



Manpower Survey

Survey into Recruitment, Retention, Education and Training Issues Relating to Veterinary Nursing

April 2004

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2 Introduction

The veterinary profession, together with Lantra (the Sector Skills Council for veterinary nursing), jointly sponsored research into VN recruitment, retention and training. It is the largest survey ever undertaken by the profession into veterinary nursing, and the first for fifteen years.

The aims of the research were to:

- Review VN manpower levels and future needs
- Identify current roles and responsibilities of practising VNs
- Review current, and identify future, pre- and post-qualification training needs
- Advise and influence future legislation relating to VNs.

The quantity of responses to the survey was staggering. Over 12,000 questionnaires were distributed and a total of 36% replies were received. Veterinary Nurses particularly felt so strongly that almost 50% replied - the majority of whom also used the opportunity to register their opinions. VN comments in the survey include: 308 on salary; 120 on terms and conditions of employment; 200 on the VN Training Scheme; 65 on lack of career structure; 195 on lack of recognition; and 48 on demotivation with being a VN. Representative comments from VNs, student VNs, and employers have been included at the end of each relevant chapter.

The results from this survey will:

- Provide data upon which key organisations can plan their actions for the future of veterinary nursing in the UK
- Ensure that everyone in the profession is fully aware of some of the pressures that veterinary nurses work under
- Feed into any reviews of the training and qualifications systems
- Provide a basis for discussion on employer issues

The executive summary will be presented as a separate document as well as being part of the main report. Both of these documents are available on the BVNA, RCVS and Lantra websites. Hard copies of the main report are available from Lantra.

3 Executive Summary/ Key Issues

The interest and response to this survey has been overwhelming. Over 12,000 questionnaires were sent out with a total response rate of 36%. The response rate from Veterinary Nurses was almost 50%.

All of the statistics in the survey relate to questionnaire respondents unless otherwise stated

Comments from the questionnaires

'Having worked almost continuously in the veterinary profession for 21 years I am still amazed at the lack of employer recognition for the VN skills and abilities, reflected in a poor pay and conditions environment.' (VN)

'I really do hope that we demoralised and disillusioned nurses are in the minority, otherwise the long-term outlook for our profession (and equally importantly, for the animals in this country) is very grim.' (VN)

'The amount of time and effort involved in the NVQ scheme is irrelevant as once qualified the skills taught will not be used. A VN is there to help on reception and to do general cleaning and not be a 'mini vet.' (Employer)

'I hope to see an increasing role for veterinary nurses in the future. However I do not feel that they are or should be mini-vets. There are many important nursing roles for them to perform -- these should be more highly valued by vets and nurses alike.' (Employer)

'This career would be much more enjoyable with better pay, fewer on-duty (unpaid) hours and a better sense of team spirit in the practice. Much more encouragement and support is necessary by being told when you are doing well and is as important as when you are not.' (Student VN)

'However hard it may be working and studying, it's a very rewarding job.' (Student VN)

3.1 Demographics

3.1.1 There are a total of 18,607 qualified VNs in the UK, 5,146 are Listed and 3,461 unListed.

3.1.2 Almost half of Veterinary Nurses have been qualified for six years or over. The highest proportion of VNs are female, white British, between the ages of 25 – 35, work in first opinion small animal practices, and have no dependants.

3.1.3 The highest proportion of Student VNs are female, white British, and between the ages of 19 – 24.

3.1.4 There is an average of 16 people working in each practice, with reception staff comprising the highest number.

3.1.5 26% of practices (the highest number) have a turnover of £250,000 - £500,000, closely followed by 25% with over £750,000.

3.2 Training

3.2.1 The majority of VNs begin their training directly from school, with a quarter entering the profession as a second career choice.

3.2.2 ²The number of student VNs (at all levels) shows a slight fluctuation in the number of starters at 925 in 2000, 1,063 in 2001, 947 in 2002, and 1,004 in 2003. The numbers of achievers who qualified and became Listed are 571 in 2000, 703 in 2001, and 689 in 2002.

3.2.3 Respondents reported that 2,467 student VNs employed since January 2000, 484 (19%) have dropped out, however RCVS figures indicate a current drop-out rate of 29%. Approximately 40% of these dropped out on the pre-enrolment probationary period and 40% before achieving NVQ level 2. The drop out rate of students is highest at the pre-enrolment probationary period and before achieving NVQ level 2. Over one third of mid-year leavers stopped training and left the profession entirely.

3.2.4 Two-thirds of student VNs enrolled in 2001 or 2002 with the majority undertaking the NVQ training scheme, and 88% still actively training to become a VN. 86% of student VNs were NVQ students, and 14% were NVQ plus Higher Education. Over 14% of students attend (or attended) college in their own time, with over 4% not attending college at all.

3.2.5 70% of practices were previously registered as ATACs; with 62% now Training Practices. 62% of practices are currently training VNs. (³There were 1,297 ATACs [March 1997]; 442 did not become TPs; there are 1,213 approved TPs [October 2003].

3.2.6 The majority of employers who are currently training VNs would take on more once they are qualified, whilst one third said they would not, however RCVS enrolment figures for 2003 (1,004) indicate a stable uptake of training.

3.2.7 The majority of respondents believe that the time involved in training and qualification is excessive. Employers think that there are difficulties in recruiting and / or retaining assessors whilst VNs and VNACs disagree.

3.2.8 The majority of experiences of contact with VNACs are from average to excellent.

3.2.9 Employers (who are responsible for payments), VNs, and VNACs think that the costs are too high.

3.2.10 Whilst the overall majority of employers do not believe that the current VN training scheme is easy to implement, two-thirds think that the NVQ system provides a logical structure for training, a verifiable method for practical assessment, and produces a fully trained VN suitable for the practice.

3.2.11 Whilst the majority of students have a vet or VN present at the practice when they are on duty, over one quarter do not at night, and one tenth do not have a vet or VN when on duty.

3.2.12 VNACs are required to risk-band Training Practices, and have indicated that over 50% are in the medium to high-risk categories, which means that they require a higher degree of support and supervision with regard to the delivery of VN training. This inevitably leads to higher costs.

¹ RCVS statistics as at 24 October 2003

² RCVS statistics

³ RCVS statistics

Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The RCVS to conduct more detailed research to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student entry requirements and recruitment procedures • why student VNs drop out on the pre-enrolment probationary period and before achieving NVQ level 2. 2. The VNACs and TPs to keep more detailed information on why students leave, and their destinations, so that amendments can be made as appropriate to recruitment procedures and training systems support and management. 3. Evaluate why the time taken in training and qualification is thought to be excessive, and take steps to streamline the process. However, economies should not be made at the expense of quality. 4. Consider putting in place a system of standardisation of training (e.g. through a Centre of Excellence of Vocational Education [COVE] initiative) 5. Steps should be taken to ensure that student VNs have senior, qualified staff in attendance at all time 6. Produce advice to employers on the actual costs and benefits of training, and how this is / can be resourced.
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3.3 Qualifications

3.3.1 The majority of VNs are qualified by the 'green book' scheme.

3.3.2 Overall, the majority of respondents are not satisfied with the NVQ-based system for training VNs, and believe that the NVQ system:

- does not provide a logical structure for training
- paperwork and record keeping is unmanageable, however there are some anomalies in responses (see 3.7)
- does not provide a verifiable method for practical assessment
- does not make VN surgeons value VN training
- does not produce a fully trained VN suitable for the practice
- the information about the NVQ-based system is unhelpful.

3.3.4 Over one third of VNs are qualified as NVQ assessors, and the majority of assessors are VNs. Over a quarter of employers are qualified as assessors, however anecdotal evidence indicates that the majority of employers are not practising as assessors.

3.3.5 The majority of students work alongside their assessors at least one day per week, with nearly half of students working with their assessors two or more days per week. One third work with their assessors for less than one day per week.

3.3.6 Assessor questioning, observation, and student work product were the most frequently or always used assessment methods.

3.3.7 The majority of vets indicated that the case log requirements with reference to the portfolio are about right in the majority of cases, however there is some concern that the requirements for diagnostic imaging and maintaining veterinary resources are too high.

3.3.8 VNAC experience of the most recent External Verifier visit is good to excellent. They also think that the RCVS application of the NVQ Code of Practice is average to good. The RCVS as an awarding

body was rated good to excellent by VNACs for the publication 'VN News', portfolios, the Centre Handbook, the RCVS VN exam, the RCVS centre points, and Frequently Asked Questions, but average to poor on the VN department. The RCVS as an awarding body was broadly rated by employers as average on enrolment advice, examinations & entries, and VN Listing issues, but average to unacceptable on portfolios.

3.3.9 Slightly over 50% of employers are aware of Modern Apprenticeships, however only 3% rated themselves as very conversant.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The NVQ work-based route is a relatively recent introduction and this is believed to be the main reason for many of the issues raised. Whilst it is still early days for the NVQ system further, more detailed research needs to be undertaken to evaluate the NVQ system as a whole, and to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify more user-friendly ways of managing the system • identify best practices of students working alongside their VN assessors 2. Explore alternative, user-friendly methods of record keeping and paperwork. 3. Veterinary surgeons to be made aware of why the assessment requirements for diagnostic imaging and maintaining veterinary resources are as high as they are. 4. The RCVS to investigate why the VN department has a poor rating with VNACs. 5. Lantra to work with sector representatives to make employers aware of Modern Apprenticeships.
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3.4 National Occupational Standards

3.4.1 The majority of VNs are either unsure or agree that the National Occupational Standards (that make up the NVQs), and the current VN syllabus are relevant to current veterinary practice.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RCVS, as the awarding body, should gather information from External Verifiers concerning issues relating to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) / NVQ content. 2. Lantra, as the Standards Setting Body, should consult with RCVS and the profession as to the need to review the NOS. 3. Identify, develop and promote the wider use of NOS for example, job descriptions, appraisal systems, skills gaps analysis, and training programmes. 4. Identify and promote vet practices that illustrate good practices, and develop them as sector champions.
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3.5 Listed Status

3.5.1 36% of employers pay the annual Listing fee; 63% of VNs pay their own annual Listing fee. Almost all VNs who responded have Listed status. The main reason for not being currently Listed is that it is too expensive.

3.5.2 Over one half of employers require VNs to undertake Schedule 3 procedures, however almost one-third of employers have not checked Listed status in the last 12 months.

3.5.3 The majority of VNs understand the legal implications of performing Schedule 3 procedures while not maintaining Listed status, although a very small number are not aware that there are legal implications.

3.5.4 Three-quarters of VNs received information about the importance of maintaining Listed status in 12 months to August 2003.

3.5.5 In over one third of practices, there is always a Listed VN or student on duty; and in one third of practices animals are only ever treated by a veterinary surgeon.

3.5.6 Almost one-third of employers believe that Listed VNs are over-trained for the tasks and responsibilities they are expected to carry out.

Recommendation	1. RCVS and other organisations representing VNs to make employers aware of the legal implications of disregarding the requirements of the Veterinary Surgeons Act, and that only qualified and Listed VNs should carry out schedule 3 duties.
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3.6 Tasks / work roles

3.6.1 The majority of VNs have clinical veterinary nursing duties as their main function.

3.6.2 The main duties performed by VNs include:

- Nutritional advice / counselling
- Administration of medicines by injection
- Administration of anaesthetics pre-medication
- Setting up an I/V line
- Taking blood samples
- Anaesthetic monitoring
- Taking radiographs
- Performing in-house laboratory tasks
- Dental hygiene
- Preparing and dispensing medications.

3.6.3 Over one-third of VNs spend between a quarter and a half of their time working on reception. Two-thirds and over of VNs are routinely expected to do general housekeeping, clean the kennel area, clean the consulting room, and clean the theatre.

3.6.4 Over two-thirds of employers do not see VNs taking an increasing role and substituting for full time vets. Almost half of employers see unqualified VNs substituting for VNs. Almost half of employers see the need for a trained grade below that of VN, and over half of these believe that person needs a formal qualification.

3.6.5 Student VNs working under supervision undertake a similar range of work to that of qualified VNs albeit less frequently. Approximately 40% of student VNs only occasionally or never take radiographs, although this is a required area of training and competence. It is interesting to note that employers think that this area of VN training is over-assessed (too many portfolio case logs required). The RCVS reports a high rate of failure in the radiography section of the practical exams.

3.6.6 Unqualified support staff undertake work which is illegal under the Veterinary Surgeons Act. In particular 9% of employer respondents indicated that support staff undertook dental hygiene work and that, in some instances, this included dental extractions. Other worrying areas of support staff employment were administration of medicines by injection (15%), monitoring anaesthesia (21%) and dispensing medicines to clients (49%).

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RCVS and other organisations representing VNs to make employers aware of the legal implications of disregarding the requirements of the Veterinary Surgeons Act. 2. RCVS and professional representative bodies to promote the value of Listed VNs to animal health and welfare. 3. Employers should make every effort to use VNs for the tasks that they are qualified for. 4. Develop the vet care / technical assistant role to assist qualified staff with basic duties, and promote the lower level qualifications available to ensure that they are properly trained. 5. The RCVS to raise awareness of the range and scope of what VNs are, and are not, allowed to do. 6. Identify and promote vet practices that illustrate good practices, and develop them as sector champions.
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3.7 Working conditions

3.7.1 VNs report that their average annual salary is £14,008. This varies by region with Listed VNs in England earning the most, followed by those in Wales, then Scotland and finally Northern Ireland. London pays the highest average salary (£16,394). There is an indication that a proportion of VNs and student VNs are paid below the national minimum wage and hours worked.

3.7.2 Employers report that the salaries paid to VNs at different levels increases according to qualifications and responsibility. The highest salaries at all levels are paid in the London area, however Yorkshire & Humberside pay the highest additional salary for nurses who have achieved a post-registration qualification (eg. the Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing).

3.7.3 Over three-quarters of VNs are in permanent full-time employment. 14% of VNs have second jobs, the majority of whom need to supplement their income; some require additional intellectual fulfilment; and a few enjoy working in the voluntary sector.

3.7.4 3% of VNs are personally in receipt of State Benefits (e.g. income support).

3.7.5 Over one-quarter of employers offer an employer contributory scheme.

3.7.6 17% of employers, following a request, give the option of working reduced hours/flexitime in order to accommodate family commitments.

3.7.7 Over one-quarter of VNs and over two-thirds of student VNs do not have written contracts of employment.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All employers should ensure that all their employees, including VNs and employed student VNs, have written terms and conditions of employment. This is a legal requirement. 2. VNs, together with the BVNA, should explore the feasibility of joining an appropriate trade union, or find alternative methods of resolving issues. 3. BVNA to increase awareness of its' representative role for VNs 4. Review the pay situation for VNs and student VNs regarding the national minimum wage, and the number of hours worked.
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3.8 Recruitment & Retention

3.8.1 Since January 2000, a total of 1,059 VNs have qualified in practice, and a total of 463 of VNs have left. Almost half of VNs leave in the first year. The main reasons for leaving are:

- Too little money
- Unqualified staff carrying out Listed VN duties
- Relocating for family reasons
- Lack of career opportunities.

3.8.2 The retention rate of newly qualified VNs by employers is 44% (since January 2000). Employers and VNACs do not believe that there are difficulties in retaining newly qualified VNs whilst VNs think there are. Only one third of all VNs stay in the same practice for more than two years.

3.8.3 Almost half of all employers do not intend training student VNs in the future, however 44% of these employers would reconsider if there was more financial support, 41% if there was a reduction in costs, and 41% if there was a change in the size or focus of the practice. 39% would reconsider if a non-NVQ training scheme were implemented.

3.8.4 For those who would train VNs in the future, half do not anticipate a change in the numbers of VNs trained at any one time. In those practices who anticipate increasing the number of student VNs trained, 24% say this is due to the increased use of unqualified staff; 21% to new working practices; and 8% to moving business areas.

3.8.5 Almost half of employers anticipate a change in the in the number of VNs employed. The main reasons are changes in business turnover, and introduction of new working practices.

3.8.6 Over half of practices have attempted to recruit a VN in the last 12 months, and in almost two-thirds the vacancy was unfilled for between 2 and 6 months. Where a practice was unable to recruit, the vacancy was managed by recruiting unqualified staff, left unfilled, or restructuring.

3.8.7 Employers consider that three-quarters of Listed VNs who are trained by their own practice work competently, however 45% of Listed VNs who had moved from other practices were not trained to work competently.

3.8.8 The introduction of the NVQ scheme has had no impact on improving the VN retention rate.

3.8.9 Since January 2000, employers have employed an average of 2.81 student VNs per practice, a total of 2,467, and an average of 0.55 students have dropped out, a total of 484.

3.8.10 42% of employers who are currently training student VNs will take on more students once these are qualified.

3.8.11 Half of VNACs do not keep records of the destinations of mid-year leavers.

3.8.12 The most common destinations of mid-year leavers, where records are kept are:

- Temporary suspension of training due to health / personal factors
- Left the profession entirely
- Stopped training but remained in the practice.

3.8.13 Students who completed in 2001/2002 said that they are most likely to:

- Move to next level of training
- Become a Listed VN and stay in practice
- Choose not to List
- Become Listed and move

3.8.14 Almost half of VNACs advertised for various posts in the last two years, and one third advertised for Internal Verifiers. The most popular media for placing adverts are local press, Vet Record and Vet Nursing Times. The amount for placing adverts ranged from less than £250 to more than £1,000. Half of the advertisements placed received between one and three enquiries, and applicants who responded to an advert filled almost two-thirds of the posts.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employers should consider reviewing the terms and conditions of employment of VNs to increase retention rates. This would decrease costs incurred in recruitment, and in the induction and training of staff. 2. The awarding bodies should explore the possibility of introducing a qualification at level 2 for a Veterinary Care Assistant. There appears, from the survey to be the potential for someone at this level who would have cleaning and kennel duties, and be able to work on reception. This would free up the qualified VNs to do the work they are qualified to do. 3. Information needs to be gathered on post-training destinations of students, particularly to find out if they stay with their original employer, change employer – and why, or leave the industry. 4. VNACs should keep records of the destinations of mid-year leavers.
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3.9 Continuing Professional Development

3.9.1 The vast majority of VNs believe that CPD is an important requirement to ensure that skills and knowledge remain current.

3.9.2 The average number of CPD days taken last year (2002) was 3.25. 10% had between 6 and 10 days CPD. 28% had no CPD days last year, the main reasons included:

- Training available was not appropriate to the needs of the individuals
- Too far to travel
- Not able to put training into practice

3.9.3 Three-quarters of employers allow paid time off to attend CPD. Two-thirds of employers fully-fund CPD. 7% of VNs can only take CPD if it is taken as unpaid leave. 41% of employers who contribute to CPD stipulate content, and 63.2% stipulate budget.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lantra, together with RCVS, BSAVA, BVNA, and other relevant organisations, should:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• produce a map of the range of training opportunities and qualifications available to VNs• produce models for structured CPD programmes for VNs• undertake a promotion of the value of CPD2. All employers should consider the value of CPD to the commercial success of their practices, and support their staff as appropriate.3. Consideration should be given to the development of distance learning and on-line provision.
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3.10 Regulation

3.10.1 Over three-quarters believe the need for an enforceable system of regulation for Veterinary Nursing. This should include annual listing of qualified VNs, disciplinary procedures and mandatory CPD.

3.10.2 The majority of respondents believe that the RCVS should continue to administer a list/register of VNs.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The RCVS should evaluate the procedures for the implementation of regulation of VNs.
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3.11 Careers

3.11.1 64% of VNs, and 32% of student VNs do not think that careers advisers are well informed about the training, education and role of the veterinary nurse, however 60% of student VNs thought they received good advice.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lantra and veterinary profession organisations need to research the best way of getting good, accurate information to careers advisors.
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3.12 Job Satisfaction

3.12.1 40% of VNs have some regrets about their career choice, but would not change, 37% have no regrets whatsoever, 10% have serious regrets and wish to change, and a further 10% have already chosen to change career.

