been tasked with defining the pros and cons of a Veterinary School in Hong Kong. This has been done by discussing in depth the benefits and reservations raised by various parties.

“We, the HKVA sub-committee, issue the following statement, with supporting information, based on majority opinion:

In principle and taking into consideration the subcommittee members’ concerns, we are supportive of a Veterinary School in Hong Kong. However, there are reservations but we believe these can be overcome, for the long term development of the veterinary profession and what it can contribute to the local community.”

1. General Case for the Establishment of a Veterinary School in Hong Kong.

- 1.1. A well-structured, independent veterinary profession is critical to the economic and social well being of any society. Veterinarians provide a backbone for industries that rely on the use of animals, oversee how animals and humans interact and help uphold humanity through compassionate care of the animals with whom we share our environment.
- 1.2. Currently, the veterinary profession in Hong Kong is wholly dependent on other countries for its supply of veterinarians. In addition, Hong Kong citizens wishing to become veterinarians must be trained overseas. As a consequence, Hong Kong has limited control over the curriculum studied and limited opportunity to manage the number of veterinary graduates entering the local work force. The substantial rise over the past decade in the number of Hong Kong students pursuing a veterinary career indicates a deep interest and commitment to the profession by the youth in Hong Kong. It must also reflect the obvious financial benefits of overseas income to universities providing the training.
- 1.3. Although the current system for overseas training for veterinary graduates has some benefits, the complete reliance on overseas training has several consequences for Hong Kong society:
 - 1.3.1. Topics that are relevant to specific needs of Hong Kong are inevitably omitted from an overseas veterinary curriculum (e.g. animal and public health issues directly pertinent to Hong Kong, clinical and public health issues relating to aquaculture, welfare concerns, Hong Kong laws, etc.).

- 1.3.2. Students are not prepared for the realities of work in Hong Kong. (While they can “see practice” in Hong Kong, none of their formal teaching will be structured to meet the demands specific to Hong Kong).
- 1.3.3. Students (or their parents) must pay overseas education fees. This inevitably restricts the profession to individuals who come from relatively wealthy/privileged backgrounds and denies the profession access to a large number of students who could potentially be much more suited. Not only is this **manifestly unfair** but also the profession is severely limiting the human pool from which it can draw for future members.
- 1.3.4. Students currently have no independent body to turn to for support and assistance in their early days of practice. A local Veterinary School would provide an ideal base for a young graduate mentoring scheme, providing regular seminars and support groups. This should be structured in close consultation with the profession and the University would be answerable to the profession for its effective deliverance.
- 1.3.5. An obvious benefit of the current system is that students obtain international exposure during their training and often have an opportunity to gain some experience in their country of training before returning to Hong Kong. This could be addressed partly by a local Veterinary School through strategic use of externships etc
- 1.4. There is currently a dearth in Hong Kong of specialists in all areas of veterinary clinical practice. Also, there are minimal opportunities to train locally as a specialist. Specialists visiting from overseas are always in high demand and the transient and irregular nature of their visits may impact the quality of service that the profession is able to provide. There will inevitably be a limit to number of specialists that Hong Kong can maintain, as in any jurisdiction. However, this is a strong area in which a Veterinary School could impact the wider region. In addition, the lack of local specialists forces the Veterinary Surgeons Board (VSB) to use overseas experts, with associated high costs and possible lack of understanding of the local prevailing conditions. A local Veterinary School, with its own faculty of specialists and that provides training for further local specialists, will address both of these issues.
- 1.5. A Veterinary School can provide the heart of, and leadership for the profession, which is currently lacking in Hong Kong. It will assemble a collection of specialists with academic and clinical skills who will provide a unique body to support and advise government, industry, private practitioners and specialist organizations. It must strive to develop as a centre of excellence that will provide a strong, independent voice for our profession, which will be available to all. While it would be unrealistic to expect a new faculty in Hong Kong to develop specialisms in all areas

immediately, it is reasonable to expect local faculty to rapidly develop an international network to provide ready access to global leaders in all relevant fields.

