

# The European College of Veterinary Pathologists (ECVP): The Professional Body for European Veterinary Pathologists

Anja Kipar ■ Mona Aleksandersen ■ Cinzia Benazzi ■ Maja Suter

## ABSTRACT

The European College of Veterinary Pathologists (ECVP) was established in 1995 with the aim of advancing veterinary pathology and promoting high standards within the specialty in Europe. The ECVP is one of 21 European colleges recognized by the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS), which represents a quality-assurance system for European veterinary specialists. Until the ECVP was founded, there was no unified European system recognizing the specialty of pathology, and many European countries followed their own qualification systems, which varied in form and standard. The ECVP provides an annual certifying examination, the passing of which is required to gain membership (diplomate status) in the college. This qualification is now accepted on equal terms by the well-established American College of Veterinary Pathologists (ACVP). In line with EBVS requirements, the ECVP has also established a standard continuing professional development (CPD) and re-registration system for its membership. Furthermore, it has promoted and unified European post-graduate training in veterinary pathology by setting up requirements for residency training programs and making registration and monitoring of these programs by the ECVP a prerequisite for approval of an institution as a training facility. The concurrent establishment, together with the European Society of Veterinary Pathology, of an annual summer school that trains residents for the certifying examination has further fostered European post-graduate training. Within 10 years, the ECVP has succeeded in establishing common standards and a unified approach to veterinary pathology throughout Europe. This article describes the evolution and organization of the ECVP.

**Key words:** EBVS; ECVP; quality assurance; ECVP certifying examination; CPD; Summer School in Veterinary Pathology

## INTRODUCTION

The European College of Veterinary Pathologists (ECVP) was established in 1995 to advance veterinary pathology and promote high standards within the specialty in Europe. At that time many different qualification systems, with varying standards, were practiced in the various countries of Europe. The ECVP therefore represents an organized effort to establish Europe-wide criteria for training and experience to qualify as a specialist in veterinary pathology and encourages veterinarians entering the field to acquire training and competence based on approved standards. Those who meet the standards of training and competence established by the college, and pass the certifying examination, are awarded ECVP member status.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, the ECVP received full recognition by the European Board of Veterinary Specialization (EBVS), the umbrella organization of the 21 European colleges organizing post-graduate veterinary specialization.<sup>2, 3</sup>

## HISTORY OF THE ECVP

The ECVP was formally proposed by the European Society of Veterinary Pathology (ESVP) at its 12th Autumn Meeting in Mondovì, Italy, in September 1994, as a consequence of a growing desire to harmonize post-graduate training and provide certification in veterinary pathology in Europe. In 1995, the ECVP was founded at the constitutional meeting in Edinburgh, according to the policies and procedures of the

EBVS,<sup>2</sup> with 85 invited charter (founding) members. In 1997, the constitution and bylaws of the ECVP were accepted by EBVS. The total membership of the ECVP had by then increased to 271, based on the acceptance of 182 *de facto* members, the criteria for which are explained in more detail below.

## OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE ECVP

Veterinary pathology is a discipline-oriented specialization that focuses on the morphological recognition and functional interpretation of disease conditions in animals by morphological analysis and investigations of etiology and pathogenesis. The knowledge and experience of veterinarians specializing in pathology ensures their competence in research and in service to the public and institutions and increases the prestige and usefulness of the profession. Accordingly, the main objectives of the ECVP are to foster science, standards of qualification, and recognition of specialization in the field (see Table 1).