3.12.2 29% of VNs see themselves staying in the profession for 3-5 years, 28% staying for more than ten years, 18% staying for less than two years, and 16% staying for 6-9 years.

3.12.3 The most de-motivating factors as a practising VN are:

- Too little money (46%)
- Lack of praise from employer (21%)
- No recognition of capabilities by employer (20%)
- Lack of professional respect from employer and colleagues (19%)
- Poor morale (19%)
- Lack of opportunity for career progression (18%)
- Lack of client recognition of professionalism (15%)
- Over long hours (14%)
- Dissatisfaction at not being permitted to perform Schedule 3 tasks (13%)
- Pressure to devolve nursing duties to less qualified staff (7%)
- Insufficient junior staff to devolve duties to (5%)
- Pressure to perform Schedule 3 duties (4%)

3.12.4 77% of students consider that they have made the right career choice, 17% are not sure yet. 42% of students have not considered giving up training, 37% have occasionally considered giving up training, 10% frequently consider giving up, and a further 10% have definitely considered giving up.

3.12.5 The main reasons why Student VNs are no longer actively training to become a VN, have considered giving up training, or have had issues with training, are:

- Pay (61%)
- Portfolio too demanding (39%)
- Pressure of having to work and study at the same time (32%)
- Working conditions (21%)
- Lack of support from the practice (17%)
- Too few career prospects (11%)
- Demoralised because of exam failure (8%)
- Issues with college (6%)
- Family reasons (6%)
- The job is not what I thought it would be (4%)

3.12.6 74% of student VNs who are no longer in training, are still working in veterinary practices, 13% are in another unrelated job, 9% are unemployed, and 4% are still working with animals.

3.12.7 Student VNs anticipate that in five years time they will:

- still be working as a veterinary nurse in practice (74%)
- in another animal-connected job (28%)
- undertaking higher education (24%)
- as a VN in industry or education (18%)
- in another unrelated job (11%)
- as a full-time parent (10%)
- as an unqualified VN (4%).

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Employers should consider how they treat their staff; VNs wish to have their education, experience and expertise valued, be treated as fellow professionals, and rewarded accordingly.2. RCVS and professional representative bodies to promote Listed VNs value to animal health and welfare.3. Employers should make every effort to use VNs for the tasks that they are qualified for.4. The BVNA should use the information and opinion expressed in this survey, to enhance support available, and ensure that the voice of VNs is heard in the highest levels.5. VNs should make strong representation to the BVNA to ensure that their voice is heard.
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4 Methodology

In order to gather accurate information on the veterinary nursing industry, four questionnaires were designed to generate both qualitative and quantitative information from veterinary nurses (VN), student veterinary nurses, employers of veterinary nurses and veterinary nursing approved centres (VNAC). The questionnaires were developed by the steering group, who provided the questions.

A database was produced by RCVS targeting 5,106 VNs, 3,389 student VNs, 3,611 veterinary practices and the 59 VNACs. In addition to the database, press releases were sent to professional journals to announce the survey and to promote interest. This was also used as a method of gathering responses from those people who were not registered with the RCVS.

Visits to 4 veterinary practices and discussions with a VNAC were used to pilot the questionnaire with employers, VNs, student VNs and VNACs. This collected both initial responses to the questions and overall thoughts on the questionnaire. Following the pilot, the steering group approved a final draft questionnaire. This was then sent out by post to a total of 12,165 individuals.

In order to have sufficient statistics, the following response targets needed to be met:

Questionnaire	Sent out	Return Target
VNs	5106	357
Student	3389	345
Employer	3611	347
VNAC	59	51
Total	12165	1100

4.1 VN Questionnaire

The VN questionnaire began by building a profile of VNs using quantitative information gathering techniques. This looked at issues including gender, age, ethnic minority, qualifications, Listed status and employment. Information was gathered on VNs views on VN shortages, continuing professional development, regulations and careers. They were also asked to give any opinions.

4.2 Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire sought information on the student, training and qualifications, working conditions, and careers information. The students' perception of the industry was also explored, to see if the student expected to stay in training and become a fully qualified VN, and the reasons for dropping out of training where this applied.

4.3 Employer Questionnaire

The employer questionnaire initially asked about the practice, staffing numbers and questions on training, recruitment and retention, the current and future roles of VNs, and the current VN training scheme. Whilst this questionnaire collected a majority of quantitative information, the final question

asked their views on the industry and related issues. This collected qualitative information and filled any gaps from the quantitative questions.

4.4 VNAC questionnaire

The VNAC questionnaire was designed to gather information on VN training, the staff involved in the training of student VNs, and difficulties faced by student VNs. It asked for information on the NVQ-based system and on awarding bodies, and gathered opinion on the current method of training.

4.5 Correlation

The information from the questionnaires was inputted into a specially designed database, and the responses were correlated into four reports, one for each set of questionnaires.

The four reports were then analysed and the results provided the basis for this report.

5 Response rates

Over 12,000 questionnaires were sent out (see fig. 5.1) with approximately 46% returned from VNs, 34% from VNACs and Student VNs, and 25% from employers.

The total response rate was 36%. The response from VNACs was the only one that did not meet or exceed the target.

Fig. 5.1

Questionnaire	Sent out	Returned	Response Rate
VNs	5106	2333	45.69%
Student	3389	1150	33.93%
Employer	3611	878	24.31%
VNAC	59	20	33.90%
Total	12165	4381	36.01%

6 Demographics

6.1 VN Demographics

⁴There are currently 5,146 qualified VNs on the RCVS List. In 2001, 441 VNs lapsed, 348 lapsed in 2002, and 549 in 2003.

Almost half of Veterinary Nurses have been qualified for six years or over.

Fig 6.1.1

Length of time qualified	%
0-2 years	22.3%
3-5 years	31.2%
6-10 years	21.9%
11-15 years	13.0%
16-20 years	5.4%
21 years +	6.2%

The highest percentage of VNs are female [98.7%], white British [96.7%], and between the ages of 25 – 35 [59.4%]. 60.4% of respondents work in first opinion small animal practices (fig. 6.3.1). 75.9% have no dependants.

Fig 6.1.2

Number of dependants	Yes	No
Children under 5	13.7%	86.3%
Children 6 – 16 in full-time education	7.4%	92.6%
Other	2.8%	97.2%
None	75.9%	24.1%

6.2 Student VN Demographics

The highest percentage of Student VNs are female [98.3%], white British [96.8%], and between the ages of 19 – 24 [71.9%].

70.6% of respondents work in first opinion small veterinary practices (see fig.6.3.1).

⁵In 2000, 925 student VNs enrolled, 1,063 in 2001, and 940 in 2002. In 2000, 571 student VNs qualified, 703 in 2001, and 689 in 2002.

6.3 Practice Demographics

First opinion small animal practices comprise the largest number of businesses.

⁴ RCVS statistics

⁵ RCVS statistics

Fig 6.3.1

Business activity	VN	Student VN	Employer
First opinion small animal practice	60.4%	70.6%	65.5%
Mixed	23.2%	28.1%	27.9%
Large Animal	0.2%		1.3%
Equine	1.1%		2.4%
Exclusively Referral	2.5%		2.0%
University or HE	3.7%	1.3%	0.7%
Industry	0.9%		0.2%
Other veterinary related work	3.9%		
Non-veterinary employment	2.8%		
Not in paid work at present	1.4%		

The average number of staff employed in a practice is 15.98 (fig. 6.3.2). There is some disparity in the figures provided by employers and student VNs, however this could be caused by the differences in numbers responding and the type of practices they work in.

Fig. 6.3.2

Number of staff employed	Employer		Student VN	
	Mean	%	Mean	%
Number of full-time vets	4.47	26.3%	5.16	37.5%
Number of qualified VNs	2.46	14.5%		
Number of Listed qualified VNs	2.21	13.0%	2.85	20.7%
Number of student VNs employed	1.68	9.9%	3.12	22.8%
Number of student VNs on placement	1.01	6.0%	1.02	6.8%
Number of assessors			1.67	12.2%
Number of support staff employed	7.37	43.4%		
Total number of staff	15.98	100.0%	13.81	100.0%

The average number of practice Qualified VNs, Listed VNs and non VN support staff in gender and age categories shows that reception staff comprise the highest number, with the majority aged over 36 years. The highest number of Listed VNs are aged between 25 and 36 years (fig. 6.3.3).

Fig. 6.3.3

Staff breakdown	Gender		Age				
	Male	Female	16-17	19-24	25-35	36-45	45+
Kennel staff/animal assistants	5.2%	94.8%	18.0%	34.8%	27.7%	11.0%	8.6%
Reception staff	0.7%	99.3%	2.2%	11.3%	25.1%	31.5%	30.0%
Practice administrators	7.7%	92.3%	0.9%	3.9%	23.6%	31.6%	40.1%
Student VNs	3.1%	96.9%	11.5%	69.7%	15.7%	2.2%	1.0%
Listed VNs	2.3%	97.7%	0.5%	29.0%	54.9%	12.3%	3.3%
Qualified VNs	2.6%	97.4%	1.3%	27.7%	56.5%	11.1%	3.3%

The highest percentage [26.1%] turnover of practices is £250,000 - £500,000, closely followed by 25% with over £750,000.

Fig. 6.3.4

Gross turnover	%
Less than £100k	4.3%
£100-£250k	14.2%
£250-£500k	26.1%
£500-£750k	18.9%
Above £750k	25.0%
Do not wish to answer	11.4%

6.4 VNAC Demographics

45% of VNACs are Further Education providers; 40% are vet practices; and 40% VN training providers.

Fig. 6.4.1

Type of VNAC	Yes	No
Vet practice	40.0%	60.0%
FE provider	45.0%	55.0%
Managing agent	5.0%	95.0%
HE provider	20.0%	80.0%
Work based learning	15.0%	85.0%
VN training provider	40.0%	60.0%

⁶There were 1,297 ATACs before the NVQ scheme was introduced. 442 ATACs did not become TPs. 20 TPs have subsequently been suspended or lapsed.

Comments from questionnaires

In an effort not to be sexist - we would love more male VNs - the problems of their best of the profession - young women juggling children with unsociable hours often required - is not being fully addressed. (Employer)

⁶ RCVS statistics

7 Training

- 7.1 The majority of VNs began their training directly from school (43.4%) with 24.7% entering the profession as a second career choice.
- 7.2 70.5% of practices were registered as ATACs, with 62.4% now Training Practices. 61.8% of practices are currently training VNs.
- 7.3 Of 2,467 student VNs employed since January 2000, 484 have dropped out. Approximately 40% of these dropped out on the pre-enrolment probationary period and 40% before achieving NVQ level 2.

Fig. 7.1

The number of student VNs who have dropped out at the following stages since January 2000	%
On the pre-enrolment probationary period	36.5%
Before achieving NVQ level 2	44.2%
Before achieving NVQ level 3	13.7%
After passing RCVS exams but without portfolio	5.6%

Fig. 7.2

The number still actively training to become a VN	%
Yes	87.9%
No	12.1%

- 7.4 42.2% of employers who are currently training VNs and with student VNs would take on more once they are qualified; 32.3% said they would not.
- 7.5 When asked the question 'Are you satisfied with the NVQ-based system for training VNs?' 69.9% of employers said no, 51.7% of VNs said yes, and VNACs were 50/50 yes and no.
- 7.6 There is some ambivalence in opinion regarding the quality of the NVQ system of training, with a higher proportion disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the NVQ system provides a logical structure for training, and that the system provides a verifiable method for practical assessment.
- 7.7 The majority of employers, VNs and VNACs do not believe that the NVQ system makes VN surgeons value VN training, nor that it produces a fully trained VN suitable for the practice.
- 7.8 All groups reported that the paperwork and record keeping is unmanageable, and the information about the NVQ-based system is unhelpful.
- 7.9 Employers agree that the costs are too high, whilst VNs and VNACs disagree. All agree that the time involved is excessive. Employers agree that there are difficulties in recruiting or retaining assessors whilst VNs and VNACs disagreed. Employers and VNACs do not think that there are difficulties in retaining newly qualified VNs whilst VNs think that there are.

Fig. 7.3

Agree / disagree with the following statements	1 – strongly agree to 4 – strongly disagree		
	VNs	Employer	VNAC
The NVQ system trains VNs to a high standard	2.04	2.11	1.89
The NVQ system provides a logical structure for training	2.19	2.33	2.05
The NVQ system provides a verifiable method for practical assessment	2.16	2.25	2.11
It makes VN surgeons value VN training	2.78	2.75	2.79
It produces a fully trained VN suitable for the practice	2.15	2.34	2.05
The practice gets good support from the VNAC	2.28	2.42	1.58
Paperwork and record keeping is manageable	2.92	3.22	2.79
Information about NVQ based system is helpful	2.50	2.82	2.63
The costs are too high	2.22	1.82	2.05
The time involved is excessive	1.83	1.54	2.00
There are difficulties in recruiting or retaining assessors	2.08	1.94	2.05
There are difficulties in retaining newly qualified VNs	1.95	2.25	2.26

7.10 The majority of experiences of VNACs are from average to excellent.

Fig. 7.4

Experience of the VNAC in the following areas	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Unacceptable	Unknown
Enrolment Advice	14.8%	27.8%	20.3%	8.0%	3.9%	25.3%
Examinations and Entries	12.8%	29.3%	23.8%	5.4%	4.6%	24.1%
Portfolios	15.4%	25.3%	20.9%	8.6%	7.7%	22.1%
VN Listing Issues	7.7%	17.9%	16.2%	5.8%	3.5%	48.8%
Other	8.6%	15.9%	12.6%	4.9%	6.8%	51.2%

7.11 90% of respondents do not believe that the current VN training scheme is easy to implement, however 62.4% think that the in-house training, and compilation and assessment of the portfolio is easy to implement. Comments from student VNs however show that the portfolio places additional pressure on them, and is not always seen as useful.

Fig. 7.5

Current VN training scheme easy to implement	Yes	No
Training in-house and compilation and assessment of the portfolio	62.4%	37.6%
Dealing with VNAC	8.6%	91.4%
Dealing with Assessors	8.2%	91.8%
Dealing with RCVS	10.5%	89.5%

Student VNs

7.12 The majority of student VN respondents enrolled in 2001 or 2002 [66.6%], with 85.6% undertaking the NVQ training scheme, and 87.9% still actively training to become a VN.

Fig. 7.6

Date of enrolment as a student veterinary nurse	%
Before 1998	4.2%
1999	8.1%
2000	15.5%
2001	33.6%
2002	30.0%
2003	8.7%

7.13 85.6% are NVQ students, and 14.4% are NVQ plus Higher Education.

7.14 Whilst the majority of students have a vet or VN present at the practice when they are on duty, 27.9% do not at night, and 9.9% not at all times.

7.15 Over 14% of students attend (or attended) college in their own time, with over 4% not attending college at all.

Fig. 7.7

	A VN	A Vet	No assessor at present
Is the assessor	54.0%	43.5%	2.5%

Fig. 7.8

On average no. of days worked with assessor	%
Less than one day per week	31.6%
One day per week	23.0%
Two or more days per week	45.4%

Fig. 7.9

Vet or VN presence at the practice when on duty	%
Yes, always	62.3%
Yes, but not at night	27.9%
No	9.9%

Fig. 7.10

Attendance at college (or have in previous years)	%
Yes, in work time	81.6%
Yes, in my own time	14.1%
No	4.3%

7.16 Fig 7.11 lists the tasks that student VNs have the opportunity to undertake. All of these tasks are important because they are necessary for NVQ and qualification achievement.

Fig. 7.11

VN students with the opportunity to undertake the following (under supervision)	Yes every day	Yes, at least once a week	Yes occasionally	No
Maintain anaesthesia	71.6%	23.4%	4.1%	0.9%
Assist during operations (scrubbed up)	10.5%	8.7%	58%	22.8%
Minor surgical procedures	7.2%	6.9%	19.6%	66.3%
Place intravenous catheters	17.4%	19.6%	37.6%	25.4%
Set up intravenous infusions	38.8%	37.5%	19.5%	4.2%
Take radiographs	22.1%	34.2%	26.7%	17%
Process radiographs	48.4%	43.1%	6.7%	1.9%
Give injections	87.2%	10.6%	2%	0.2%
Take blood samples	32.6%	26.4%	26.5%	14.5%

VNACs

7.17 The number of student VNs (at all levels) shows an increase of starters from 2001/2002 (524) to 2002/2003 (560).

Fig. 7.12

No. of student veterinary nurses trained during each of the last three academic years	Pre VN/ANA	NVQ 2	NVQ 3
2000/2001			
Starter	49	191	152
Leavers	0	17	5
Exam pass	9	115	74
Exam resit	0	15	26
Achievers	9	88	69
2001/2002			
Starter	70	247	207
Leavers	2	16	5
Exam pass	10	171	117
Exam resit	2	20	37
Achievers	27	151	108
2002/2003			
Starter	107	222	241
Leavers	18	35	24
Exam pass	46	119	80
Exam resit	3	4	6
Achievers	15	58	21

7.18 The drop out rate of students is highest at the pre-enrolment probationary period and before achieving NVQ level 2.

Fig. 7.13

Since January 2000, no. of student VNs who have dropped out at the following stages	%
On the pre-enrolment probationary period	39.3%
Before achieving NVQ level 2	41.5%
Before achieving NVQ level 3	13.0%
After passing RCVS exams but without portfolio	6.2%

7.19 The majority of achievers became Listed and stayed in practice or moved to the next level of training.

Fig. 7.14

Destinations for achievers	1 – most frequent	2	3	4	5 – least frequent
Became a Listed VN; stayed in practice	40%	20%	10%	0%	15%
Moved to next level of training	35%	20%	5%	0%	10%
Became a Listed VN and moved	10%	15%	15%	10%	0%
Chose not to List	10%	0%	0%	25%	5%
VNAC does not keep records	5%	0%	5%	0%	10%

7.20 Over one third of mid-year leavers stopped training and left the profession entirely.

Fig. 7.15

The most common destinations for mid-year leavers in 2001/2002	1 – most frequent	2	3	4	5 – least frequent
Stopped training; left profession entirely	20%	15%	0%	10%	5%
Temp suspension of training due to health / personal factors	20%	10%	5%	0%	5%
Stopped training but remains in practice	10%	5%	0%	15%	10%
Changed employer but remains in training	5%	0%	20%	5%	10%
VNAC does not keep records	5%	0%	5%	0%	0%
Moved to another course	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Other	0%	0%	5%	0%	5%

7.21 Over 50% of TPs are in the medium to high-risk categories.

Fig. 7.16

Number of Training Practices in the following risk categories	Low	Medium	High
Approved	155	158	49
Applications pending approval visits	2	1	6
Applications pending approval by RCVS	0	8	0
Applications pending completion of action plans	1	2	7

Employers

7.22 The number TPs has slightly decreased from practices registered as ATACs.

Fig. 7.17

	Yes	No
Practices registered as ATACs	70.5%	29.5%
Now TPs	62.4%	37.6%
Currently training VNs in practices	61.8%	38.2%

7.23 The majority of employers are dissatisfied with the NVQ system for training VNs.

Fig 7.18

Satisfaction with the NVQ based system for training VNs	Yes	No
Employer	30.1%	69.9%
VNs	51.7%	48.4%
VNAC	50.0%	50.0%

7.24 A large majority of employers find the current system difficult to implement.

Fig. 7.19

Ease of implementation of the current VN Training Scheme	%
Yes	10.0%
No	90.0%

Comments from questionnaires

I think more should be done somehow to 'check-up' on the standards of tuition at all colleges - they do vary. I think less should be made of the portfolio system - it is repetitive and easily 'doctored' - practical experience is so important, writing about it is not so important. Every time we have a new student I make them work in practice before undertaking studies, to make them aware of the 'job' and the workload. (VN)

Feel the cost of SVN training is very high and that, combined with time to train and assess, is putting pressure on our practice of training student VNs. Qualified nurses are hard to find we had an advert for a QVN on two separate occasions in the VN Times and V Times and only had 2 applicants. (VN)

I feel it is a great shame that many nurses leave the profession when they have worked so hard to gain the qualification in first place. Since qualifying as a VN I have seen many changes with regards to training nurses, I know how vague and sub standard the green book system was in many ways. I believe the portfolio system is much better and as the support available from the royal college is extremely helpful/useful and of a very high standard. (VN)

I would like to make it clear that all tasks performed by our student VNs are supervised by a vet or a Listed VN as part of their training and completion of their portfolio case logs. (VN)

I trained years ago under the old 'green book' system and was lucky to be employed by a well-equipped purpose built practice, and 3 monthly blocks at Agricultural College to learn the theory behind VN. I still believe this gave me a good grounding and made me an enthusiastic VN, unlike today's trainees who study under NVQ syllabus' whilst working full-time and being stressed by mountains of paperwork. I feel really lucky to work in a job which I love and after 12 years, still gives me a great deal of satisfaction. I also feel lucky to be working in a forward thinking and progressive practice.