- 1.6. Veterinarians have a diverse training that equips them with unique skills to contribute towards many critical areas in society, such as caring for animal health and welfare, supporting food and livestock industries, providing unique expertise in food safety, biosecurity and quarantine management, understanding of and research into emerging infectious disease and support to the biotechnology sector. A local Veterinary School will be responsible for tailoring its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to meet specific needs in all of these areas in Hong Kong and the wider region.
- 1.7. Society in Hong Kong will benefit from a centre that can provide clear academic leadership in veterinary science. A Veterinary School would have a responsibility to support government in matching the diverse needs of our community with the knowledge and skills unique to the veterinary profession. Organisations, industry and individuals involved in any animal-related activity will have an independent body of expertise to consult and collaborate with.
- 1.8. There is no doubt that this part of the world would benefit from a centre of veterinary excellence. Standards of veterinary science in the wider region are generally well below those in more developed areas of the world. A regional Veterinary School that taught and practiced to the highest academic and technical standards would offer a shining example to governments, industry, other academic institutions and private owners in the region. It would also provide a local centre for postgraduates from Hong Kong and neighboring countries to access high quality teaching of modern knowledge and skills. It would establish a network of “distance learning” of taught material that was specifically tailored to the needs of different local regions and was maintained by local people, able to communicate to the local community more effectively than someone in a remote country.
- 1.9. The eclectic nature of the veterinary curriculum puts veterinarians in a unique position to bridge gaps between human health, veterinary medicine, animal science and the wider environment. Consequently, the profession is able to provide strong practical support to the “One Health” concept. A Veterinary School will provide an academic body that can identify areas of need in Hong Kong that require investigation, establish collaborative research projects with existing organizations locally (e.g. medical schools) and overseas, and attract funding from national and international sources into diseases of local and global importance.

- 1.10. A Veterinary School will provide a hub for public education on animal-related issues, especially animal welfare. It will be a medium to connect the community to matters of veterinary science relevant to the local society. Currently in Hong Kong, there is no independent body, which local people can connect to in regard to education and information on veterinary matters.

2. The Funding of a Veterinary School in Hong Kong.

- 2.1. Veterinary education is inherently costly. However, it is a cost that society should be prepared to accept in order to reap the multitude of benefits a Veterinary School has to offer.
- 2.2. A privately funded local Veterinary School would rely on high academic fees, which would result in an exclusive selection process. As such, it would contravene the principles of fair and equal opportunities, based on academic merit, to all in society. In addition, a large proportion of suitable candidates, with good practical skills and a strong work ethic, would be denied access to a career in the veterinary profession.
- 2.3. Hence we believe that a publicly funded Veterinary School is the most appropriate model for Hong Kong.

3. The Job Prospects for Graduates of a Veterinary School in Hong Kong.

- 3.1. Currently, the majority of the veterinarians in Hong Kong work in small animal clinical practice. There is concern amongst the veterinary profession that the rising numbers of students undertaking veterinary education will contribute to an over supply of veterinarians in Hong Kong. This could have some follow on effects such as unemployment and decreased wages. Further studies in regards to the population dynamics of the Hong Kong veterinary profession are warranted in order to understand the needs of the profession in Hong Kong.
- 3.2. There are other important career opportunities for veterinarians in Hong Kong, such as in government, industry (e.g. pig and poultry, HKJC, aquaculture), food safety, academia and research. Some areas of industry are currently underserved, such as aquaculture, and a Veterinary School would provide an opportunity to have an important positive impact on productivity, food safety and welfare in this sector. These initiatives would require some additional government funding to implement (e.g. in support

of veterinary care for livestock industries), although the benefits to animal welfare and human health would be marked.

- 3.3. Irrespective of the career opportunities, a local Veterinary School will not in itself have a major impact on oversupply of veterinarians. A more important factor relating to oversupply, which is relevant irrespective of a local Veterinary School, is the numbers of local students studying overseas. As these students are privately funded, Hong Kong currently has limited means of controlling their numbers. Given the ability to produce its own veterinarians, Hong Kong would for the first time be able to manage production of veterinary graduates to meet the demands of the local community
- 3.4. It would be feasible to impose some control on the quantity of veterinarians wishing to register in Hong Kong by introducing a registration examination, which is in line with other professions in Hong Kong, such as the medical profession.
- 3.5. Currently, there is no independent body that has the academic and professional expertise to conduct and oversee such an examination process. A veterinary school in Hong Kong, acting in collaboration with the VSB, would be ideally placed to perform these duties.

4. What are the Other Options?

4.1. Maintain the Status Quo.

Veterinary science remains a sought after profession amongst the youth worldwide and Hong Kong is no exception to this trend. A recent survey conducted by the HKVA indicated that about 200 students from Hong Kong were currently undertaking veterinary studies overseas. Given the continued interest in the veterinary profession in Hong Kong, and the financial outlay by the students in overseas countries, it is only reasonable to try and cater for the students' demands locally, in Hong Kong. Thus maintaining a status quo is a "less than ideal" option.