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership includes veterinary pathologists who have pursued a wide variety of career paths within academic and research institutions, industry, government, and private pathology diagnostic laboratories. There are four types of membership.<sup>4</sup> Diplomates are the regular members and are veterinarians who satisfy the college requirements with

**Table 1: Main objectives of the ECVP**

Area	Objective
Science	To further scientific progress in veterinary pathology
Standards of qualification	To establish standards of training, experience, and examination for qualification as a specialist in veterinary pathology
Recognition	To further the recognition of qualified specialist veterinary pathologists by suitable certification and other means

respect to training, experience, and competence in veterinary pathology. This group includes both charter and *de facto* diplomates, as well as diplomates via the examination route. Charter diplomates are veterinary pathologists of established reputation who collectively established the college (founding members); *de facto* diplomates are veterinary pathologists who were allowed to apply for membership until December 31, 1997, based on their *curricula vitae* and according to standard criteria, and were subsequently elected as *de facto* diplomates by a two-thirds vote of the original charter membership.<sup>4</sup> Emeritus diplomates (emeritus members) are retired members, and honorary members are persons who have contributed in an extraordinary manner to the advancement of veterinary pathology. The latter may be appointed by majority vote of the ECVP Council, confirmed by a majority vote of the membership of the college.<sup>4</sup>

Since 1998, membership of the college can be achieved only by passing the ECVP certifying examination, the first of which was organized in 1999. By February 2007, the number of members had increased to 298, including 70 new members by examination.

### ECVP COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES

The college is represented and administered by the ECVP Council which consists of seven officers: the president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer and three councilors, who are all members of the college.<sup>4</sup> The chair of the Examination Committee is an additional, invited member of the council. The president and vice president are elected for two years and the secretary and treasurer for five years, each by a majority vote of the members. Councilors are elected for three years (see Table 2). The council has appointed several committees that fulfill specific functions: the Examination Committee, the Applications Committee, the CPD Re-registration Committee, the Nominations Committee, and the Education Committee (see Table 1).

#### Examination Committee

This committee is responsible for the creation and organization of the annual ECVP certifying examination. It has 10 members, all members of the college, who are selected to cover the different specialties within the ECVP and the major career tracks and, ideally, to represent most regions of Europe. At this point, eight committee members have entered the college via the examination route. Membership is generally for five years. The Examination Committee developed and established the first certifying examination in 1999, after offering several information sessions at annual meetings and a mock exam the year prior to the

first examination. These were intended to provide adequate information on the mode and standard of the examination for prospective candidates and supervisors. In recent years, one or two proctors have been appointed each year to increase the pool of prospective Examination Committee members. These are diplomates invited to act on the committee for a year in order to become acquainted with the system and to be prepared to enroll as full committee members at any time.

#### ECVP/ESVP Education Committee

At an early stage, the representatives of the ECVP realized that structured training was necessary to allow candidates from all European countries to prepare adequately for the ECVP certifying examination. As a result, the councils of the ECVP and its sister organization, the European Society of Veterinary Pathology (ESVP), installed this joint committee in 1999, in order to organize summer courses to prepare candidates for the ECVP certifying examination. It currently has six members from academia and industry, several of whom are at the same time ECVP or ESVP council members. In 2001, the Education Committee took up the task of developing and establishing the ECVP/ESVP Summer Schools in Veterinary Pathology, the first of which took place in 2003, and it is responsible for their overall organization and management and for the choice and coordination of program and speakers.<sup>5</sup>

### ECVP CERTIFYING EXAMINATION

The ECVP provides one certifying examination per year, in February. Its form and criteria follow the requirements of the EBVS.<sup>6</sup> The examination has five parts and is delivered over two-and-a-half days. The five parts are Histopathology, Gross Pathology, General Pathology, Veterinary Pathology, and Comprehensive Pathology (see Table 3); the passing mark is 60% for each. Marking of the questions is performed by a standard operating procedure approved by the ECVP Council. Candidates who pass two or more parts retain credit for these parts for the next four years, provided a mark of more than 30% has been attained in the failed parts. Two additional attempts to pass the failed parts are permitted within these four years.