Unfortunately many veterinary nurses have not had the same opportunities as I have. I have been travelling round Australia working as a VN. I based my answers to this survey on the employer I did my training with in England. I was employed there for 2 and a half years. I think that the main problems for VNs are the lack of decent wages and the lack of recognition and appreciation by veterinary surgeons. I for one am often moved to wonder why I went to college and studied for 2 years only to spend most of my day cleaning cages, mopping floors etc. Most VNs do not get sufficient opportunity to use their skills. Nurses leave but replacements are not taken on, so the remaining staff are expected to do more. VNs are not afraid of hard work and don't mind long hours. We DO mind lack of appreciation, lack of decent wages and the lack of opportunity to use the skills for which we trained. (VN)

In my experience having worked with several vets in four different practices, the general attitude is that it doesn't matter if one is qualified or not. I'm no different to someone with no college training, and in fact one vet had preference to one 'nurse' who he had trained in house just as he wanted. He would only operate with her, and another told me I only did the training for my own enjoyment and interest, and he was only 28 years old, not some old school vet as you would expect. (VN)

With career progression - "top up" VN degree for it to be held locally as an evening day release course, for nurses that might not want to do be diploma - medical/surgical. (VN)

Half of assistant vets don't understand the VN training scheme. Partners are great, some assistant vets aren't, and as a head nurse I spend a lot of time on training and some teaching in house. Certain vets think training nurses is a waste of time - this really annoys me! They have a good career and decent money they shouldn't be grudge others wanting the same. (VN)

Our nursing staff has greatly improved with training and the bosses often say this, which is nice! (VN)

Having had feedback from our trainees regarding the college they went to on day release, I have come to the conclusion that these colleges should also be assessed. I have found the content of lectures seriously lacking in various areas from quality of information given to what subjects are covered during their time in lectures. Certain subjects seem to have been covered repeatedly where other equally important (and sometimes more important) subjects were never covered or were merely mentioned. (VN)

VN training needs to be made more uniform. Different assessors give a wide range of assessments, which means that standards vary greatly from one college or VNAC to another. (VN)

Given that, in my opinion, the standards of training VNs in the last 5 years have improved greatly, it should without a doubt be a recognised, respected and appreciated profession. VNs are so much more knowledgeable and practically competent than in recent years and still they are underpaid, over worked, never utilised to the best of their ability and very rarely respected for the job they do. (VN)

Veterinary practices, in our area north Wales, are dropping out of being ATACs - mine included. There is no support here - BVNA meetings have been abolished, CPD courses are always in England that means long travelling hours, road shows have stopped coming to Wales. Our nearest college for the pre-veterinary nurse course is 170 miles away even further for the veterinary-nursing course. I think there is too much confusion in nursing with too many levels diplomas, NVQ, degree etc after working in practice for six years as a locum - there is no standardised work conditions nationally. Some vets employ no veterinary nurses yet allow their staff to be called nurses its unfair and demoralising. It

seems a scale of one step forward and three steps back. Teach us to a higher level than were allowed to use in practice- ridiculously contradicting our code of ethics. (VN)

I consider myself a competent and experienced nurse and in my role as a theatre nurse I have the opportunity to teach schedule 3 and other nursing duties. I find this very rewarding and I am very lucky to work in a practice where this is encouraged. Especially by the vets - they have a lot of trust in me as a nurse, which makes me feel very proud. Our practice has just had a 100% pass mark this summer of seven students and I think this reflects very well on our centre as a training hospital - and once again I am very proud to be part of this. The assessing is a large part of my job, and it is a lot of work but our nurses appreciate the time and effort involved which make it worthwhile. (VN)

The RCVS wanted us to take responsibility for our actions yet every 5 minutes they are taking another procedure away from us. Soon we will be doing the same as auxiliary nurses. Should we have qualified? We could still gain knowledge from books!! Why have the BVNA just launched a dentistry course? (VN)

Having been against the introduction of NVQs because it put much of the responsibility for VN training on practices I now feel that it is a logical basis for training. I still feel it is too onerous for practices but VNs are trained to work methodically which must be better than just under-pinning knowledge. It does cost the practice more than previously but this is acceptable, cheaper than most comparable training, probably cheaper for the nurses than the previous system. (Employer)

Portfolio and current VN training too much hassle. Green books produced just as competent VNs. Employees are stressed and disheartened. Considering ceasing training and employing animal nursing assistants in the future. (Employer)

VH/NVQ has been a monumental waste of time and money. Until we get competent, qualified and effective course provision, nothing will change. Throwing money at 3rd rate course providers and burying us with paperwork is not a solution. The VN examination is unfair, unsafe and corrupt - we will be happy to provide evidence. (Employer)

The attitude of our VNAC was bad - they dictated appointment times to us (even the VAT inspector asked when is suitable!). (Employer)

VNs have to learn lots of detail about things they are never going to be needed to do, as they are not vets, e.g. diagnosis of infectious diseases, detailed surgical and medical treatments including drug usages. They cannot have the same depth of knowledge as the vets, and a little knowledge is dangerous. (Employer)

Qualified nurses' conditions and pay are not the best in the world. This is never going to change until nurses are taught customer service skills, marketing and how a practice runs. Instead everyone seems to be in denial that a veterinary practice is a service business. We only teach clinical subjects and then have a system for dealing with complaints which usually arise as a result of poor customer service skills / communication. (Employer)

Portfolio is very hard and demanding. It's difficult to do college syllabus, portfolio and work to a good standard at all times, as not enough hours in day for all three! I feel that considering the amount of responsibilities SVNs have the pay should be better. I find living in the south I can't afford to live and it is due to this reason that I have felt like giving up. (Student VN)

I am currently on a scheme run by Barony College. I am a full time student working in a placement and receiving tuition at Barony. I get paid approx. £3200 to live on per year. I have to work 35 hours per week at the placement another 15 hrs in a part time job to fund myself. I spend 20 hrs a week travelling and with my spare time I have to work on my portfolio (which is time consuming), I revise for exams, run a household and after seeing some friends (or family) would be nice. If it weren't for sheer determination to have this career I would not be doing this still. It would benefit me loads if I was given more money support and if there was more approved practises near where I live. (Student VN)

I find my day-to-day work highly stressful as I'm constantly concerned by how much portfolio I still need to complete as well as trying to find time to complete logs and also study for my exams. I also found it highly distressing when told from RCVS that deadlines or certain things required for case logs keep changing, i.e. 10 days to get log signed. I must say that, I certainly was not expecting my training to be quite as stressful as it has been. (Student VN)

I'm an older student coming to veterinary nursing and pleased to say that it was/ is the right decision for me. However I feel the pay does not reflect the time, effort and study required of the student or qualified V.N. There is also considerable variation in what Vets will and will not let you do in day-to-day practice. Apart from that I'm really enjoying the learning / study. (Student VN)

My training would be easier if I could do it by correspondence or if there was a college in central London as where I currently work short staffing levels is often a problem and often hard to get a day for college. (Student VN)

8 Qualifications

8.1. The majority of VNs are qualified by the 'green book' scheme. This is because the NVQ work-based route is a recent introduction.

Fig. 8.1

Qualification routes taken by VNs	%
Non NVQ 'green book' scheme	73.7%
Work based route - VN S/NVQ scheme	25.0%
VN HND route	0.1%
VN Degree route	0.7%
Overseas qualification	0.5%

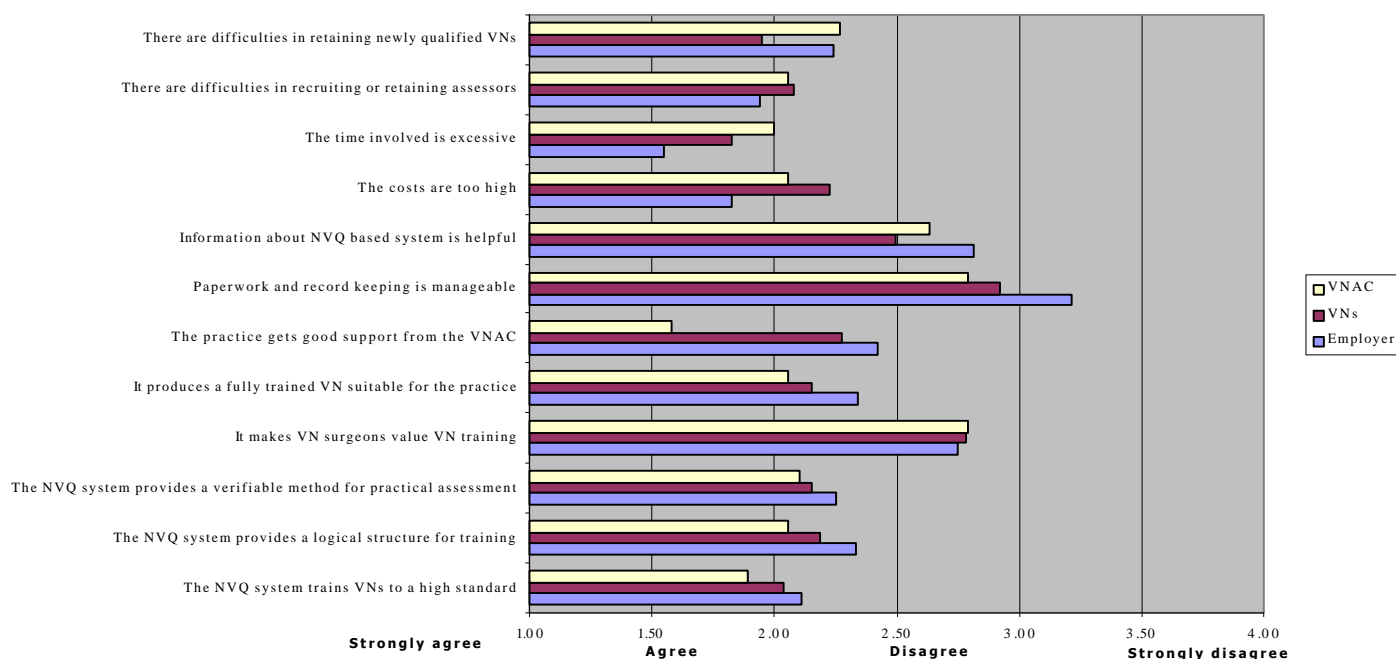
8.2 Over one third of VNs are qualified as NVQ assessors.

Fig. 8.2

Additional qualifications	Yes	No
Assessor award (D or A Unit)	37.8%	62.2%
Internal Verifier Award (D or V unit)	5.8%	94.2%
Certificate in Education/other recognised teaching qualification	5.0%	95.0%
'Top up' VN degree qualification	0.3%	99.7%
City & Guilds qualification in Small Animal Nutrition	6.2%	93.8%
RCVS Cert in Equine Veterinary Nursing	0.6%	99.4%
RCVS Dip in Advanced Veterinary Nursing (surgical)	3.7%	96.3%
RCVS Dip in Advanced Veterinary Nursing (medical)	0.6%	99.4%
BVNA Certificate in Companion Animal Behaviour	4.0%	96.0%
BVNA Diploma in Dermatology	0.2%	99.8%

8.3 The majority of VNs, employers and VNACs do not agree that NVQ paperwork and record keeping is manageable.

Fig 8.3



8.4 Level 2 candidates:

- 64.6% expected to sit their level 2 examination in 2003
- For 52.6% this would be their first attempt
- 66.7% expected to complete their level 2 portfolios in 2003

8.5 Level 3 candidates:

- As level 2 candidates only 44.7% passed their RCVS examination at their first attempt
- 58.8% passed their level 2 examination in 2002
- 69.2% expect to take their level 3 examinations in 2003, and 24% in 2004
- For 48% this will be their first attempt
- 67.6% expect to submit their level 3 portfolios in 2003, and 27.6% in 2004

Fig. 8.4

NVQ Level 2 examination statistics						
	Summer 2000			Winter 2000		
	No.	Pass	%	No.	Pass	%
1 st attempt	663	530	80	146	112	77
2 nd attempt	33	21	64	107	41	38
3 rd attempt	34	16	47	9	3	33
4 th attempt	3	3	100	6	-	-
Total	733	570	78	268	156	58
	Summer 2001			Winter 2001		
	No.	Pass	%	No.	Pass	%
1 st attempt	695	566	81	166	139	64
2 nd attempt	42	15	36	98	61	62
3 rd attempt	58	27	47	13	3	23
4 th attempt	11	6	55	22	13	59
Total	806	614	76	299	216	72
	Summer 2002			Winter 2002		
	No.	Pass	%	No.	Pass	%
1 st attempt	774	628	81	166	137	83
2 nd attempt	39	20	51	117	56	48
3 rd attempt	29	13	45	17	6	35
4 th attempt	24	13	54	8	3	38
Total	866	674	78	308	202	66

⁷ RCVS statistics

Fig. 8.5

⁸ NVQ Level 3 examination statistics						
	Summer 2000			Winter 2000		
	No.	Pass	%	No.	Pass	%
1 st attempt	337	162	50	121	56	46
2 nd attempt				153	84	55
3 rd attempt						
4 th attempt						
Total				274	140	51
	Summer 2001			Winter 2001		
	No.	Pass	%	No.	Pass	%
1 st attempt	521	264	51	148	87	59
2 nd attempt	60	42	70	217	143	66
3 rd attempt	63	43	67	16	10	63
4 th attempt				16	9	56
Total	644	349	54	397	249	63
	Summer 2002			Winter 2002		
	No.	Pass	%	No.	Pass	%
1 st attempt	590	361	61	170	101	59
2 nd attempt	85	52	61	214	145	68
3 rd attempt	59	45	76	43	26	60
4 th attempt	11	45	76	13	10	77
Total	745	465	62	440	282	64

8.6 The majority of assessors are VNs.

8.7 Whilst 45.4% of students work with their assessors two or more days per week, over 31% work with their assessors for less than one day per week.

Fig. 8.6

How many IVs do you employ to quality assure the VN NVQs?	%
VNs (working towards D34/V unit)	19%
VNs (D34/V unit holder)	58%
VSs (working towards D34/V unit)	6%
VSs (D34?V unit holder)	17%

8.8 Assessor questioning [88.2%], observation [86.5%], and student work product [64.1%] were the most frequently or always used assessment methods.

Fig. 8.7

The frequency that methods of assessment are used	Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Always
Observed assessment	0.0%	5.0%	70.0%	25.0%
Witness testimony	0.0%	57.9%	42.1%	0.0%
Simulation	15.8%	73.7%	10.5%	0.0%
Assessor questioning	0.0%	0.0%	78.9%	21.1%
Student work product	0.0%	21.1%	47.4%	31.6%
Video or photographic evidence	52.6%	42.1%	5.3%	0.0%

8.9 The majority of vets indicated that the case log requirements with reference to the portfolio are about right in the majority of cases, however there is some concern that the requirements for diagnostic imaging and maintaining veterinary resources are too high.

⁸ RCVS statistics

Fig. 8.8

With reference to the portfolio, opinion of the case log required	Too many	About right	Too few
Level 2 Health and Safety	21.6%	74.0%	4.5%
Level 2 Reception and Client Support	46.1%	51.3%	2.6%
Level 2 Admission and Discharge of Animals	13.9%	70.3%	15.8%
Level 2 Preparing and assisting with medical VN procedures	13.8%	70.1%	16.0%
Level 2 Basic Nursing	46.5%	51.2%	2.3%
Level 3 Laboratory and diagnostic aids	30.0%	65.8%	4.2%
Level 3 Medical Nursing and Fluid Therapy	38.6%	57.1%	4.2%
Level 3 Diagnostic Imaging	51.9%	45.8%	2.3%
Level 3 Surgical Nursing and Theatre Practice	41.3%	56.0%	2.7%
Level 3 Anaesthesia	24.8%	64.0%	11.2%
Level 3 Maintaining veterinary resources	55.0%	43.0%	1.9%

8.10 Experience of the RCVS is varied, but tends toward average.

Fig 8.9

Employer experience of the RCVS in the following areas:	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Unacceptable	Unknown
Enrolment advice	3.4%	18.1%	27.2%	12.8%	7.3%	31.2%
Examinations and entries	3.8%	17.9%	33.9%	12.3%	7.6%	24.4%
Portfolios	2.0%	12.8%	27.7%	16.6%	14.5%	26.4%
VN Listing issues	2.9%	15.4%	25.4%	10.7%	6.4%	39.3%
Other	2.3%	5.9%	19.7%	8.8%	13.1%	50.2%

8.11 The RCVS was rated good to excellent of VN news, but average to poor on the VN department.

Fig. 8.10

VNAC rating the following RCVS support services and documents	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Unacceptable
Portfolio	10.0%	45.0%	20.0%	25.0%	0.0%
VN news	10.0%	60.0%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%
VN department	10.0%	15.0%	40.0%	35.0%	0.0%
Centre handbook	5.0%	25.0%	65.0%	5.0%	0.0%
RCVS website	5.3%	36.8%	36.8%	21.1%	0.0%
RCVS VN exam	5.0%	25.0%	65.0%	5.0%	0.0%
RCVS centre points	20.0%	45.0%	30.0%	5.0%	0.0%
Frequently asked questions (FAQs)	30.0%	30.0%	25.0%	15.0%	0.0%

8.12 Overall, experience of the most recent External Verifier visit is good to excellent.

Fig. 8.11

VNAC experience of most recent EV visit	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Unacceptable
Positive	20.0%	55.0%	15.0%	5.0%	5.0%
Supportive	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	5.0%	5.0%
Helpful	25.0%	50.0%	20.0%	0.0%	5.0%
Knowledgeable	25.0%	40.0%	20.0%	15.0%	0.0%

8.13 Slightly over 50% of employers are aware of Modern Apprenticeships.

Fig. 8.12

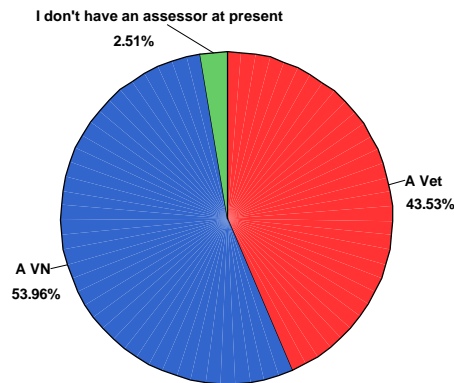
No. of employers aware of the Government training mechanism known as Modern Apprenticeships	%
Yes	51.7%
No	45.6%
Very Conversant	2.7%

8.14 *VN role in Quality Assurance*

- 39.13% assess student VNs; of these 5.99% are Internal Verifiers and 3.45% are head of the VNAC.
- 29.4% of employers are qualified as assessors.

