

Summary	
Meeting	Standards Committee
Date	14 February 2024
Title	Standards Committee Minutes
Summary	Minutes of Standards Committee meeting held remotely on 14 November 2023
Author	Beth Jinks Standards and Advice Lead B.jinks@rcvs.org.uk

Classifications		
Document	Classification¹	Rationales²
Minutes	Unclassified	n/a

1Classifications explained

Unclassified	Papers will be published on the internet and recipients may share them and discuss them freely with anyone. This may include papers marked 'Draft'.
Confidential	Temporarily available only to Council Members, non-Council members of the relevant committee, sub-committee, working party or Board and not for dissemination outside that group unless and until the relevant committee or Council has given approval for public discussion, consultation or publication.
Private	The paper includes personal data which should not be disclosed at any time or for any reason, unless the data subject has agreed otherwise. The Chair may, however, indicate after discussion that there are general issues which can be disclosed, for example in reports to committees and Council.

2Classification rationales

Confidential	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To allow the Committee or Council to come to a view itself, before presenting to and/or consulting with others 2. To maintain the confidence of another organisation 3. To protect commercially sensitive information 4. To maintain public confidence in and/or uphold the reputation of the veterinary professions and/or the RCVS
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Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held remotely on Wednesday 14 February 2024

Members:

Linda Belton (Chair)
Claire McLaughlan
Louise Allum
Danny Chambers
Olivia Cook
Will Wilkinson
Derek Bray
Alice McLeish
Tim Walker
Melissa Donald
Matthew Rendle
Sue Paterson

In attendance:

RCVS

Lizzie Lockett	CEO
Eleanor Ferguson	Registrar
Gemma Kingswell	Head of Legal Services (Standards)
Beth Jinks	Standards and Advisory Lead
Victoria Price	Senior Standards and Advice Officer
Ben Myring	Policy and Public Affairs Manager

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland

David Kyle	Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer
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AI 1 Apologies for absence, declarations of interest, minutes from the meeting of 13 November 2023.

1. Apologies were received from W Wilkinson.
2. No new conflicts of interest were declared; however, the Committee was reminded about an already declared conflict at AI 2(b).

3. The minutes from the meeting of 13 November 2023 were agreed.

Matters for decision

AI 2 (a) Temporarily registered official veterinarians (Northern Ireland) – confidential

4. The minutes of this agenda item discussion can be found in the classified appendix at paragraphs 1-6.

AI 2 (b) Review of guidance re use of 'specialist' and other related titles – confidential

5. The minutes of this agenda item discussion can be found in the classified appendix at paragraphs 7-20.

AI 2 (c) Maintaining professional boundaries

6. The Committee was reminded of the discussion at the previous meeting which explored whether guidance on maintaining professional boundaries could be added to the supporting guidance to the Code of Professional Conduct. The Committee discussed that, while relationship dynamics between vets/nurses and clients are different to that in human medicine, there is still a potential power disparity.
7. The Committee was directed to consider the proposed guidance in the paper at paragraph 7, which is presented as one potential option. The Committee discussed the following:
 - a) Vets and nurses are important parts of the community, and it can be hard to separate their social and professional lives. However, vets and nurses do need to be aware of situations where one of the parties could potentially be exploited – this goes for the client as well as for the professional.
 - b) The current wording addresses clients 'who could be considered vulnerable', however the nature of the vet-client relationship and emotive work involved means that any client could be vulnerable due to the imbalance of power.
 - c) Regarding certification services at 3.0, it could be made clearer that this refers to certification which will be relied upon in an official capacity (e.g. equine passports) as opposed to small animal vaccination cards which are not considered certification and instead form part of the clinical record.
 - d) It was raised that the Disciplinary Committee has not heard any recent cases with regards to crossing professional boundaries. The most similar issues have related to conflicts of interest when providing false certification for own animals in an official capacity.
8. The Committee requested that the proposed guidance be redrafted from a different angle of the inherent power imbalance in professional/client relationships and mutual protection for all involved.