#### Histopathology

This part of the examination tests one of the main tasks of a veterinary pathologist: the evaluation of tissue alterations on the light-microscopic and ultrastructural level and the formulation of a histopathological diagnosis. It requires the evaluation of histological slides, an ultrastructural picture, and a cytological specimen. Required answers include a

**Table 2: Council and committees of the ECVP**

Committee	Function	Members	Terms (years)
Council	Governance of the college	President (chair)	2
		Vice-president	2
		Secretary	5
		Treasurer	5
		3 councilors	2
Examination Committee	Creation and implementation of the annual ECVP certifying examination	Chair 9 members 2 proctors	5 each
Admissions Committee	Evaluation of applications to the ECVP certifying examination, proposal of accepted candidates to ECVP Council	Chair 2 members	Not defined
	Evaluation of the application of institutions for registration as training institutions		
CPD Re-registration Committee	Establishment of CPD criteria	Chair	Not defined
	Evaluation of recertification data of members	2 members	
	Proposal to ECVP Council to renew membership of recertified members		
Nominations Committee	Acceptance of nominations for the ECVP Council	Chair 2 members	Not defined
Education Committee <sup>5</sup>	Organization of the annual ECVP/ESVP Summer School in Veterinary Pathology	Chair 5 members	Not defined

**Table 3: Organization of the ECVP certifying examination**

Day	Session	Subject	Material Covered
1	Morning	Histopathology	18 histological slides 1 ultrastructural picture 1 cytological specimen
	Afternoon	Gross Pathology	60 gross pathology images
2	Morning	General Pathology	60 questions (40 MCQs, 20 SAQs)*
	Afternoon	Veterinary Pathology	Part A: major items (60 questions) Part B: minor items (30 questions) 50% MCQs, 50% SAQs*
3	Morning	Comprehensive Pathology	5 essay questions

\*MCQ = multiple-choice question; SAQ = short-answer question

complete description and a morphologic and etiologic diagnosis or appropriate differential diagnosis with suggestions for additional diagnostic procedures.

#### Gross Pathology

This part evaluates the ability of a pathologist to observe and interpret tissue changes. Gross pathology images are examined. Required answers include a morphologic and etiologic diagnosis and/or appropriate differential diagnosis.

#### General Pathology

This part of the examination tests the understanding of basic mechanisms of diseases, including the principles of cell and molecular pathology.

#### Veterinary Pathology

The ECVP recognizes the variable career pathways and employment opportunities for veterinary pathologists. To test the competence of the candidate in diagnostic veterinary pathology, including the ability to read the associated

literature critically, this part of the examination allows candidates to select certain fields of interest. Candidates must therefore choose in advance one major item and one minor item that has not been chosen as a major item. Major items are (a) large and small domestic animals, (b) laboratory animals and toxicological pathology, and (c) exotic animals, poultry, and fish. Minor items are (a) small domestic animals (dog, cat), (b) large domestic animals (horse, pig, cattle, sheep, goat), (c) exotic animals (cage birds, zoo animals, wildlife), (d) poultry (industrially kept birds), (e) laboratory animals (rodents, non-human primates), (f) toxicological pathology, and (g) fish.

### **Comprehensive Pathology**

This part of the examination tests the candidate's ability to approach and solve a problem in the field. Requirements are the analysis and interpretation of data, the creation of a hypothesis, in some cases a proposal to prove the hypothesis, and the final diagnosis and synopsis. This section comprises essay questions of different types (e.g., data analysis, toxicological pathology study, investigation of new diseases, abstract review, second-opinion case).

Since the first ECVF certifying examination, 54 candidates have passed the examination. The first-time pass rate since the examination was instituted has varied between 25% and 100%. The mean overall pass rate for 1999–2006 is 61%, compared to a 39% pass rate in the ACVP certifying examination in the period between 2001 and 2005.<sup>7</sup>

### **Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Re-registration**

The EBVS requires each college to review its procedures for evaluating the CPD of its members.<sup>6</sup> Members are therefore advised to maintain their own personal CPD records. The ECVF has developed a standard procedure for individual re-evaluation of ECVF membership every five years, and a CPD Re-registration Committee has been appointed by the council. Every year, the council invites members to send in their CPD reports and a statement regarding working time spent in the specialty. The evaluation takes the form of a credit-point system, considering the following items: publications, presentations at national congresses or continuing education, presentations at international congresses, attendance at national and international congresses, preparation of exam questions, supervision of residents, and membership in the ECVF Council or the Examination Committee. For each item a maximum number of points can be given. A minimum total number of points must be collected during each five-year period. The member is also required to spend at least 50% of his or her official working time in the field of specialization.