8.15 The majority of assessors are VNs.

Fig. 8.13



8.16 The alternative forms of assessment VNACs would like to use, are:

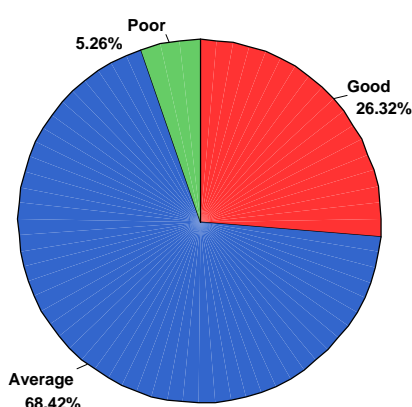
- Retain exam based
- Essay/literature research evidence
- Some past performance
- APL

8.17 MRCVS is the most common qualification of lecturers involved in the VNAC.

Fig. 8.14

		Table %
What are the qualifications of your lecturer team who are involved in the VNAC?	VNs (Listed)	20.0%
	VNs (Graduate)	.0%
	VNs (RCVS Dip AVN)	15.0%
	MRCVS	45.0%
	VNs (HE)	5.0%
	Other	.0%
	None	15.0%

Fig. 8.15 How effectively VNACs consider the RCVS applies the NVQ Code of Practice



Comments from the questionnaires

It would be easier for the independent assessors to come in from the VNACs to assess the student VNs as I find the assessment time consuming working in a small practice. (VN)

As a head nurse within the practice, and assessor as well as internal verifier for the VNAC, the biggest battles within practice are:

- Awareness and interest/support for the NVQ VN training scheme from my own practice point of view
- Support of career progression. Ideally I would have taken my surgical diploma but lack of support in the practice and also the inability to use the skills post-qualification has deterred me. (VN)

The VN qualification should not be reduced in its content, although a better system for practical examination should be set up. We should have our own 'professional' body, registration and accountability, which should enforce a way of ensuring registered nurses are up to date and still skilled, not just capable of affording a yearly listing fee. This would also help to stop the current trend in practices of training lay staff to 'their standard' to do the same nursing as student or qualified VNs. This may have something to do with why nurses feel undervalued, or don't bother to continue their course. (VN)

Finding a balance between being an assessor and developing your own skills can get a bit depressing. Although I love to train students I feel I never have time for me! I know that might seem selfish but you do need to feel good about yourself in this type of career. Your confidence needs boosting every so often! (VN)

Having worked in the profession for 16 years I feel the general standard of VN training has improved, although the present NVQ system de-moralises students with sometimes unattainable requirements. (VN)

I think that the NVQ basis does provide a better-trained nurse, but it is time consuming for practice members and students alike. Unless you have dedicated students it is a lot of work to get through - stressful for them, to cope with case logs, study and their own work (long hours, duties, etc). The end result after 2 hard years is often still long hours and poor pay. (VN)

The NVQ/portfolio scheme is fine as long as the training practices are committed and have good assessors and student nurses are allowed time to complete their work and study. Unfortunately I did not - but through sheer hard work and determination I qualified first time. I am now ensuring that my fellow trainee nurses do get time - and give them as much help as possible especially with portfolio and practice sessions. I think the new VN training is a waste of time, the log sheets and paperwork is a joke. How can you prepare a plan for a RTA? Most log sheets are made up. I know many practices that have to do this. I don't think it improves your knowledge of training anymore than the green book. It is revision work from college and more work for others. (VN)

There seems to be too many case logs in the portfolio and too much paperwork to contend with on the current syllabus. I have resisted doing the D or A units and becoming an assessor, although I have over 20 years experience. Our other qualified nurse was happy to do this initially but it now takes up so much of her time she is barely able to do the job of VN herself. (VN)

I find it very frustrating that employers seem to have a lack of knowledge and understanding about the VN degree programs. A lot of extra and more in depth subjects are studied, and research modules undertaken e.g. advanced surgical and critical care nursing, canine and feline behaviour, customer care and management, information giving professional practice and dissertations. I personally put in a lot of hard work and effort during my 3-year course to gain my first class degree and it disappoints me that my efforts go unrecognised and un-rewarded. I hope that this gap of knowledge within the profession will be rectified somehow, so others and myself gain the recognition we deserve from employers and colleagues alike. (VN)

I was satisfied with the content of the S/NVQ level 2 and 3 training and my course tutors were very helpful. I was however very disappointed with the back up from the RCVS and BVNA when I was experiencing problems with my employer. I found myself repeating most of my level 3 portfolio due to an unprofessional boss. In hindsight I should have complained more at the time. (VN)

The NVQ system for training VNs is better than the green book that I had while training but it is a lot of work for the general practice and the students. When I was assessing students I felt that I was decreasing my nursing skills, which was not the reason that I trained as a nurse. I think the system as it is now is good for a practice that has a lot of assessors both vets and nurses but is not ideal for the smaller practice as to do it properly requires time which you very often haven't got as you are doing other things. (VN)

I've trained to become an assessor recently. I have found it really hard because the colleges locally will only let people do A1 awards if they do an introduction to teaching course first, which was 3 hours weekly for 20 weeks. This has made it very difficult in our area to train as an assessor. I would be grateful if someone can look into this to prevent other nurses in the area doing this. (VN)

Qualified as a R.A.N.A. - no provision allowed in your survey for this valuable section of older VNs still in practice. NVQ to many older people = not very qualified. This administration of this scheme is top heavy with paperwork/assessors/external verifiers, etc. It will alienate the smaller practice, which can often offer a more personal approach to training than the larger premises. The current debate regarding schedule 3 and particularly dental extractions is causing unrest. The veterinary surgeon in charge of the case should be able to delegate to a VN under supervision as per the Act but equally the VNs should know their capabilities. So I feel it is important that VNs are responsible for their actions. It is important VNs are Listed and their skills kept up to date, if as a profession we aspire to more responsibility. (VN)

The portfolio is supposed to be evidence of training and the student's ability practically in practice. Why is it then necessary to continue with the practical exams to gain the professional qualification? (VN)

- The portfolio is much too demanding.
- Placement at vet schools (full-time course) is very intimidating.
- Staff at vet schools are not helpful
- Should be better clarification of portfolio at beginning of studying, instead of finding things out half way through.
- Staff at practice placements need to be better informed, what is required of the VN students
- Great to know you are interested in the opinions of VNs! (VN)

I feel the NVQ system only works well within a good team of vets/VNs, and at a practice with good standards. As an assessor in training I feel there is little support for myself and my students - this is something that needs to be sorted out if we are to keep training practices functioning and to encourage students to opt for the work option rather than the full-time college course. (VN)

Feel that portfolio too long-winded. Too many cases per section. Have decided to train as an interior designer now. Am still in work just to pay for that course. There is not sufficient money to keep me as a Listed VN. (VN)

A few years back I was the only Listed VN. In order to train the student nurses it was required for me to do the D32/D33 units. This is an area of my job that I hate. I simply want to be a veterinary nurse and perform the skills as much as I can. We are a very busy practice and very little time if at all is available for me to assess portfolio work. It is often necessary for me to take work home with me. Why should I have to do this? I don't get paid for it. I didn't become a veterinary nurse to assess students, and if that was my wish I would choose a different career that paid well. (VN)

I feel strongly that there should be a check on nurses employed in practice, as to their qualifications and what they are allowed to do. The vet I work for does not have any interest in whether nurses are qualified or not. The other two in the practice do all aspects of nursing. One has several years' experience, the other has 6 months experience! I feel that this situation makes a mockery of the VN qualification. (VN)

As an assessor at a busy training practice I feel we have had a lack of support and guidance from RCVS. They have constantly changed rules and moved goalposts and expected us to 'catch-up'. At one point in time, I had student VNs completing 3 different versions of portfolio; no doubt shortly they will produce version 4. How do they expect us to competently guide student VNs through this ever-changing paperwork? (VN)

As an assessor in a large busy practice it is almost impossible to assess, mark and take time out to complete the portfolio properly. Content is mostly relevant but the quantity I feel is too much for both student and assessor. (VN)

As a former lecturer in veterinary nursing I am internal verifier for the veterinary nurse NVQ, I have become extremely disillusioned with this system of training. Although I believe that trainee nurses are trained to a high standard if the assessors are dedicated, the ridiculous amount of paperwork and the confusion caused by the RCVS as they constantly move the goalposts has made it unworkable in practice. I know of several qualified assessors who deny possessing their D/A units when applying for new jobs as they do not want to carry out the assessor role. (VN)

Although the NVQ portfolio is very time consuming for the trainers and the students It's a massive improvement on the green book that I trained with. I think with a lot of practical subjects when I trained I knew how to do it but not why I was doing it - case logs would have made sure I knew both. (VN)

Regular updates are needed regarding assessor and internal verifier information. No-one seems to have the same standards. Very difficult to remain completely up to date - seems to change all the time. We need a newsletter for assessors and internal verifiers. VNACs do a good job. Some very good practices will opt out if things continue to make their life difficult e.g. cost, paperwork, time. (VN)

I think the NVQ system is a very effective way of learning and becoming qualified. (VN)

I am quite happy with the veterinary profession as a whole. I feel that maybe the 3rd edition portfolio for student veterinary nurses is fine if you work in a busy practice that see plenty of different cases but if you work in a small quiet practice then I would imagine the portfolio is near impossible. (VN)

The current NVQ scheme for training VNs seems to totally disregard the needs and limitations of the small general practice. The input required from non-student personnel is ridiculous! The verifiers appear to regard visits as great social events and a chance to put into place more regulations and rules that cannot be fulfilled in a small practice. Myself, and other Listed VNs at my practice are at a loss to know how we are supposed to give the necessary support to our students, fulfil all the rules and still support our boss! Also, running what has to be a profitable practice - or we all end up without jobs! (VN)

The scheme is producing well-trained veterinary nurses for today's practices but at what cost to the enjoyment of the working environment for students and trainers - I think it is a step backward and detracts from job satisfaction for both vets and nurses. (Employer)

Portfolio is excessively time consuming with a huge amount of jargon! (Employer)

It can be unrealistic for a Listed VN/assessor to have to find such a huge chunk out of their working day to train/assess and complete paperwork and still run a busy practice competently. (Employer)

RCVS attitude to any negative feedback on training issues from practice / VNAC gives impression that powers that be do not listen. (Employer)

Why have practical exams when the portfolio requires that many hours be spent assessing practical tasks? Wake up RCVS or you will lose all your TPs. (Employers)

I think nursing training is basically very poor. It is very difficult in a busy practice to give the time to the students on a formal basis. The worst part as an assessor is the supposed verification in writing of every tutorial/ discussion/ training given in duplicate etc. - far too much paperwork. (Employer)

RCVS external verifiers now insist that practices or students are able to trace clinical records of cases used in their casebooks to prove their variety and accuracy. This raises some important issues re client confidentiality. We only became aware of it during a routine visit from our internal verifier, and we understand that the RCVS expect us to have introduced this in retrospect! We have no system to trace clinical records deliberately in order to protect confidentiality. (Employer)

The portfolio is without doubt the hardest part of the training course, it's extremely difficult after working a 15hr shift to then write case logs and revise for the exams. I suppose the problem is that the portfolio doesn't go towards anything, you put so much hard work in and yet you get nothing back. I remember when at school having to do course work - it was a nightmare but it was worth it as it made a percentage of the final grade. I think the portfolio and what it stands for really needs to be considered. (Student VN)

Working in a busy referral hospital means that undertaking work on the portfolio in work hours has proved impossible. Plus the set-up of the portfolio means that at times it is very frustrating when inputting the cases into the computer generated format, e.g. cannot get headings on the same page as typed in data. The 10-14 day turnaround of cases, from time undertaken to assessment, can be difficult to meet due to my work rotas and assessors hours not always corresponding. Hence have met with assessor on my own time. (Student VN)

The exam centres are too far away, why is there not one in central England? (Student VN)

As a degree student veterinary nurse I feel many older VNs are very non-positive towards the degree. I feel this is very unfair because there are not many people in the VN profession that would pay for all their own exams, university fees, accommodation & work on full time practice placement for no pay like degree nurses do. There is a misunderstanding towards degree nurses & a step forward for VNs should be received positively not with fear. A VN has a very responsible job & I feel people do not understand the job very well, it is high risk & working many hours a week and on call so I feel it should be higher paid. To do this job it must be your love & passion, it is mine & I wouldn't want to do anything else. I would just like to be a little more appreciated! (Student VN)

Repeating numerous case logs on the same topic only results in repetition and apathy. I don't believe that a written report can be used to assess students' practical ability but I do believe that it is an excellent learning tool. And anyway if the portfolio is in place to provide evidence of practical ability, why is it that the horrendous practical exams are still in effect? (Student VN)

With regards to the RCVS exams, if you fail one or more sections I don't think you should have to retake the whole exam. I think it would be acceptable to just re-sit the part you failed as you have already passed the other sections; I see it pointless to have to pass the same part twice. (Student VN)

More support from RCVS when needed. It's very difficult to do a portfolio and study for practical and theory exams and work full time. Why are both needed? (Student VN)

The royal college needs to make their procedures fairer to veterinary nurses. They really need to bend on rules of admin. Thanks to my exam application for summer 2003 being looked at by a member of staff 1 day after the deadline, even though it was sent in months before, I was refused to sit, now forcing me to take a year out. A few students in my class are in the same boat. This we find disgraceful, especially when letters of complaint are not acknowledged. The way I have been treated makes me not want to carry on with this training. (Student VN)

9 National Occupational Standards

9.1 The majority either agree or are unsure that the occupational standards and the current VN syllabus are relevant to current veterinary practice.

Fig. 9.1

Are the occupational standards relevant to current Veterinary practice						
NVQ 2 VN	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Average
VN	7.2%	38.1%	48.2%	5.2%	1.2%	2.6
Employer	6.0%	32.9%	42.6%	13.3%	5.2%	2.8
VNAC	5.0%	60.0%	35.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.3
NVQ 3 VN	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Average
VN	7.7%	38.9%	47.4%	4.8%	1.3%	2.5
Employer	6.4%	34.6%	39.6%	13.9%	5.4%	2.8
VNAC	10.5%	63.2%	26.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2

Fig. 9.2

Is the current VN syllabus relevant to current Veterinary practice						
NVQ 2 VN	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Average
VN	7.8%	42.4%	40.0%	8.6%	1.2%	2.5
Employer	5.3%	36.1%	38.8%	15.9%	3.9%	2.8
VNAC	20.0%	55.0%	20.0%	5.0%	0.0%	2.1
NVQ 3 VN	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Average
VN	8.3%	43.1%	39.3%	8.0%	1.4%	2.5
Employer	5.3%	37.7%	36.7%	16.0%	4.2%	2.8
VNAC	21.1%	63.2%	15.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9

Comments from questionnaires

I think the occupational standards have improved but it still takes a lot of working out to match individual assessments. There should be specific guidelines for contents required for main types of tasks. A tick chart for species/tasks would be helpful. Questions and knowledge lists - helpful if available. (VN)

The present occupational standards are not as good as the previous standards (1997) there are many gaps. It is obvious from the present standards (level 3) that Lantra is not fully informed on veterinary practice and the practised tasks performed by student veterinary nurses or veterinary nurses. (VN)

Students seem to think that the standards are not their concern. More should be done to enlighten them, maybe by college work. (VN)

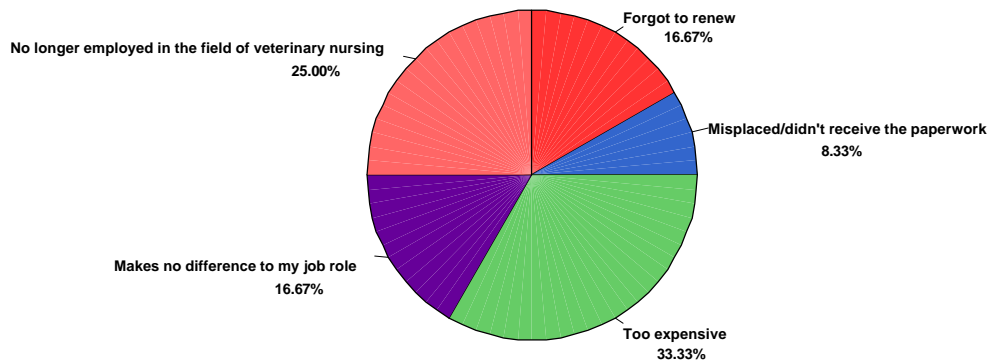
I believe the current standards are excellent - they are easy to read very comprehensive, apart from a few omissions, and should act as an excellent guide to students, teachers and assessors, especially in the writing of case logs. Why then do the colleges fail to explain the importance of the standards to their students, such that most of them claim to have never heard of them, let alone know how to use them! The pressure of the standards is as a revelation to my students and great help in their

understanding of the portfolio etc! Please can more emphasis be placed upon the standards in their induction? (Employer)

10 Listed Status

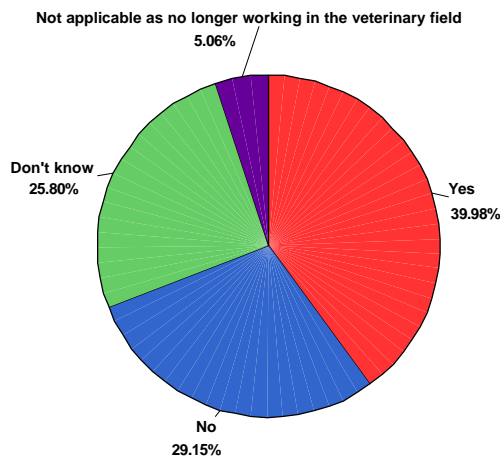
10.1 99.1% of VNs have Listed status.

Fig 10.1 The main reasons for not being currently Listed.



10.2 95.65% of VNs understand the legal implications of performing Schedule 3 procedures while not maintaining Listed status, whilst 0.86% are not aware that there are legal implications.

Fig 10.2 Number of employers who have checked Listed status in 12 months to August 2003.



10.3 71.67% of VNs received information about the importance of maintaining Listed status in 12 months to August 2003.

Fig. 10.3

If yes, what was done about it	%
Did not read it	1.5%
Read it but took no further action	5.8%
Became Listed	3%
Brought my employers' attention to it	1.5%
Already Listed	88.2%

10.4 36.44% of employers pay the annual Listing fee; 62.52% of VNs pay their own annual Listing fee.

Fig. 10.4 Employers requiring VNs to undertake Schedule 3 procedures.