Action: Standards and Advice Lead**AI 2 (d) Diagnosis case studies**

9. The Committee was reminded of the background for this item - at its last meeting in November 2023, the Committee considered a set of four case studies on the topic of diagnosis. The case studies were requested by Veterinary Nurses Council (VNC) to determine if they would be a helpful way of explaining to the profession the dividing line between diagnosis, which may only be done by veterinary surgeons, and recognising conditions or symptoms and relaying this information to a veterinary surgeon, which may be done by veterinary nurses. At the November meeting, the Committee made a number of comments as to how the case studies could be clarified and amended – the amendments have been made and included within the paper.
10. The Committee was asked to consider whether the amendments to the case studies will achieve sufficient clarity and if not, to consider more generally whether the case studies are the appropriate vehicle for conveying the nuances of this topic.
11. The Committee had the following discussion:
 - a) It is difficult to capture every scenario within case studies, and the real effect of the case studies may instead cause confusion and inhibit the role of RVNs instead of empowering.
 - b) Although the case studies are improved following the amendments, it is perhaps not possible to make them nuanced or detailed enough to achieve the original intent of explaining the dividing line between diagnosis and the provision of information.
 - c) That the following would not be considered diagnosing:
 - i) Reporting of a clinical sign
 - ii) In terms of interprofessional communication, RVNs undertaking triage, making an assessment, and reporting this back to a vet
 - iii) Reporting a variation away from what is considered 'normal' (an abnormality)
12. The Committee was informed that the RCVS Fellowship Science Advisory Panel are currently looking at the relationship between animal behavioural medicine/therapy and 'acts of veterinary surgery' as protected by the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. The process used by these, and other paraprofessionals such as musculoskeletal services, involve the vet undertaking an initial clinical assessment to rule out underlying conditions before the paraprofessional does their own assessment within their own discipline which may go into more detail than the vet. These subsequent assessments by paraprofessionals may therefore involve more than just a report of clinical signs and reporting back to a vet. The Committee was reminded that in the near future, new legislation may allow the RCVS to regulate paraprofessionals, and so any interpretation of 'diagnosis' may have a 'knock on' effect.

13. It was discussed that the streams of work relating to paraprofessional regulation and RVNs under the new Act should be joined up to avoid parallel and unconnected conversations about this topic.
14. The Committee agreed that the case studies have not achieved the desired outcome and work on these should not continue. Instead, it was agreed that an illustrative article in VN Education may be more useful in providing clarity, but that this would be a matter for VN Council and/or the Director of Veterinary Nursing.

Matters for discussion

AI 3 (a) Update re recent discussions with VMD

15. The Committee was informed that the joint RCVS/VMD guidance on frequently asked questions has been published on the RCVS website, and that some wording within the RCVS controlled drugs guidance has been amended to ensure consistency,

AI 3 (b) Under care review

16. In preparation for the 12-month review of the under care guidance, the Committee was asked to confirm categories for use to collect data for analysis and agreed to discuss canvassing views of the profession more towards the end of the 12-month period.

Matters for note

AI 4 (a) Remote certification update from Defra

17. The report was noted.

Matters for report

AI 5 (a) Disciplinary Committee Report

18. The report was noted.

AI 5 (b) Riding Establishments Subcommittee Report

19. The report was noted.

AI 5 (c) PSS update

20. The report was noted.

Confidential matters for report

AI 6 (a) Routine Veterinary Practice Subcommittee Report

21. The report was noted.

AI 6 (b) Ethics Review Panel Report

22. The report was noted.

AI 6 (c) Certification Subcommittee Report

23. The report was noted.

AI 7 Risk and equality

24. Nothing added.

AI 8 Any other business and date of next meeting on 16 April 2024 (in-person)

25. The Committee congratulated Professor David Morton on his retirement from the position of Chair the of Ethics Review Panel and thanked him for his hard work.

Table of actions - unclassified

Paragraph	Task	Responsibility
8	Redraft guidance on maintaining professional boundaries	Standards and Advice Lead