### **REGISTRATION OF RESIDENCY PROGRAMS**

The EBVS requires the ECVF to develop criteria for residency programs and to approve the residency programs of individual institutions that aim to train veterinary pathologists in preparation for the ECVF certifying examination.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the ECVF has prepared a document outlining its requirements for registration of residency training programs and requested that institutions apply to be registered as approved centers for the training of veterinary pathologists. By 2007, 40 residency training

programs had been approved as ECVF training centers. A list of these approved centers is published on the ECVF Web site. New proposals from other centers can be considered at any time.

### **THE ECVF WEB SITE**

The ECVF maintains a regularly updated Web site for the information of members and interested trainees.<sup>8</sup> The site displays information on the ECVF constitution and bylaws, examination, diplomates, CPD and post-graduate training courses, and employment opportunities. A discussion forum invites members and trainees to discuss any upcoming issues.

### **INTERACTION WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL BODIES REPRESENTING VETERINARY PATHOLOGISTS**

#### **European Society of Veterinary Pathology (ESVP)**

The main objective of the ESVP is to promote the scientific work of veterinary surgeons and physicians active in the areas of functional and morphologic pathology of animals, as well as that of other interested natural scientists, by organizing scientific post-graduate training, conferences, and meetings. It also aims to act as a link between national societies and associations for veterinary pathology in Europe and to ensure the maintenance of common interests in veterinary pathology throughout the European sphere.<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, it acts as a tool for contact between veterinary pathologists in all EU member, candidate, and associated states and countries outside the EU and currently has 602 members from academia and the pharmaceutical industry as well as state and private research and diagnostic laboratories. ESVP and ECVF work closely together in their attempt to foster post-graduate training in veterinary pathology and to maintain high scientific standards in the field. This close working relationship is reflected in their joint ECVF/ESVP Education Committee, which is responsible for the ECVF/ESVP Summer Schools in Veterinary Pathology, and in their shared contribution to the scientific committee responsible for the program of the ESVP's annual conferences.<sup>5</sup>

#### **American College of Veterinary Pathologists (ACVP)**

Since 1997, the ECVF Council has had formal interactions with the ACVP Council on an annual and more frequent basis. Mutual insight has been gained into the respective certifying examinations through this process. To further worldwide recognition of the ECVF, the council proposed mutual acceptance of ECVF diplomates by examination and ACVP diplomates by both colleges; it was also proposed that diplomates could act as supervisors of trainees wishing to register for the certifying examination of the other college. These proposals were accepted by the ACVP and ECVF in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

### **SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK**

Since its establishment the ECVF has had a considerable impact on veterinary pathology in Europe by establishing high standards of qualification in the field. It has had a unifying effect and led to common professional standards

throughout Europe. By establishing a summer school, it has promoted post-graduate education and raised awareness of the value of excellent post-graduate education for future careers in the field. The ECVP qualification is now accepted as equivalent to that of its sister American college, the ACVP, by industrial and academic employers. In addition, the activities of the ECVP have facilitated contact between young and senior veterinary pathologists, leading to the formation of a Europe-wide network.

As the second largest of the European colleges under the umbrella of the EBVS, the ECVP is in a favorable position to raise recognition of European specialization. With a growing workforce of members by examination (today representing approximately 25% of the membership), it will consolidate its professional position. In the near future, the ECVP needs to accommodate interest from new European countries, especially those in Eastern Europe.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank their colleagues on the ECVP Council, who provided data for and critically assessed this manuscript.