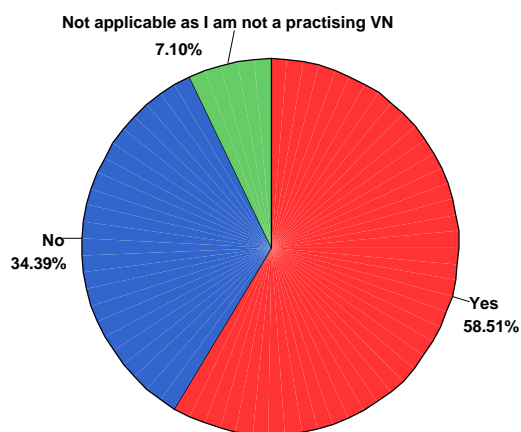


Fig 10.5 Where answered no, is it because:

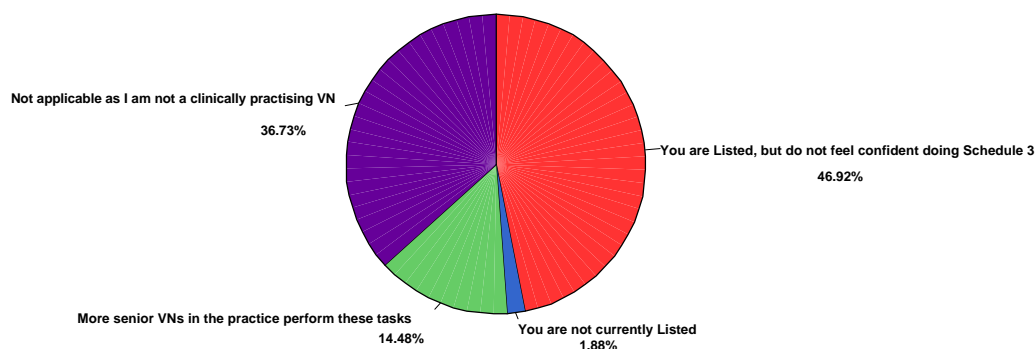


Fig. 10.6 Are Listed VNs over-trained for the tasks and responsibilities they are expected to carry out?

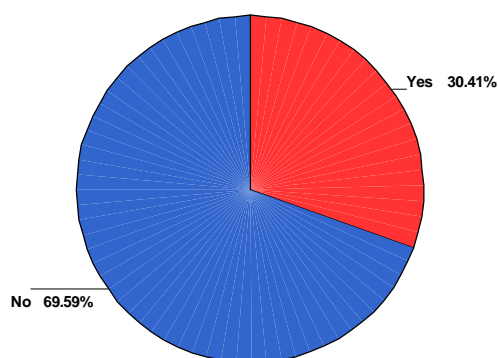


Fig. 10.7 In the absence of Listed VNs, or student VNs, how are animals [in-patients] given medical treatment in the practice?

		Column %
How are animals given treatment if listed or student VN is absent?	Always a listed VN or Student on duty	38.4%
	Only by a veterinary surgeon	34.3%
	By a non member of staff under vet supervision	14.7%
	By a non member of staff under veterinary direction	12.7%

Comments from questionnaires

If the RCVS continues to list VNs, all qualified VNs should be registered (similar to MRCVS). There should be an easily available list of what VNs can and can't do. (VN)

I remain Listed, despite not being employed in veterinary practice, in case I choose to take on temporary or locum work. Also I am proud of my qualification and still wish to be recognised as a professional. (VN)

I think the RCVS charge far too much to list as a VN. I receive minimal correspondence from them. If it were not a requirement from my employer then I would not see the point in listing. I think listing is a good idea but should cost much less. (VN)

The RCVS does not help morale by constantly changing legislation i.e. the dental debate. The consequence is that practices will no longer adhere to its rulings. (VN)

The cost of being on the VN list is high - OK if employer pays but a lot if they don't. The penalty fee for re-registering is MUCH too expensive especially as information is already on database. I wasn't Listed for a number of years as I was at university and relocated during the holidays; I didn't have extra money. Now I work PT due to family commitments. If the practice didn't pay I would be unListed. (VN)

My card to prove that I am Listed is no better than my card to say I'm a member of my local garden centre. (VN)

At the moment I feel that a lack of clinical practice i.e. schedule 3, and the lack of encouragement I get from my employer is more de-motivating than the salary I get. (VN)

The main problem I have found since I qualified is that I am still pretty much treated like a trainee. At the practice where I work we are not allowed to carry out schedule 3, as the vets would rather do it themselves. (VN)

The profile of Listed VNs needs to be increased in the non-vet press. The public would not dream of allowing a vet without qualifications to treat their pets however they accept it in nursing. (VN)

I've studied long and hard to finally qualify and have been supported by my practice. However life has been made difficult by the forever-changing portfolio and it's requirements from the practice and myself. I hope after all my hard work I get recognition as a Listed VN. (Student VN)

11 Tasks/ work roles

Fig 11.1 Which of the following best describes the VNs job role?

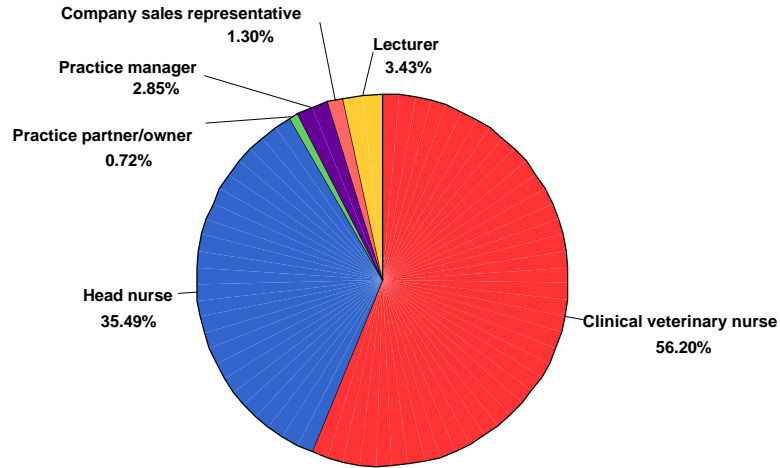


Fig. 11.2 Who performs the following tasks

	Yes					
	Me	Vets	Listed VNs	Non Listed colleagues	Student VNs	Support staff
Nursing clinics	68.2%	7.6%	65.1%	14.2%	29.2%	3.9%
Consultations	14.2%	90.0%	14.4%	1.9%	2.8%	0.3%
Vaccination clinics	10.0%	81.4%	11.0%	1.2%	1.8%	0.5%
Nutritional advice/counselling	70.9%	47.3%	67.1%	17.5%	31.7%	13.2%
Administration of medicines by injection	82.0%	83.8%	75.7%	24.4%	59.8%	11.0%
Administration of anaesthetics pre-medication	76.3%	80.4%	70.6%	20.2%	47.9%	6.1%
Performing minor acts of surgery	42.8%	88.1%	42.3%	3.6%	4.0%	0.5%
Setting up an i/v line	81.4%	79.1%	75.4%	19.0%	48.3%	5.1%
Taking a blood sample	82.2%	84.3%	76.6%	18.2%	46.4%	3.6%
Anaesthetic monitoring	84.3%	48.6%	77.9%	25.2%	63.6%	10.0%
Taking radiographs	76.3%	83.6%	72.7%	17.8%	37.7%	4.5%
Performing in-house laboratory tasks	82.4%	54.5%	77.1%	26.4%	65.0%	15.0%
Dental hygiene	73.6%	76.6%	70.5%	17.7%	38.6%	5.1%
Dental extraction	33.1%	87.1%	32.7%	6.1%	5.3%	1.3%
Preparing and dispensing medications	83.2%	71.5%	76.6%	30.3%	62.4%	36.6%
Use ultrasound	6.2%	74.9%	5.6%	1.2%	1.5%	0.5%
Advise on or dispense complementary medicine therapies	30.1%	68.4%	27.7%	8.0%	13.0%	8.4%

Fig. 11.3 The amount of time VNs spend on reception.

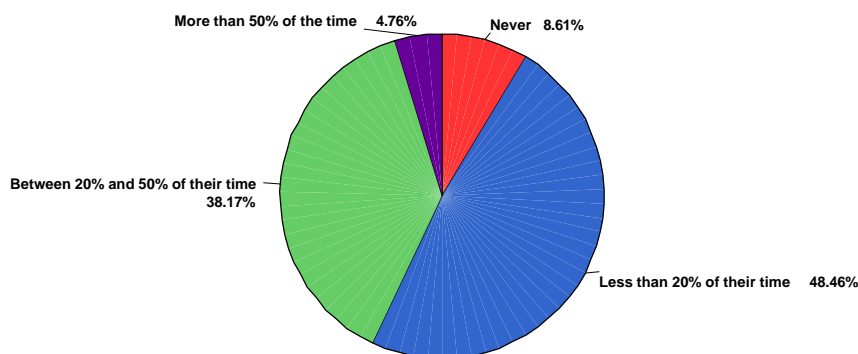


Fig. 11.4 How often VNs do the following duties.

	Routinely	Occasionally	Never
	Row %	Row %	Row %
How often do VNs do general house keeping?	61.6%	30.9%	7.5%
How often do VNs clean the kennel area?	87.2%	11.7%	1.2%
How often do VNs clean the consulting room?	67.8%	26.3%	5.8%
How often do VNs clean the theatre?	93.2%	5.9%	.9%

- 11.1 35.99% of employers see VNs taking an increasing role and substituting for full time vets; 64.01% of employers do not.
- 11.2 44.42% of employers see non-VNs substituting for VNs; 55.58% of employers do not.
- 11.3 46.58% of employers see the need for a trained grade below that of VN; 53.42% of employers do not.
- 11.4 68.22% of employers who see the need for a trained grade below that of VN believe that person needs a formal qualification.

Comments from questionnaires

Veterinary nurse's abilities may be recognised by vets - but not often are allowed to fulfil them. Too often they want to hand over their unwanted tasks which can be very demoralising. Many vets should realise we are not glorified cleaners - which seems to be a huge part of veterinary nursing - particularly in a branch surgery. Vets seem scared to let clients know that VNs may be able to carry out procedures e.g. lumpectomies, dental, etc. and appear to hide the fact that we are capable. Too many unqualified staff feel that they are as able and should be allowed to do the same tasks. Little distinction is made between VN and support staff. (VN)

It is a disgrace that VNs are encouraged to spend lots of money on diplomas etc, to then be told we cannot perform simple tasks e.g. cat castrates, routine dental, etc. In many areas we have more time and patience than many vets (esp. doing dental) and whilst there are always risks, with appropriate training and supervision these can be reduced. (VN)

Having spent 2 years at college to become a Listed, qualified VN, I was in for a shock once I had qualified this January (2003). I found my employers attitude did not change what so ever. I found it very frustrating during my training that my employer did not even know how to help me complete a log sheet! Overall I enjoy my job but feel student VNs need a lot more support from employers, not just head nurses and fellow members of staff. I feel there is a big shortage of GOOD VNs out there because all the good ones are leaving the job for better money. Only leaving the ones that are not able to do the job properly. (VN)

I recently decided to become a locum so I could gain experience, but also it's the only way I can afford to save money. Most VNs live at home which after a certain age is stressful and you decide to change careers. Employers aren't clued up on the knowledge of a VN and VNs/student VNs do nearly just as much as VNs so its hard for them (employers) to appreciate VNs have that extra bit of knowledge. I think if employers knew the stresses of a VN and what we can do and want to do we might get paid for our knowledge, and used a bit better in the practice. (VN)

I am lucky as a head nurse, I get to do schedule 3, have lots of variety and am training for my diploma. However lack of schedule 3 still disheartens me. Opportunities, lack of professional recognition, lack of decent pay etc, so what it must be like for some. Well it's understandable that they leave the profession! (VN)

VNs should be able to form a valued part of any team and not be considered as 'vets in training' or 'glorified cleaners'. We have a lot to contribute to many of the cases seen in practice but often our opinion is discounted or not even sought. We do not spend 2 years at college learning to sweep floors - we learn to nurse people's pets back to full health. (VN)

A 'thank-you' goes a long way. (VN)

The RCVS are making it more and more difficult to have job satisfaction because of the restrictions on schedule three. We are more than capable of extracting teeth, cat castrations etc in fact we are probably more competent than a lot of the student vets who are let loose on some of these procedures. And some vets! The RCVS are making it more and more difficult to have job satisfaction because of the restrictions on schedule three. We are more than capable of extracting teeth, cat castrations etc in fact we are probably more competent than a lot of the student vets who are let loose on some of these procedures. And some vets! (VN)

Working for the PDSA is very busy for both vets and nurses. If the royal college are going to continue to take away schedule three procedures from us to do this will put more pressure on vet, and nurses will have no morale as they will feel they are only there to clean out kennel. There will also be less registered nurses on the list as no one will want to pay the fees if schedule three is to be taken away. Nurses have been removing lumps and doing dental for years. I see no point in going to college for two years if all you can do is clean kennels. (VN)

Poor working hours, including 91 hours during my week of nights, I work for 21 days without a break, who regulates this? Who can help me? (VN)

I am at present undertaking a course in dentistry, I wanted to do this course to get a better understanding of dentistry and help the vets. I have since found out that the time that I have spent and the quite large sum of money the practice has spent has been a waste. After spending what will be a

year of my time on this course I will be unable to perform many of the dental procedures that I have studied and feel that I have wasted both my time and my employers money. I am waiting for the day when veterinary nurses will finally be recognised for their hard work and commitment. We do not wish to take the place of the vets. We just wish we could help them to the best of our ability. (VN)

I have been in veterinary nursing profession for many years. I have seen many changes and advances and many for the better. However, the pressure on the nurses to 'sale' everything from pre sale b/s to every patient too highly priced dog food and endless dental products. I thought the important thing was for the animals' 'health' not their owners' 'wealth'. (VN)

I personally gave up nursing approx. 3yrs go and moved into practice management. It was a very difficult decision to make, as I love nursing. When I first qualified I was trained to do: closed dog castration, cat castration, skin biopsy's, stitch ups, abscess and dental work including extractions (the majority of dentals were carried out by myself) and gradually more rules and regulations prevented me from performing such tasks. Turning me into what I felt to be a glorified cleaner. I had to watch vets who were not used to doing these tasks struggle because the VNs would normally do them. It's a constant stringent and rigid application of rules that reduces morale. If you are competent and trained why should we not be allowed to perform these tasks - especially if we have done it for years and the supervising vet is happy? (VN)

The development of a lower level of nursing/ surgery assistant qualification is essential. The current VN is too demanding and excessive for the average first opinion practice. VNs should not be mini vets but should focus on nursing. (Employer)

The current VN training is producing VNs with the expectations of working in hospital standard veterinary practices. Small non-hospital standard practices may now be unable even to train VNs never mind offer the type of job they ultimately aspire to. Unless another grade of VN is established there will be a return to use of unqualified albeit practically trained personnel doing the job we previously employed VNs to do. (Employer)

Nurse training should emphasise the skills of making animals comfortable, keeping animals clean and communicate with the client. Nurses should not be trained into 'mini-vets' .The importance of the traditional role should be emphasised on being one of great importance. (Employer)

I believe that business pressures dictate that small animal delegate more and more practical work to veterinary nurses to avoid placing these procedures out of reach of pet owners (or undercharging for veterinary surgeons time). As these veterinary nurses become fee earners for the practice this will I create a vacuum in the practice support structure, which should be filled by animal care attendants. (Employer)

There is, I suggest a need for three levels of skill in a modern veterinary practice: -

1. The kennel maid, cleaner etc. with very good common sense and basic skills in handling etc.
 2. A competent technician who is multi-skilled in client care, t.i.c., first aid, dispensing, radiography, dentistry, anaesthetic monitoring etc. etc., but is unlikely to utilise advanced academic or technical skills,
 3. An advanced technician who can confidently perform complex tasks such as calculating nutritional requirements of sick animals, be part of team for complex orthopaedic / neuralgic surgery etc.
- (Employer)

12 Working conditions

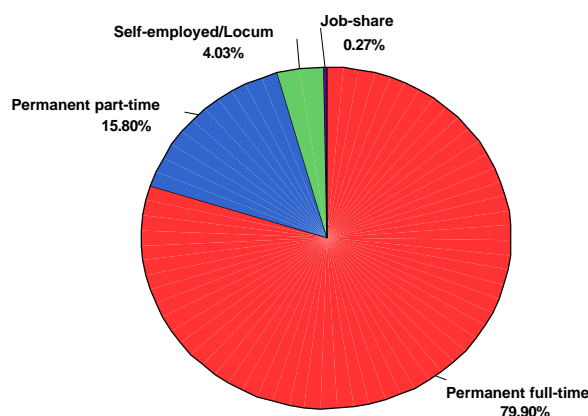
Fig. 12.1

Income by region	Annual salary
North West	£12,938
North East	£12,259
Yorkshire and Humberside	£13,638
West Midlands	£13,715
East Midlands	£14,041
South West	£13,563
South East	£14,687
London	£16,394
East of England	£14,549
England	£14,039
Scotland	£13,385
Wales	£12,855
Northern Ireland	£12,514
UK Average	£14,008

Fig. 12.2

Annual average salary						
RDA	NVQ 2 Salary	NVQ 3 Salary	Listed VN Salary	Additional Salary for Diploma	Head Nurse Salary	Count
North West	£8,701	£9,705	£13,094	£1,600	£14,740	74
North East	£9,290	£10,111	£12,899	£1,500	£16,774	16
Yorkshire and Humberside	£8,920	£10,007	£13,397	£3,333	£15,555	66
West Midlands	£8,216	£9,747	£13,018	£1,000	£15,725	66
East Midlands	£8,788	£10,023	£13,463	£1,000	£15,622	41
South West	£8,894	£10,102	£13,207	£2,183	£15,766	148
South East	£9,451	£11,057	£14,489	£1,630	£17,656	164
London	£9,805	£12,154	£17,553	£2,000	£20,083	34
East of England	£9,306	£10,661	£14,534	£2,007	£17,233	74
England	£9,036	£10,417	£13,892	£1,831	£16,515	698
Scotland	£8,687	£10,139	£12,607	£2,160	£14,678	78
Wales	£9,200	£9,785	£13,700	£4,000	£16,392	40
Northern Ireland	£7,798	£8,948	£12,154	.	£12,685	18
UK	£9,002	£10,360	£13,793	£1,992	£16,307	878

Fig. 12.3 The nature of VN employment.



12.1 13.54% of VNs have second jobs. Of these 87.2% need to supplement their income; 9.7% require additional intellectual fulfilment; and 3.1% enjoy working in the voluntary sector.

Fig. 12.4 Second jobs include:

Second job	No.	Second Job	No.
Avon lady	1	Locum	7
Bar work	4	Member of voluntary organisation	1
Buy / sell / restore horse trailers	1	Own business from home	1
Cleaning	2	Painting & decorating	1
Clerical	1	Relief milker	1
Dog grooming	1	Rent property	1
Emergency night nurse	2	Research	1
House / pet sitting and animal feeding jobs	8	Puppy socialisation / training classes	1
Human staff nurse	1	Waitress	1
Exercising horses	1	School teaching assistant	1
Voluntary fund raising for cat charity	1	Territorial Army	1
Internal verifier	1	Tutor in animal care	1
Karaoke host	1	Puppy parties	1
Lecturer	2	Hospital work	1
		Write for VN Times	1

12.2 3.17% of VNs are personally in receipt of State Benefits (e.g. income support).

Fig. 12.5 Additional benefits as part of employment.

	Yes	No
	Row %	Row %
Free accommodation	4.2%	95.8%
Subsidised accommodation	3.2%	96.8%
Use of car for private purposes	2.1%	97.9%
Employer contributory pension scheme	26.2%	73.8%
Performance related pay/commission	6.6%	93.4%

12.3 16.75% of employers, following a request, given the option of working reduced hours/flexitime in order to accommodate family commitments. 13.07% did not. For 70.18% this was not applicable.

12.4 28.53% do not have a written contract of employment.

12.5 60.52% of student VNs have a written contract of employment.