4.2. Provide Overseas Scholarships.

Government funded scholarships to undertake veterinary science training overseas will negate the issues of financial hardships encountered by students wishing to pursue a career in veterinary science. However, these will not overcome the significant personal issues and hardships experienced by such students. Thus, building a local veterinary school provides the most wholesome solution.

5. What are the challenges?

5.1. The Provision of a Veterinary Faculty.

To create a faculty that spans the entire veterinary curriculum and in sufficient depth to build productive research groups will undoubtedly be a challenge and will take time. However, it is reasonable to expect that this can be achieved as follows:

- 5.1.1. There is considerable interest in this project from overseas academics. Many veterinarians who are motivated by animal welfare, academic challenge and a desire to see their profession develop see this as a potentially fascinating career opportunity.
- 5.1.2. It is clear to everyone globally that China and other countries in the region are developing rapidly in every area of industry, commerce, health care, food production, animal welfare and just about every other aspect of society. Equally, there is no doubt that veterinary science, clinical practice and animal welfare lag significantly behind the levels attained in many other countries. This creates an obvious vacuum, which offers tremendous opportunities to develop the veterinary profession, to undertake applied research and obtain industry-funding that are not present elsewhere. This is a genuine enticement for academics who wish to be involved at the cutting edge of developing our profession.
- 5.1.3. It will be critical for a Veterinary School in Hong Kong to have a reliable, high quality partner that is already well established in the field of veterinary education. This partnership will provide a ready source of academics to cover all areas while the local faculty is developed.
- 5.1.4. The financial benefits (e.g. attractive salary and tax benefits) of working at a Veterinary School in Hong Kong will be competitive with those overseas.

5.2. The Access to Veterinary Clinical Material.

Students in Hong Kong will have access to the same range of animals as those in other Veterinary Schools overseas, if in lower numbers. It is true that access to commercial ruminant farms is severely restricted. However, minimum requirements to obtain accreditation with overseas bodies can be accomplished through the development of a dedicated large animal facility, use of modern teaching aids in Hong Kong and strategic use of farms in Southern China or overseas. Students who wish to develop more detailed skills in farm animal practice must be offered electives, which will inevitably entail periods overseas.

- 5.2.1. Most people are surprised at the large numbers of pig and poultry farms that exist in Hong Kong, 43 and 30 respectively, and which are more than sufficient to ensure students get good exposure in these areas.
- 5.2.2. Hong Kong has a highly developed veterinary pet industry, including a well-respected SPCA, which will provide access to extensive small and exotic animal clinical material.
- 5.2.3. Hong Kong has an important aquaculture industry. In addition, there are significant developments of very large aquaculture farms in Southern China. These will provide teaching material that is critical for veterinarians in Hong Kong yet is largely or completely ignored by Veterinary Schools overseas.
- 5.2.4. There is a large industry based on sales of live and slaughtered animals in Hong Kong that provides a unique environment for training students in public health.

5.3. The Accreditation of Graduates from a Veterinary School in Hong Kong.

The undergraduate course delivered by the Veterinary School would need to be accredited before graduates could register with the Veterinary Surgeons Board to practice as veterinarians in Hong Kong.

- 5.3.1. It is unreasonable to expect any academic or professional body to accredit a new course in advance. The profession must define knowledge, skills and general competencies that they will expect of the students on graduation and it is the School's responsibility to deliver these. It is reasonable to expect the professional body to oversee regular reviews of the course and ensure guidance to provide the School with all opportunities to achieve accreditation. It is reasonable to expect that a final inspection would be performed shortly before graduation of the first tranche of students, at which stage accreditation would be granted if the course matched requirements.
- 5.3.2. The exact procedures for accreditation of the Veterinary School will have to be established by the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong. However, the rules of the VSB relating to registration currently permit assessment of qualifications from unlisted academic institutions overseas by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications ("HKCAAVQ"). Presumably this arrangement could be extended to cover the local field. There is recent precedent from the United Kingdom (the University of Nottingham School of Veterinary Science, accredited by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons) and other countries, which provide useful models for this process.

5.3.3. International accreditation with professional bodies in other countries must also be obtained after commencement of the course and in line with the guidelines for each country. For example, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) requires a veterinary school to graduate a minimum of four cohorts before it can be accredited. It is expected that the Veterinary School in Hong Kong will develop a dialogue with the various professional bodies in different countries in order to gain accreditation and overseas recognition for its graduates.