### REFERENCES

- 1 European College of Veterinary Pathologists [ECVP]. ECVP Information Brochure <[http://www.ecvpath.org/info\\_brochure.asp](http://www.ecvpath.org/info_brochure.asp)>. Accessed 06/01/07. ECVP, 2003.
- 2 European Board of Veterinary Specialisation [EBVS]. Policies and Procedures of the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation <[http://www.ebvs.be/index.php?Page=pdf/April\\_2005.pdf](http://www.ebvs.be/index.php?Page=pdf/April_2005.pdf)>. Accessed 07/11/07. EBVS, 2004.
- 3 Lumeij JT, Herrtage ME. Veterinary specialization in Europe. *J Vet Med Educ* 33: 176–179, 2006.
- 4 ECVP. Constitution <<http://www.ecvpath.org/Documents/ECVP%20Constitution.doc>>. Accessed 06/01/07. ECVP, 2001.
- 5 Kipar A, Aleksandersen M, Benazzi C, Hodge T, Sukura A, Wyers M. ECVP/ESVP Summer School in Veterinary Pathology: high-standard, structured training for young veterinary pathologists. *J Vet Med Educ* 34: 485–491, 2007. current issue.
- 6 EBVS. About EBVS <<http://www.ebvs.be/index.php?Page=history.php>>. Accessed 07/11/07. EBVS, 2004.

7 Mosier D. ACVP Certification Examinations—5 Year Review (2001–2005) <[www.acvp.org/news/newsletter/mar06.pdf](http://www.acvp.org/news/newsletter/mar06.pdf)>. Accessed 07/11/07. *ACVP Newsletter* (March):16, 2006.

8 ECVP. ECVP home page <<http://www.ecvpath.org/>>. Accessed 07/11/07. ECVP, 2007.

9 European Society of Veterinary Pathology [ESVP]. ESVP home page <<http://www.esvp.eu/>>. Accessed 07/11/07. ESVP, 2006.

### AUTHOR INFORMATION

**Anja Kipar**, Dr.med.vet.habil., Dipl. ECVP, MRCVS, is a veterinary pathologist and Professor of Veterinary Pathology at the Department of Veterinary Pathology, Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Liverpool, Crown Street, Liverpool L69 7ZJ UK. E-mail: [akipar@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:akipar@liverpool.ac.uk). She is the chairperson of the ECVP/ESVP Education Committee and a member of the ECVP Council.

**Mona Aleksandersen**, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ECVP, is a veterinary pathologist and Associate Professor of Veterinary Pathology at the Department of Basic Sciences and Aquatic Medicine, Norwegian School of Veterinary Science, P.O. Box 8146 Dep., 0033 Oslo, Norway. E-mail: [mona.aleksandersen@veths.no](mailto:mona.aleksandersen@veths.no). She is treasurer of the ECVP, a member of the ECVP/ESVP Education Committee, and a member of the ECVP CPD Re-registration Committee.

**Cinzia Benazzi**, DVM, Dipl. ECVP, is Professor of Veterinary Pathology in the Department of Veterinary Public Health and Animal Pathology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Bologna, Via Tolara di Sopra 50, 40064 Ozzano Emilia (Bologna), Italy. E-mail: [cinzia.benazzi@unibo.it](mailto:cinzia.benazzi@unibo.it). She is chairperson of the ECVP CPD Re-registration Committee and a member of both the ECVP Applications Committee and the ECVP/ESVP Education Committee. She is also secretary of the ESVP and an ESVP Council member.

**Maja Suter**, Dr.med.vet., PhD, Dipl. ACVP, is an ECVP charter member and is Professor of Veterinary Pathology and Chair of the Institute of Animal Pathology at the Vetsuisse Faculty, University of Berne, Laenggass-Strasse 122, 3012 Berne, Switzerland. E-mail: [maja.suter@itpa.unibe.ch](mailto:maja.suter@itpa.unibe.ch). She was a member of the ECVP Council from 1995 to 1998, a member of the ECVP Examination Committee from 1996 to 2002, and vice-president and president of the ECVP from 2001 to 2003 and 2003 to 2005 respectively.