Comments from questionnaires

Having worked almost continuously in the veterinary profession for 21 years, I am still amazed at the lack of recognition from employers for the skills and abilities of VNs. This is reflected in an environment of poor pay and conditions. I believe the degree course and VN training restructuring can only be for the better! Few VNs last more than 5-6 years in practice due to the above factors. Many I have known have re-trained to become human nurses or leave the career altogether to seek better pay and working conditions. (VN)

Effort needs to be directed to encouraging partners to utilise their VNs as professionals, not cleaners/receptionists – then nurses. (VN)

If I leave my job as a VN it will be because of long hours, on call duties, in addition to working 41-50 hours per week, and spending a lot of time doing unskilled manual labour – e.g. Mopping, cleaning, emptying bins. It is a long day's work for low wages. I would not be able to support my family without claiming other benefits in addition to my wages. The work/life balance is a constant source of stress as I have so little time at home. (VN)

If I had known how badly paid VNs are I would never have trained to be one. Although I am one of the higher paid VNs, if you work in a bank straight from school, or go into the police, this is the starting wage. (VN)

Veterinary practices needs to have more structured pay scale, also need to be able to increase status within ordinary vet practice without having to specialise, move to being a rep. or similar. Vet nurses feel under valued. Qualified VNs do not appear to do anything more than student VNs. This has led to disillusionment within the job. Most jobs do not increase holiday entitlement with years of service. No pension, health schemes or company cars! This is why VNs flock to other jobs. (VN)

1. Level of pay for student and qualified VNs is appalling and must be addressed. As a secretary I have previously earned £25K p.a. with less than half the responsibility and specialised knowledge that I use in my current job!

2. There is too little incentive for unqualified but experienced VNs to take and pass their exams. Many find it makes no difference to their employment opportunities or their role at work. How can the qualification hope to be recognised and appreciated if employers (including locum agencies) often employ vet nurses with experience without stipulating the need be qualified? (VN)

Clients do not realise what qualified VNs are capable of. They treat you as a glorified cleaner. Within the PDSA they do know and use VNs to their full potential but I have worked in private practice where they have little respect for all levels of nursing staff.

Within private practice I received little help training. I personally would prefer to be recognised as what VNs can do rather than a higher pay. (VN)

The general public needs to be made aware of the veterinary nursing profession, TV makes it look like all we do is hold animals for the vets and do reception. Most people I have spoken to don't even realise

we are capable of blood sampling etc. There is very little respect for VNs - people view us as not being intelligent enough to be a vet - so we chose to be a VN. I find my job ever increasingly frustrating, as I feel I have no respect for my qualification(s), nor does my employer or the clients. The pay is pathetic, I cannot survive on job satisfaction of which I have very little left.

I think there should be a standardised wage for qualified nurses i.e. £14,000 pa and it should be enforced to each practice. There should be checks made to ensure this is being done and all vet nurses are on a manageable and liveable wage and employers should pay all college fees.

Mopping floors, cleaning out kennels and litter trays' in your late thirties/forties kind of makes you think about things! (VN)

I have worked as a head nurse previous to working as a locum nurse. I would work 40 -45 hours per week, and no overtime was paid. There was often little or no recognition of the contributions made to the practice. Hence the reason for becoming a locum nurse.

Although I thoroughly enjoy veterinary nursing and am highly committed to the profession I am forced to seek alternative means of employment to allow me to achieve a standard quality of life, i.e. to obtain a mortgage and start a family. Even though I have a degree, have studied toward the medical diploma, have BVNA cert. in behaviour, 8 years experience plus various other CPD, I cannot expect to obtain more than £14,000pa as a VN. (VN)

I feel that, certainly in the practice I am in, the nurses are not valued at all. We are expected to work overtime and not get paid for it. The vets are just happy as long as we do a hard days work, they do not care about staff morale or any problems as long as the job is done. (VN)

We have asked again and again about nursing clinics but the vets will not give us the time or support to set them up. I think generally that VNs are undervalued. (VN)

I would certainly like to see an improvement in our wages. The general public needs to be made more aware of the job of VN. I wish more VNs would reply to these questionnaires, voting polls on websites, etc., so our opinions can be heard. Without the majority of VNs speaking out what is the point, the VN profession will never move forward. I enjoy doing these questionnaires, in the hope our profession will become a better area to work in. Major issues needed to be sorted out in my opinion!

1 Wages! Need to go up!

2 Regulation of VNs

3 Recognition of our work as VNs

4 Schedule 3 tasks we can definitely perform. (VN)

I find the standard of many practices both in England and Australia disgusting and the problem lies with the vets not the nurses. Most nurses strive to improve conditions for both themselves and the animals and find themselves facing a brick wall. (VN)

Feel like a glorified cleaner and that most of my training has gone to waste. I am already seeking a career change. Also I think the uniform is outdated and uncomfortable. (VN)

I know people who are waitresses and shelf fillers and they get paid more than I do. (VN)

I am appalled at the lack of support VNs get from their council. The VNs are given no praise or support when trying to fight the issue of how much can a VN do? I have not seen any written or heard any council member complain or voice their opinion in the issue of dental etc being taken away from VNs. I find this the biggest problem, nurses in practice have lost faith in their professional body and hence their work. (VN)

I work in a very friendly atmosphere, with good vets, nurses and support staff and the privileges we are given (i.e. CPD) and salary I receive are excellent. I don't know if I would be as keen to continue nursing in another practice (VN)

I love my job to pieces, although money isn't great I'd rather be in a job I love and get paid less than be in job I hate and get paid loads. I think I am very lucky to be working in such a good practice, which allows VNs to do nursing procedures and trains its students well. (VN)

Most employers do not pay overtime - just expect it as part of the job. Time off is rarely given. (VN)

Lack of part-time or job-share work available for veterinary nurses. (VN)

I am very lucky in that I love my current job my working colleagues are wonderful and the vets fully recognise your hard work and really appreciate and respect you. However I feel that I'm in a very tiny minority. In my last practice it was a lot different - you could say more of a more 'normal' situation, the assistant vets were very nice but the principles had no respect for you at all and treated you like children. They bullied you into things and made you feel stupid if you didn't understand something. Also some members of staff (in particular the principals) would skip corners with procedures e.g. re-using burettes, sharing old fluid bags etc and this is a practice that has the SAVA standards! There must be a way to do some kind of spot checks on all practices and then maybe standards would be raised and very bad vets could be struck off! I think VNs need support, we feel like we're on our own and when stuck in a bad practice that there's no way out. I think all VNs should be Listed but the cost is expensive so maybe reducing this would help. (VN)

Veterinary practices are small independent businesses often with very little management infrastructure, clinical performance being the most important activity. (Employer)

There is no doubt that VNs are underpaid. There needs to be more of a career structure. (Employer)

There seems to be a general air of dissatisfaction among the veterinary nurses that I meet. The main problem appears to be general level of salary. (Employer)

Veterinary nurses are an underpaid, under appreciated and underused asset in practice. Until vets pay higher wages which make reasonable hopes like getting a mortgage attainable they will have to make do with a stream of young, unqualified, enthusiastic girls who will qualify and then wake up smell the coffee and leave for a better paid, more appreciative job elsewhere. (Employer)

I think it is a brilliant idea that Lantra is taking an interest in the veterinary nursing profession. I believe that without having a veterinary nurses union we cannot push for pay rises but then again having a union of our own would bring with it more responsibility for VNs but this, I believe, shouldn't be a bad thing. (Student VN)

I feel pay is one of the largest issues at present. We are within a professional career but get treated and paid like 'cleaners'. I am trying to buy a house at present, which you could imagine on £12,500pa is near impossible. (Student VN)

I enjoy my role as a student vet nurse and am sure I will continue to do so once qualified. But there are issues that need addressing with regards to vet nurse 'duties'. Because as I understand it, a vet nurse is also a cleaner, receptionist, car park cleaner and general dogs body. Some days hardly touching any animals - never mind having training. It would be helpful if there were someone or a union, which could make sure that student vet nurses, are not used as cheap labour, and are treated with respect. (Student VN)

13 Recruitment and retention

- 13.1 Since January 2000, on average 1.2 VNs have qualified in practice, a total of 1,059.
- 13.2 On average 0.53% of VNs have left each practice since January 2000, a total of 463. They have not necessarily left the profession.
- 13.3 The retention rate of VNs is 43.72%

Fig. 13.1 How long did these VNs stay in practice.

	%
Less than one month	8.42%
2 to 6 months	23.54%
6 months to 1 year	20.95%
1-2 years	25.26%
More than 2 years	33.04%

Fig. 13.2 The reasons given for leaving

	Yes	No
	Row %	Row %
Difficulty finding accommdation	3.7%	96.3%
Over long hours	12.2%	87.8%
Too little money	30.8%	69.2%
Poor morale	11.2%	88.8%
Pressure to perfore schedule 3 duties	.3%	99.7%
Not permitted to perform	10.5%	89.5%
Schedule 3 tasks	3.4%	96.6%
Pressure to devolve nursing duties	30.5%	69.5%
Lack of career opportunity	22.7%	77.3%
Relocating for family reasons	29.5%	70.5%
Career Change	4.1%	95.9%
Contract terminated by employer	5.8%	94.2%
No recognition of capabilities by employer	7.1%	92.9%
Lack of praise from employer	5.4%	94.6%
Lack of professional respect from employer	5.1%	94.9%
Lack of client recognition	2.7%	97.3%
Insufficient junior staff to delegate duties	.7%	99.3%
Not applicaple	7.1%	92.9%

13.4 48.18% of employers do not intend training student VNs in the future.

Fig 13.3 Changes in circumstances that might prompt reconsideration

	Yes	No
	Row %	Row %
A change in size/focus of practice	40.7%	59.3%
Implementation of non-NVQ training scheme	39.2%	60.8%
The provision of more financial support	44.2%	55.8%
A reduction in costs	40.7%	59.3%
More support for NVQ assessors and students	22.5%	77.5%
Staff Changes	23.4%	76.6%
Improved availability of assessors	14.9%	85.1%

13.5 If yes to training VNs in the future, 50.83% do not anticipate a change in the numbers of VNs trained at any one time; 35.21% anticipate training fewer; and 13.96% anticipate training more.

13.6 In those practices who anticipate increasing the number of student VNs trained, 23.7% say this is due to the increased use of unqualified staff; 21.2% to new working practices; and 8.1% to moving business areas.

13.7 43.8% of employers anticipate a change in the in the number of VNs employed.

Fig. 13.4 If yes, indicated reasons for any change:

	Increase number of	Decrease number of
	Table Total N %	Table Total N %
Change in businesses turnover	46.3%	2.4%
Move into new business areas	24.7%	1.4%
Introduction of new working practices	30.1%	4.3%
Introduction of flexible hours	20.1%	2.4%
A requirement for VNs to act as assessors	15.2%	2.4%
Increased number of training places	7.6%	1.6%
Decreased number of training places	5.7%	4.6%

13.8 56.84% of practices have attempted to recruit a VN in the last 12 months.

Fig. 13.5 The length of time the vacancy was unfilled?

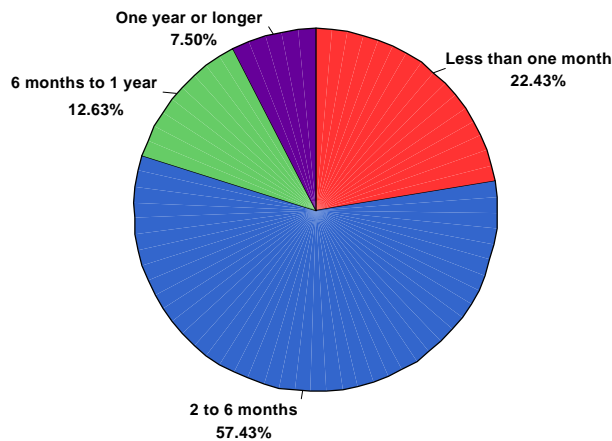
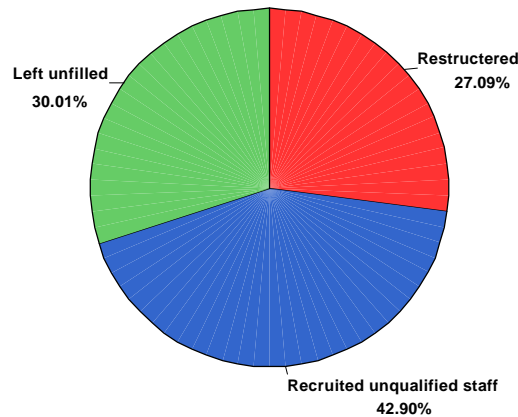


Fig. 13.6 If unable to recruit how was this vacancy managed



13.9 71.7% of Listed VNs trained by OWN practice work competently in the areas expected in the practice; 0.93% do not; for 27.32% this was not applicable.

13.9 55.48% of Listed VNs trained in OTHER practices work competently in the areas expected in the practice; 9.22% do not; for 35.29% this was not applicable.

13.10 93.51% do not believe that the VN retention rate has improved since the introduction of the NVQ scheme.

13.11 Since January 2000, employers have employed an average of 2.81 student VNs per practice, a total of 2,467.

13.12 Since January 2000, an average of 0.55 students have dropped out, a total of 484 (19.6% drop out rate).

13.13 42.2% of employers who are currently training student VNs will take on more students once these are qualified.

VNACs

Fig. 13.7

The most common destination of mid-year leavers in 2001/2002	1 - Most frequent	2	3	4	5 - Least frequent
Temp suspension of training due to health/personal factors	50.0%	25.0%	12.5%	0.0%	12.5%
VNAC does not keep records	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Stopped training, left the profession entirely	40.0%	30.0%	0.0%	20.0%	10.0%
Stopped training but remained in practice	25.0%	12.5%	0.0%	37.5%	25.0%
Changed employer but remained in training	12.5%	0.0%	50.0%	12.5%	25.0%
Moved to another course	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%

Fig 13.8

The most common destination for students who completed in 2001/2002	1 - Most frequent	2	3	4	5 - Least frequent
Moved to next level of training	50.0%	28.6%	7.1%	0.0%	14.3%
Became a Listed VN - stayed in practice	47.1%	23.5%	11.8%	0.0%	17.6%
Chose not to List	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	62.5%	12.5%
Became a Listed and moved	20.0%	30.0%	30.0%	20.0%	0.0%
VNAC does not keep records	25.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	50.0%

Fig 13.9

Advertisements in the last 2 years (2001 – 2003) for the following staff	Yes	No
IV's	30.0%	70.0%
Lecturers	45.0%	55.0%
Not applicable	5.0%	95.0%

Fig 13.10

The number of job adverts placed	%
1	50.0%
2	10.0%
3	40.0%
More than 3	0.0%

Fig 13.11

The number of enquires received on average per advert	%
None	0.0%
1-3	50.0%
4-6	20.0%
7-9	10.0%
10 or more	20.0%

Fig. 13.12

Posts filled with an applicant who responded to an advert	%
Yes	60.0%
No	40.0%
Not sure	0.0%

Fig 13.13

Where advertisements were placed	Yes	No
Vet record	25.0%	75.0%
Vet nursing times	25.0%	75.0%
TP times	0.0%	100.0%
Internet	5.0%	95.0%
Vet times	10.0%	90.0%
BVNA vet nursing journal	5.0%	95.0%
Recruitment agency	0.0%	100.0%
Local press	30.0%	70.0%

Fig. 13.14

How much invested in each advertisement	%
Free	0.0%
Less than £250	22.2%
£250 - £500	33.3%
£500 - £1000	11.1%
More than £1000	11.1%
Don't know	22.2%

Comments from questionnaires

A better entrance system into college would prevent VN trainees who do not have the academic ability attempt the course when they have little chance of achieving the qualification. Perhaps we should be looking at a different grade of veterinary nurse who completes level 2 exams but is unable to pass level 3. This would give us a greater amount of nurses available at different qualification levels. For an employer it would give him different pay rates, experience and a more structured work force e.g. VNs, Auxiliaries, level 3 and level 2 students. (VN)

Very disappointed about the lack of support qualified veterinary nurses get from the veterinary nurse council. Very frustrating the lack of recognition we get as decent, competent, qualified nurses. I think this survey is a great idea. I hope it has some effect on the veterinary profession. I am looking in to alternative careers as for the last 4 years as a qualified VN I've felt unimportant, under valued and dissatisfied. A lot of work is expected of us in very busy practices which is often boring, dirty, doing unsociable hours and not a lot is offered as an incentive in many practices to keep nurses. (VN)

Each time the question is raised they (employers) will not be a training centre because of the time, cost, paper work and the likelihood of nurses moving on when qualified. This affects us as nurses because

we are always understaffed and find it very difficult to recruit qualified vet nurses. We have been advertising since December to fill our current vacancy. (VN)

2 years hard work, plus the awful portfolio and then exams and all for 20p pay increase! Well no wonder I've had enough and so have lots others. I'm leaving to go to university; hopefully to get a better paid, more fulfilling career at the end. (VN)

I'm glad there is a VN shortage and I plan to leave soon myself. (VN)

Having become a head nurse there is little more I can do within 1st opinion practice and therefore have little hope of any significant increase in wage, unless I want to live in the London / Surrey area. This is why I intend leaving veterinary nursing as soon as possible. I'm completely disillusioned and have very little job satisfaction. In my current practice most receptionists, with no formal qualifications, are paid more than most trainee nurses, all of them in fact. One receptionist is nearly earning the same wage as me. They have no respect for nurses and my boss seems to value them more than his nurses. I can't wait for the day I hand my notice in. (VN)

I just hope that filling out this form, helps the vet-nursing situation which at present to put it mildly is crap! Employees pay is not good for nurses (salaries) hours are long and holidays are awful and we get no thanks. I love my job but get very disheartened when at the ripe old age of 34 years I am still living in practice accommodation and can't afford a mortgage, as starter homes are £150K in my area. Where are all the qualified veterinary nurses gone! There aren't that many of us left. (VN)

I feel we can fill in many surveys but it will not make my employer change his views on veterinary nursing, as unless forced will pay no attention to the results. Unless pay structures are addressed which the RCVS have already decided to ignore we will always have many nurses leaving the profession due to pay. We all deserve more from life than blue and white branded dried pasta! (VN)

I was recently asked to take over the management of the practice, and to be head veterinary nurse - for an extra four pounds a week. (VN)

WORKING CONDITIONS: Most work long hours and often stay on when their shift had finished due to lack of nursing staff. Most vets refuse to pay overtime insisting they take time-off in lieu. Very difficult to do, due to nursing shortage, and time off does not pay food and household bills etc.

CHANGES TO CONDITIONS: Never discussed beforehand with staff. At one practice the nurses were told to work an extra 5-6 hours on a Saturday. They would not be paid for this, but could take time off in lieu. When they raised objections (they were already on an on-call - weekend rota) they were told that if they didn't do it they would be sacked and replaced.

RESPECT FROM EMPLOYERS: Most nurses feel they get no respect from vets re their skills, training and opinions etc. They also feel they are regarded as mere skivvies. Many are expected to be general cleaners (hoovering, mopping & dusting waiting rooms, loos, consultation rooms etc.) In one practice the nurses were told to go and clear the bracken in the garden. Can you imagine fully trained human nurses being told by a doctor, to leave their patients on a surgical ward and go and mop waiting rooms or loos, weed the garden or sweep the car park?

TEAM WORK: Many vets will not do anything they consider a nurse's task e.g. clean a kennel, wash an instrument, and clear a work surface. They will however, drop dirty syringes, swabs etc onto a table, walk off and expect a nurse to clear up their mess. I saw 2 vets stand drinking coffee, and watch a frantically busy nurse for ten minutes, and then tell her to "pre-med the animals". Couldn't they do it themselves? No teamwork! (VN)

I am the only qualified and Listed veterinary nurse in practice with three other "nurses." Since handing my notice in the practice have replaced me with another unqualified nurse and they didn't even advertise for a qualified Veterinary nurse. I feel that this is a poor standard of practice & this is reflected in their work. Nurses are under valued and other members of staff resented me because I was paid more than them. They couldn't work out it was because I was qualified and Listed. (VN)

Talking to my employer, he say's that if they stipulate a wage, and if it is high then they will stop employing qualified nurses and trainee nurses. He feels that the practice can train nurses to their standard, and not have any problems employing unqualified nurses. (VN)

There is never a shortage of applicants for unqualified positions within practice, the vast majority of staff employed in general practice are trained in house with no formal qualifications. Until this changes, the outlook for veterinary nurses NVQ or degree qualified will remain bleak have seen extremely competent nurses leave the profession because the pay and conditions fall well below their expectations. Many nurses just want to nurse, they do not want to be vets, they just require a living wage to enable them to do a job that can be rewarding, stimulating and worthwhile. When this situation is rectified there will be no difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. (VN)

If employers looked after their staff (e.g. having enough staff so the nurses aren't over-stretched, paid adequately and appreciated more) they are more likely to keep their staff. Therefore, not having the hassle of recruiting and training up new staff or getting a locum to replace them. (VN)

There is currently a problem with recruiting VN staff. We have been trying to recruit for nearly 1year with only a small number of respondents. Training it seems is difficult unless the practice is prepared to pay for a full time VN to train. This is a drain on the practice income, which may be compounded as a result of the competition commission. Poor guidance from the RCVS has led to confusion as to what a VN may or not be allowed to perform - this then raises issues of the requirements for trained VNs. We are considering in-house training of staff to a standard we find useful, in order to overcome the current crisis. (Employer)

It takes too long to train veterinary nurses. By the time they are qualified they are married and are thinking about starting a family. They are not so useful then. (Employer)

VNs have been seriously undervalued in the past, it having been seen as a young girls' job rather than a skilled career. This needs to be addressed at a basic level to keep VNs in their posts, rather than be poached by drug companies with attractive salaries. Our nursing team is small but twice as big as two years ago. We would love to increase but it will take time. If this practice is to meet the needs of the 21st century VNs will have a huge part to play. We value and appreciate our nursing staff. (Employer)

We are currently trying to recruit a new VN and after months of advertising we have not had a single reply either from a qualified VN or one part way through training. We may be forced to recruit an unqualified person. (Employer)

The end product removes many routine minor procedures from more expensive vets and provides a much more motivated and useful range of nurses to help both vet and clients. We will continue to train nurses as required for the practice and reward them as qualified veterinary nurses to hopefully retain them. (Employer)

The practice I work for is a small, family oriented practice where if you are good at your job, they don't ask you to become qualified. Therefore they do not really 'go in to' training nurses, as when we need help with paper work etc, it is difficult, as its not a job requirement to get qualified. Sometimes I wish for more support with my quest to become a qualified VN one-day. (Student VN)

Nearly everyone I have worked with in this profession has also left - I now work with horses and have met many 'ex-VNs'. If I had received reasonable support with my training and a job that really was what its name suggests i.e. nursing animals, I would, along with many others, still be doing a job that can be rewarding and satisfying. (Student VN)

Some practices treat student nurses as slave labour, long hours, little pay, no over time. Some vets and qualified nurses have real attitude problems, and practices can be very busy and stressful at times. I was sad to give up my training as I enjoyed the course; it just wasn't worth the stress. (Student VN)

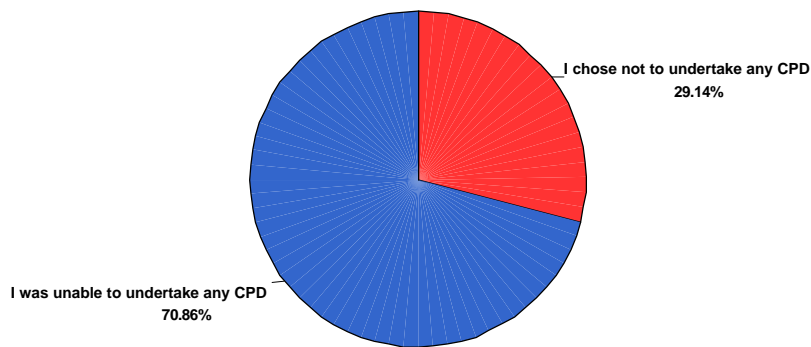
14 Continuing Professional Development

14.1 91.62% of VNs believe that CPD is an important requirement to ensure that skills and knowledge remain current.

14.2 The average number of CPD days taken last year (2002) was 3.25. 10% had between 6 and 10 days CPD. 28% had no CPD days last year, the main reasons included:

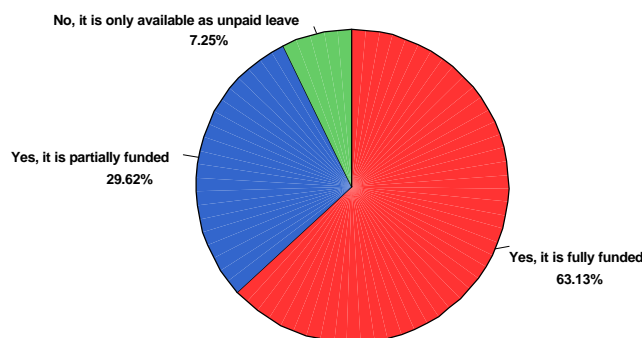
- Training available was not appropriate to the needs of the individuals
- Too far to travel
- Not able to put training into practice

Fig. 14.1 Where the answer is zero days:



14.3 76.66% of employers allow paid time off to attend CPD; 23.34% did not.

Fig.14.2 Employer contribution to the costs of CPD.



14.4 41% of employers who contribute to CPD stipulate content, and 63.2% stipulate budget.

Comments from questionnaires

There seems to be no reason why nurses should stay in the profession. Pay is not in line with the national average, hours are long and unpredictable, leaving social time as something you get if you are lucky. There is no motivation to undertake further professional development. If it were structured similar to human nursing i.e. the more knowledge you gain the higher the pay, etc.... Then maybe more nurses would stay in the profession. How many people outside the profession even know what we do? "Oh you work with Rolf Harris" is the comment I get when announcing what I do for a living! (VN)

Post qualification diploma and certificate courses are valuable and are to be promoted and encouraged. However, there is little recognition in terms of pay or responsibility allocated in reward to the time, effort and commitment put into achieving these qualifications. Candidates who pursue these goals for personal development may find greater recognition and rewards working in other sectors – the good ones' leave. (VN)

As a qualified veterinary nurse there are no CPD refresher courses, e.g.

- Anatomy and physiology
- Medical nursing
- Suturing courses and minor surgery

I would find this so beneficial as I'm training nurses whose knowledge is so much better than mine! Maybe evening classes? (VN)

I have recently become a locum partly due to the fact that I wanted to widen my knowledge and experience and also to earn a better salary. I now have money put aside to use for CPD, which I can go on courses when I want to. I am a Listed VN because as a locum I have to be, but when I have written or telephoned the RCVS for advice and information I have been extremely disappointed as to the help I have received IF ANY so I sometimes wonder why I pay my annual subscription. (VN)

More CPD in Scotland, having to travel and pay hotel bills makes CPD unimaginable. I personally spent £800 last year on CPD. (VN)

I find being an assessor VERY stressful, I'm the only qualified nurse in my practice and I'm not allocated enough time with my students. The option of CPD for myself is at present out of the question. I ask is this fair?! No wonder no one wants to stay as a VN! (VN)

Post qualification courses should cover a wider range of subjects e.g. physiotherapy, nutrition, behaviour. Once completed these sort of courses provide your employer and clients with a qualification that is useful and is seen to be useful to them. The advanced diplomas in surgery and medicine are only useful to yourself, as they do not allow you to do anymore under section 3 than you can without the qualification. (VN)

VNs like me who love the work, wanted to go on further education courses, attended congress, etc, etc. just reach a point where they cannot continue to work once children arrive on the scene due to the long and unsociable hours. This in turn leads to a 'drain' of experienced, mature and dedicated staff and practices with a high turnover of training and/or non-qualified personnel. (VN)

I think that what can be extremely frustrating is that after all the hard work and exams the duties can still be the same tedious ones as pre-qualification. I believe that if all employers really knew the involvement, they may even respect the qualifications more. I am pleased that in recent years so much

effort is aimed towards improving aspects of our profession. I do also believe that compulsory CPD would play an important role in our continuing knowledge. The opportunities for further career advancement are also encouraging in recent times. I sincerely hope that the rewards of these further qualifications will be met, just as soon. (VN)

The training focuses too much on cats and dogs, not enough on exotics and wildlife I am currently undertaking further CPD to develop this knowledge. However I still wonder why I bother with the extra stress and work, as employers have no method of appraisal or appreciation for already long hours and dedication to patients in my care. (VN)

The nursing syllabus should include sections on management of other nurses. Or preferably a post VN qualification course on management / team leading (similar certificate in practice management) which should be obligatory for head nurses and which should then attract an appropriate wage. (VN)

The courses we are offered are also mundane, it's the same thing every year, why can't we have some exciting courses like vets? (VN)

I love CPD but find there is very little available in Scotland, which is extremely unfair, as we cannot afford to travel far. (VN)

Not being on main land UK greatly increases our costs in attending regular CPD and training courses. (Employer)

I feel there is a definite need for a distant learning scheme to train non-VNs. (Employer)

15 Regulation

Fig 15.1 Opinion on the need for an enforceable system of rules and regulations for Veterinary Nursing

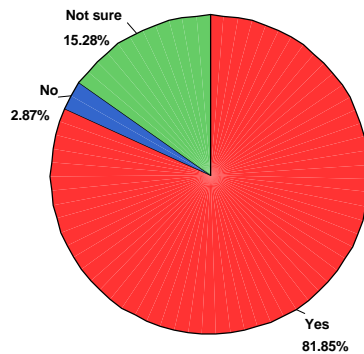


Fig 15.2 Where yes, should this include:

	Yes	No
	Row %	Row %
Annual listing of qualified veterinary nurses	78.5%	21.5%
Disciplinary procedures (e.g. formal warning, suspension from Listing)	63.5%	36.5%
Mandatory CPD	63.2%	36.8%

15.1 86.14% of respondents believe that the RCVS should continue to administer a list/register of VNs; 10.18% are not sure; and 3.68% disagree.

Comments from questionnaires

I feel that practices need to value their qualified VNs more to keep them happy. Unqualified staff or lay-staff should be restricted on what they should be doing and employers should enforce this and not expect them to do things e.g. blood sampling or IVs on their own as happens in my practice. I enjoy my role as a VN but feel that the profession will suffer if most practices are like mine. The nurse training should be to a high standard to ensure competence of all who train/pass. The portfolio is fine but in house assessments/practical should occur through out the year/ 2 years by the VNAC to ensure this competence is maintained by the practice. (VN)

Most nurses enter VN knowing of the long hours and poor pay but we have to put in hard work and go to college, to become qualified and we certainly do not get the same recognition as human nurses. I think this is partly due to the fact that veterinary nursing should have their own system for rules and regulations not the RCVS! If there was a system it should incorporate a proper pay scale for all stages across the UK, it should also include disciplinary procedures and definitely mandatory CPD. If this was in place I do not think there would be a shortage of good qualified nurses!

The RCVS should make the general public more aware of the role and importance of a qualified VN. Many nurses are leaving the profession within the first year of qualifying because of the lack of recognition/appreciation from the clients of the practice and employers. The title of a qualified VN

should change to RVN (registered VN) like that of human nurses, making us easily recognisable as a qualified professional. (VN)

VNs require a body able to take up issues such as wages, hours, etc and regulate them. The profession is too easily used and abused because of this. It is difficult to be answerable to a body (RCVS) which many arguments are regarding. VNs should have a union type group, maybe the BVNA regulating more working issues rather than the RCVS that is made up of our bosses. (VN)

I have worked alongside unqualified staff who have placed the letters VN after their name and worn little green uniforms calling themselves a VN to clients. Incorrect advice / treatment has been given but the client is none the wiser. Ultimately a qualified VN will leave such practices. But, there is no one who polices such incidents and reply is not always an easy option. Suggest - Only supply a VN uniform via RCVS and give us a registration i.e. RVN and remuneration to pay a mortgage. (VN)

Standards of veterinary practice need to be regulated, not only in relation to veterinary nursing practice, but also in relation to clinical standards. A lot of veterinary surgeons value their nurses for things other than qualifications. The reality is that a veterinary nurse's certificate is often not what makes a nurse valuable to practice. Many nurses work with inadequate or no qualifications for many years. If no differences are drawn it therefore puts into question the whole point of ever training to start with. It seems anyone can be called a veterinary nurse, how many vets would be happy to work on a parallel with colleagues calling themselves a veterinary surgeon without any qualifications. (VN)

I don't see the point in having the veterinary nursing profession more regulated - on one hand they (RCVS/ BVNA) are trying to promote the veterinary nurses and then on the other hand they are trying to limit what we can actually do in practice i.e. dental extractions. (VN)

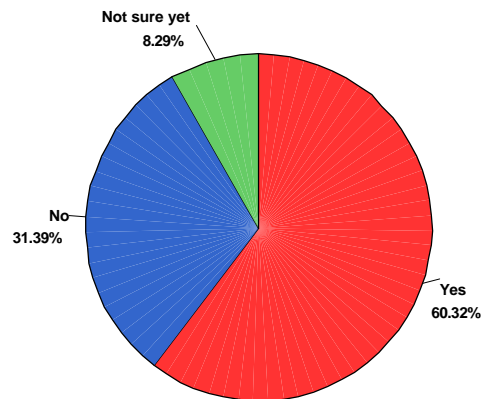
I feel very strongly that in order for veterinary nurses to acquire the recognition we want, and to be viewed as a profession, we need to accept that accountability and regulation is part and parcel of that. Further education and mandatory CPD are the only things that bring veterinary nurses this recognition. This may help to elevate the dreadful wages many nurses have to endure and survive on. In my opinion, salary levels are the reason for poor retention, and the main influence for my own CPD, to allow me to move into a better-paid job with better prospects. (VN)

After enrolling as an SVN I found that night duties were only counted as eight hours work although in practice that consisted of 13hrs on duty. With a family to care for this wasn't acceptable, I felt I could not give the practice the level of commitment they required and so have to give up. I feel SVNs are too often taken advantage of. I feel that the working conditions for veterinary nurses needs to improve. My foster practice consists of 4 vets and 1 trainee nurse. Both she and I perform the same tasks as other employees who are totally untrained and inexperienced. They provide all 'nursing' duties required and I think it's about time that qualified, Listed VNs are separately defined from lay staff. We should be doing entirely different tasks and receive increased salary and appreciation for our skills. I receive no payment and little thanks for my constant hard work, and I receive limited support from the practice, my assessor and the university. I'm paying my own way to become an efficient and competent member of the veterinary field. However until nurses and not RCVS govern the nursing profession, we will always be regarded as second-class citizens. (Student VN)

16 Careers

16.1 64% of respondents do not think that careers advisers are well informed about the training, education and role of the veterinary nurse; 32.3% are not sure.

Fig. 16.1 Did you receive good career advice with regards to veterinary nursing?



Comments from questionnaires

Your (Lantra) career advice on veterinary nursing is somewhat strange. Most people who become veterinary nurses do so to work with animals. So the "opportunity to work in the pharmaceutical industry or become practice manager" is not why I would become a vet nurse. (VN)

We have lost two nurses to human nursing this year because of the lack of a career structure. How quickly the veterinary nurse with degrees will become dissatisfied with working in practice I don't know but I think the world has gone mad. (Employer)

There are plenty of nurses enrolling but not completing the course. This I think is mainly due to the amount of programs on television related to veterinary work. Many nurses who I have met have had a glorified impression of the job, and don't realise it's a lot of hard work for a low pay. (Student VN)

I have found it nearly impossible to find careers advice to give to work experience students on nursing and had none myself. I feel that the pay is ridiculously low for what we do, and that our abilities as people and nurses are not stretched. (Student VN)

I find my day-to-day work highly stressful as I'm constantly concerned by how much portfolio I still need to complete as well as trying to find time to complete logs and also study for my exams. I also found it highly distressing when told from RCVS that deadlines or certain things required for case logs keep changing. i.e. 10 days to get log signed. I must say that, I certainly was not expecting my training to be quite as stressful as it has been. (Student VN)

17 Job satisfaction

Fig 17.1 Opinion about VN choice to train and qualify as a veterinary nurse

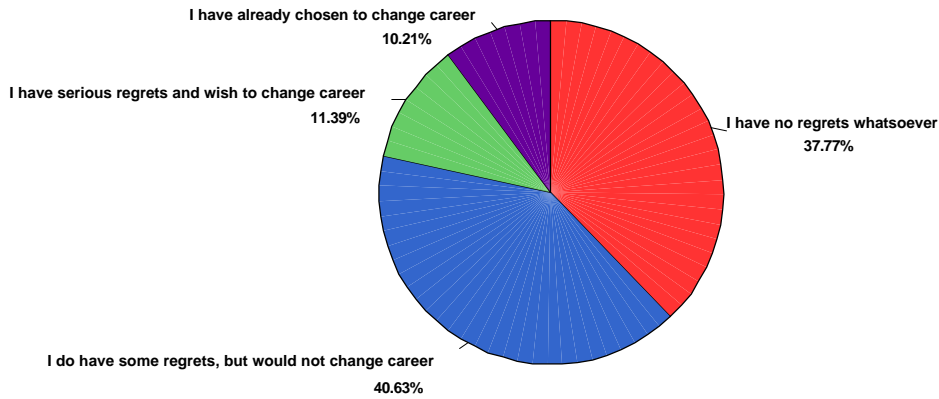


Fig 17.2 Realistically how long do you see yourself continuing to be employed as a VN within the veterinary profession?

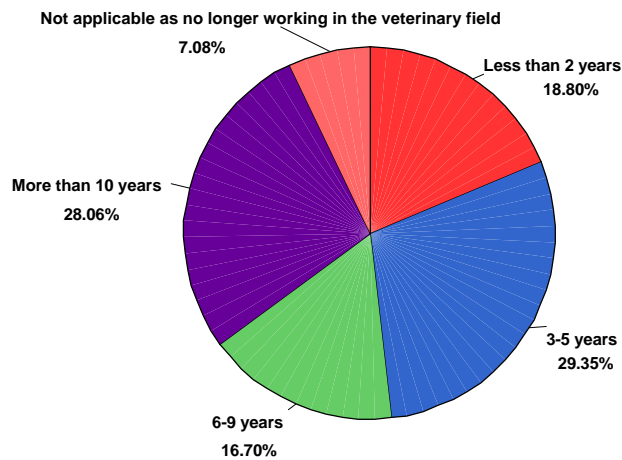


Fig 17.3 The most de-motivating factors as a practising VN

	1- Most de-motivating	2	3	4	5	Mean
	Table %	Table %	Table %	Table %	Table %	
Too little money	45.8%	17.2%	10.2%	5.4%	7.6%	1.98
Lack of praise from employer	21.3%	15.5%	12.0%	9.7%	7.4%	2.49
No recognition of capabilities by employer	19.8%	15.3%	12.8%	9.8%	7.4%	2.53
Lack of professional respect from employer and colleagues	19.2%	15.5%	11.4%	10.0%	8.3%	2.58
Poor morale	18.7%	15.9%	16.5%	10.2%	8.4%	2.63
Lack of opportunity for career progression	17.7%	17.4%	15.6%	9.9%	8.7%	2.63
Over long hours	14.2%	18.0%	18.3%	9.5%	8.5%	2.71
Lack of client recognition of professionalism	15.1%	15.1%	16.5%	10.4%	8.6%	2.73
Dissatisfaction at not being permitted to perform Schedule 3 tasks	13.4%	12.2%	12.5%	8.7%	12.4%	2.91
Pressure to devolve nursing duties to less qualified staff	7.4%	9.6%	15.2%	9.9%	10.5%	3.12
Insufficient junior staff to devolve duties to	5.3%	8.8%	16.2%	11.1%	9.9%	3.22
Pressure to perform Schedule 3 duties	3.6%	2.4%	5.8%	8.4%	24.1%	4.06

17.1 77.61% of students consider that they have made the right career choice; 17.38% are not sure yet; and 5% believe that they have not made the right career choice.

17.2 42.46% of students have not considered giving up training; 36.93% have occasionally considered giving up training; 10.61% consider giving up often; and 10% have definitely considered giving up.

Fig. 17.4 Student VNs who are no longer actively training to become a VN, have considered giving up training, or have had issues with training, what were the reasons

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %
Pay	61.23	25.45	9.58	3.74
The portfolio is/was too demanding	39.18	36.40	20.76	3.65
The pressure of having to work and study at the same time is/was too great	31.67	47.51	17.30	3.52
Working conditions	21.22	32.76	35.41	10.61
The practice didn't/doesn't give much support with my training	17.41	34.97	33.33	14.29
There are/were too few career prospects	11.32	29.25	46.23	13.21
I am/was demoralised because i keep/kept failing the RCVS exam	7.99	9.07	32.49	50.45
I had/have issues relating to my college	6.44	14.65	40.42	38.49
Family reasons	5.71	10.25	33.11	50.92
The job is/was not what I thought it would be	3.69	12.46	50.15	33.69

Fig. 17.5 If no longer in training

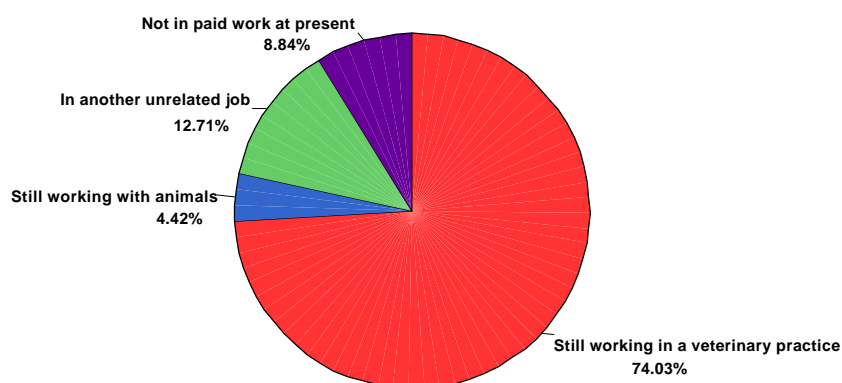


Fig. 17.6 In five years time, where do you anticipate you will be working?

	Yes	No
	Row %	Row %
As a veterinary nurse in practice	74.3%	25.7%
As a veterinary nurse in industry or education	18.7%	81.3%
As an unqualified veterinary nurse	4.3%	95.7%
In another animal-connected job	28.3%	71.7%
In another unrelated job	11.9%	88.1%
Undertaking higher education (diploma/degree)	24.2%	75.8%
Full-time parent	10.2%	89.8%

Comments from questionnaires

From the age 6 I wanted desperately to work with animals and here I am following my dream. It took me one hell of a long time to get here, but it was worth it. The exams were no way easy - my written exams I flew through but those practicals. No offence but I will never want to see Bristol Vet School for as long as I live! I knew I could do it, as did my colleagues, but come the practicals I was a total wreck! But I never gave up. The main downfall to my profession is rubbish pay! (We could all get much better money stacking shelves at Tesco's). We work damn hard with very little recognition - Vet nurses are DEDICTATED people (they must be to be able to quality). It's not a 9-5pm job - It's a vocation - so I will never understand why it is so poorly paid. I am fortunate in my new job to be able to pretty much have the run of the place (believe me it's taken 10 years to get here) but in the past I have been treated like a dogs body. We are highly trained - more often and having more experience than new graduate vets, and it would be nice to put some of the training into practice. I really love my job: but my main concern is pay - along with 99% of nurses - I wished there could be a set rate (like the minimum wage) that vets HAVE to pay. (VN)

No longer a practising VN, I have never regretted my career choice for one second, and I am proud of my qualifications. I left practice because of:

1. Lack of recognition
2. Poor pay
3. Mandatory overtime
4. Low nursing moral (VN)

I just wanted to be what I qualified to do. Not to be an assessor or a slave to my employers! (VN)

I think any vet wanting to set up a practice should have to attend and complete some form of business and people management course. My last practice was totally disorganised, the boss was a total Wally and employed useless practice managers. Its not only myself that has become disillusioned with nursing, a lot of my friends have left or are leaving the profession, due to poor management, hours, pay and most importantly lack of appreciation. Clients get ripped off as bosses try and make as much money as possible. It's disgusting. I went into the profession as I love animals and want to care for them - but this seems to be 2nd place at the best - why? If only the clients could see this, they'd be horrified. All practices should be thoroughly investigated especially (name and address provided). They made my life a misery and gave me a nervous breakdown. They keep sacking people and have had at least 5 court procedures in the last 18 months for poor people management. (VN)

The general public has no recognition of the VN capabilities. Vets use the excuse of being a small business therefore very low wages. This becomes very demoralising and you get to an age where you realise you put in your 'all' for nothing. It is extremely hard after having children - you hardly ever see VNs over the age of 25! Hardly any vets providing training anymore - too many hassles. You look round at other people's jobs and realise how easy their work is for double the money. When you're married with children and a life, you need to earn a living and not be made to feel like a glorified cleaner every day! (VN)

I entered this career knowing it was vocational and after completing 20+ years as a qualified and now senior nurse I plan to stay until retirement but more support and better pay is required to make family life possible. I feel very strongly that qualified VNs are definitely not paid enough. For the responsibility (i.e. IV drips, blood samples, answering worried clients questions) we undertake everyday. I feel very bitter that somebody sat at the check out in Safeway's earns more money per hour than I do. (VN)

Vets need to appreciate their nurses in order to keep them and also pay them for their experience and qualifications. Vets are too happy to employ unqualified staff to perform qualified roles, just to save money. (VN)

Changing to NVQ means we get less respect. Employers always think they can pay you less because you do it 'for the love of animals! VNs hours of work should be reduced. (VN)

I am a Listed VN who has gone on to qualify as a vet. I chose to leave VN since I felt that I was not valued as member of staff and had no real responsibility. I also feel that the level of pay for Listed VNs is in general too low. They work long hours in a skilled job and are often not paid accordingly. Until VNs are recognised as trained staff and not just general 'dogs - bodies' there will continue to be a shortage of VNs in practice. There should be a better pay scale so that a VN can work full time and manage to support themselves - at present I know many who cannot make ends meet on their salary alone! Also the degree nurses I have met lack practical experience! A word on training - practices will cease to train due to the mass of paperwork. (VN / Vet)

Vets are not the only ones that can get degrees. They need to realise nurses are intelligent and hard working people. The general public needs to realise this too! (VN)

I have left work to raise my first child, I am in no hurry to return to the long hours and poor pay (I am more financially stable on state benefits!) and am unsure whether to return to the veterinary industry at all. (VN)

I returned to vet nursing after a long break due to health reasons. I can't believe that 10 years after I last nursed things haven't changed. Staff are still demoralised, pay is poor, and nurses are still living at home as they can't afford places of their own. It's quite shocking. With caring nurses having to leave the profession I despair for the future. (VN)

I am not prepared to put up with rudeness and bad manners from vets, especially older ones much longer. (VN)

To help veterinary nurses further more must be done about malpractice towards nursing staff. Employing vet surgeons seem to be able to get away with so much abuse towards veterinary nurses. We are often used and abused. Accommodation though often free is badly maintained and sometimes almost dangerous. Veterinary surgeons should be spot checked to ensure all people have contracts so they cannot be unfairly treated and they should be fined if no contracts are in place. (VN)

I feel that a lot of my fellow veterinary nurses do not take their career seriously due to the way they are treated within practice. Veterinary nurses need to wake up, listen and take responsibility, have their bosses expect high standards and reward them for these standards, maybe then veterinary nurses may take to change more seriously and want to improve their profession rather than taking a back seat all the time. (VN)

Veterinary nursing is not often an obvious career progression. Therefore disillusionment as VNs get older is always going to be a problem as they look for a new challenge. They are still vastly over-qualified for the tasks they are legally allowed to perform. (Employer)

While it must be better for nurses to be over qualified rather than under qualified I think the new nursing scheme, in particular the degree course, is encouraging people to train with no realistic idea of the mundane nature of most of the work they will actually be doing. This results in their disillusionment. (Employer)

Vets are usually the reason VNs get depressed and feel under-used. (Employer)

None of the practices I have worked in have allocated specific time for veterinary nurse training. The nurses are the backbone of any practice and are being let down by their profession and employees. By making the system more complicated, it is just encouraging employers to stick their heads in the sand even more. As a profession we should all (older male employers included) be appreciating our nurses more, giving more practical and emotional support. I wonder how many vets would pass the veterinary nurse exams? I'm sure I wouldn't! And how many would want to try and study, revise, hold down a very full time job and get treated as second class citizens? (Employer)

18 Conclusions and Recommendations

Training

There is a considerable drop-out rate of students at the pre-NVQ level 2 stage. Because many VNACs and TPs do not keep records on the destinations of early leavers, it is difficult to ascertain reasons for leaving early.

The issues relating to training include:

- The length of time taken is perceived as excessive
- The content of training is not always seen as relevant to VN job roles, relevance to employer expectations, and schedule 3 restrictions
- The take-over of the NVQ system

Training and assessment is lacking in cohesion, and does not appear to be co-ordinated to ensure economy of effort and resources.

Only 62% of student VNs have a vet or Listed VN present at all times whilst they are on duty. This practice should be eliminated as soon as possible.

A number of employers have decided to train in-house and not pursue the qualification route. This affects the morale of Listed VNs and has legal implications. Employers need to value training, but should be told what actual costs are, where the funding is from, and be reassured by standardised training being in place across the UK.

Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The RCVS to conduct more detailed research to identify:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• student entry requirements and recruitment procedures• why student VNs drop out on the pre-enrolment probationary period and before achieving NVQ level 2.2. The VNACs and TPs to keep more detailed information on why students leave, and their destinations, so that amendments can be made as appropriate to recruitment procedures and training systems support and management.3. Evaluate why the time taken in training and qualification is thought to be excessive, and take steps to streamline the process. However, economies should not be made at the expense of quality.4. Consider putting in place a system of standardisation of training (e.g. through a Centre of Excellence of Vocational Education [COVE] initiative)5. Steps should be taken to ensure that student VNs have senior, qualified staff in attendance at all time6. Produce advice to employers on the actual costs and benefits of training, and how this is / can be resourced.
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Qualifications

Whilst the NVQ system is relatively recent, there have been three changes in the portfolio since its' introduction. This has contributed to dissatisfaction with the system.

There is duplication of assessment that could be eliminated by producing 'model' assessments and tools to support good practices.

The role of expert witness (a recent introduction in some sectors) in work placements, rather than relying totally on qualified assessors could engage vets and more VNs (who normally do not get paid for acting as an assessor). A co-ordinating assessor would have overall responsibility for induction to the NVQ system, action planning, portfolio management, and assessment – making better use of the expertise in the workplace. Integrated guidance and assessment tools would also support this.

Small practices feel excluded from being part of the training and qualification process, because they do not have the manpower, nor the equipment required.

The use of jargon is a barrier to understanding the system.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The NVQ work-based route is a relatively recent introduction and this is believed to be the main reason for many of the issues raised. Whilst it is still early days for the NVQ system further, more detailed research needs to be undertaken to evaluate the NVQ system as a whole, and to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify more user-friendly ways of managing the system • identify best practices of students working alongside their VN assessors 2. Explore alternative, user-friendly methods of record keeping and paperwork. 3. Veterinary surgeons to be made aware of why the assessment requirements for diagnostic imaging and maintaining veterinary resources are as high as they are. 4. The RCVS to investigate why the VN department has a poor rating with VNACs. 5. Lantra to work with sector representatives to make employers aware of Modern Apprenticeships.
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National Occupational Standards (NOS)

There is a general lack of understanding of what the NOS are, how they are developed, how they can be used, and their relationship to NVQs. In many cases assessment appears to rely heavily on portfolio completion without referral to the NOS.

There are a wide range of NOS that could be useful to VNs and their employers, for example supervision and customer services. Any future review to the current VN NOS should look to the wider role (and subsidiary roles) of VNs. A range of smaller qualifications could be made available, including assistant roles.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RCVS, as the awarding body, should gather information from External Verifiers concerning issues relating to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) / NVQ content. 2. Lantra, as the Standards Setting Body, should consult with RCVS and the profession as to the need to review the NOS. 3. Identify, develop and promote the wider use of NOS for example, job descriptions, appraisal systems, skills gaps analysis, and training programmes. 4. Identify and promote vet practices that illustrate good practices, and develop them as sector champions.
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Listed status

Understanding of the value, purpose and legal requirements of Listed status appears to vary.

The RCVS should become more responsive to the needs of VNs, particularly regarding costs, re-registration and value for money.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. RCVS and other organisations representing VNs to make employers aware of the legal implications of disregarding the requirements of the Veterinary Surgeons Act, and that only qualified and Listed VNs should carry out schedule 3 duties.
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Tasks / work roles

There is a lack of clarity on who should or should not be performing the range of tasks normally within the remit of a Listed VN.

Vets are not always using VNs for the duties they are qualified to do. Cleaning and reception duties should not comprise the main role of the VN. Many VNs are very disillusioned by the type of work they are regularly expected to do.

A review of the range of roles in practices is required in developing the introduction of a vet care assistant or technical assistant role, and any appropriate training and qualifications.

Schedule 3 restrictions are causing resentment from VNs who feel that they are no longer able to perform duties for which they have been trained, and / or have extensive experience.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. RCVS and other organisations representing VNs to make employers aware of the legal implications of disregarding the requirements of the Veterinary Surgeons Act.2. RCVS and professional representative bodies to promote the value of Listed VNs to animal health and welfare.3. Employers should make every effort to use VNs for the tasks that they are qualified for.4. Develop the vet care / technical assistant role to assist qualified staff with basic duties, and promote the lower level qualifications available to ensure that they are properly trained.5. The RCVS to raise awareness of the range and scope of what VNs are, and are not, allowed to do.6. Identify and promote vet practices that illustrate good practices, and develop them as sector champions.
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Working conditions

VNs frequently work under poor terms and conditions. There is a lack of flexibility (job share etc.). The number of hours worked is often high, together with unpaid overtime as an expectation from employers, with implications of pay being below the level of the minimum wage.

There are complaints about the quality and low standard of free accommodation, and some are caught in the loop of free accommodation / low pay – no way out.

There is a low use of performance related pay or related incentives.

A high proportion of VNs and student VNs have no written contracts of employment. By law, all employees should have written terms and conditions of employment.

There is an enormous level of dissatisfaction from VNs, who are calling for recognition of their professionalism. Employers should realise that the investment made in skills and knowledge of experienced VNs is of great value and benefit to their businesses. Whilst clinical performance is a practice's most important activity, it also needs to survive as a business.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All employers should ensure that all their employees, including VNs and employed student VNs, have written terms and conditions of employment. This is a legal requirement. 2. VNs, together with the BVNA, should explore the feasibility of joining an appropriate trade union, or find alternative methods of resolving issues. 3. BVNA to increase awareness of its' representative role for VNs 4. Review the pay situation for VNs and student VNs regarding the national minimum wage, and the number of hours worked.
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Recruitment and retention

There are no (perceived) problems in recruiting new, young people into the sector, but there are issues in recruiting experienced, qualified VNs. Only one third of VNs stay in a practice for more than 2 years. This is a huge waste of investment in the development of VNs.

Employers are increasingly recruiting unqualified staff that they train to their own standards. Qualified VNs who work in practices where this happens are becoming demoralised, and are leaving the profession.

VNs are leaving as they get older for a range of reasons, mainly: low pay; lack of recognition / respect as professionals; and lack of flexibility (eg. part-time work). Generally, there are few incentives to encourage VNs to remain in a practice, including rewards for experience or levels of responsibility.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employers should consider reviewing the terms and conditions of employment of VNs to increase retention rates. This would decrease costs incurred in recruitment, and in the induction and training of staff. 2. The awarding bodies should explore the possibility of introducing a qualification at level 2 for a Veterinary Care Assistant. There appears, from the survey to be the potential for someone at this level who would have cleaning and kennel duties, and be able to work on reception. This would free up the qualified VNs to do the work they are qualified to do. 3. Information needs to be gathered on post-training destinations of students, particularly to find out if they stay with their original employer, change employer – and why, or leave the industry. 4. VNACs should keep records of the destinations of mid-year leavers.
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Continuing Professional Development

VNs believe that there is generally little reward for CPD. They rarely receive any additional pay for increased knowledge, and sometimes find that they cannot put new skills into practice (eg. dental work).

Courses are predictable, and there should be a review of what is needed. Suggestions made to the survey include management / supervisory skills, business skills, nutrition, physiotherapy, behaviour, exotics, refresher courses.

CPD is not always accessible, particularly for VNs who live in more remote or rural areas. Some VNs do not have enough time, given the hours worked.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lantra, together with RCVS, BSAVA, BVNA, and other relevant organisations, should:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• produce a map of the range of training opportunities and qualifications available to VNs• produce models for structured CPD programmes for VNs2. undertake a promotion of the value of CPD3. All employers should consider the value of CPD to the commercial success of their practices, and support their staff as appropriate.4. Consideration should be given to the development of distance learning and on-line provision.
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Regulation

VNs overwhelmingly support the introduction of Regulation. It is seen as a means of empowerment, to increase status and recognise professionalism. It is also seen as a way to increase public awareness of the value of the work of VNs.

There is a call for a body (union) to take up issues such as pay and conditions of employment.

Recommendation	1. The RCVS should evaluate the procedures for the implementation of regulation of VNs.
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Careers

Much of the current careers advice and information is sending out the wrong messages. Information should illustrate the reality of VN work, to remove the 'fluffy kitten' image, and encourage a higher calibre of applicants.

Recommendation	1. Lantra and veterinary profession organisations need to research the best way of getting good, accurate information to careers advisors.
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Job satisfaction

The top three de-motivating factors for practising VNs from the survey are: too little money; lack of praise from employers; and no recognition of capabilities by employers. Given the huge response to this survey by VNs, this reaction by them is an indictment on many employers, who should be carefully considering how they treat their staff in this litigious age.

Many VNs suggested that they should have a union to fairly represent their issues. VNs complain that they want to be treated as professionals, not dogs'-bodies.

Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Employers should consider how they treat their staff; VNs wish to have their education, experience and expertise valued, be treated as fellow professionals, and rewarded accordingly.2. RCVS and professional representative bodies to promote Listed VNs value to animal health and welfare.3. Employers should make every effort to use VNs for the tasks that they are qualified for.4. The BVNA should use the information and opinion expressed in this survey, to enhance support available, and ensure that the voice of VNs is heard in the highest levels.5. VNs should make strong representation to the BVNA to ensure that their voice is heard.
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