

Veterinary Education and Training  
A Framework for 2010  
and Beyond

Recommendations presented to  
RCVS Council

July 2002

## REMIT OF THE RCVS EDUCATION STRATEGY STEERING GROUP

To undertake a review of the key issues facing education and training in the veterinary profession, and to formulate a draft education strategy for the College to meet those challenges over the next ten years, taking into account the following areas:

- the need to confirm the College's definition of threshold standards of professional competence;
- the role of employers and practices in the education and training of new veterinarians;
- whether registration should continue to be 'life-long' (re-accreditation/re-validation) and the likely impact of any changes in policy on the education system;
- the College's future policy on CPD;
- the role of postgraduate certificates and diplomas.

### Members:

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## SUMMARY

The Education Strategy Steering Group (ESSG), chaired by Professor Neil Gorman, was established in Autumn 2000 to review the key issues facing education and training in the veterinary profession. The Group was asked to present a draft strategy to RCVS Council by June 2002, to enable the College to meet identified challenges over the next 10 - 20 years. Following publication of its draft document in July 2001, extensive consultation with the profession took place in the latter half of 2001 and the early months of 2002. Having taken account of views expressed, ESSG presented its proposals for an education and training framework to RCVS Council in June 2002. Council supported the proposed framework in principle, and agreed that a period of feasibility testing should now begin. This paper summarises the current thinking and explains what is being done to progress the framework.

## CONSULTATION TO DATE

1. ESSG published its first proposals on a framework in a consultation document in July 2001. The document, (available on the RCVS website at [www.rcvs.org.uk/vet\\_surgeons/education/esg\\_consultation.html](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/vet_surgeons/education/esg_consultation.html)) set out the context in which the framework was developed, and sought to address a number of fundamental questions: what level of competence is needed on 'day 1' after graduation, and what are the implications for continuing education and training and professional development. Should registration – the licence to practise – continue to be life-long for veterinary surgeons? If not, what are the implications for continued training?
2. The consultation document was sent to all the BVA specialist and territorial divisions, and to a number of other interested organisations. The document was available on the RCVS website as well as in hard copy. 98 written responses were received, of which 45 were from veterinary organisations including specialist and territorial BVA divisions. Representatives from 18 veterinary organisations also attended oral evidence gathering sessions in London in November 2001. Members of ESSG also took part in various conferences, congresses and discussions on the framework, including those of the Association of Veterinary Teachers and Research Workers, the British Cattle Veterinary Association, and the "VetCPD" conference in Edinburgh.
3. The overall response was very supportive of the framework in principle, although some respondents expressed reservations on matters of detail. In order to explore some aspects further, members of ESSG undertook further individual discussions with practices and members of the profession concerning the proposals for the professional training programme (PTP). BSAVA also helped by circulating a questionnaire on this topic to its members in February 2002. Of the 423 responses received by BSAVA, 77% supported the proposal for a professional training programme (PTP).

## MOVING FORWARD WITH THE FRAMEWORK – AN ITERATIVE PROCESS

4. ESSG's latest proposals take account of the views expressed during the consultation. RCVS Committees and Council, which considered the proposals at meetings in May and June 2002, have supported its recommendations in principle. Having reached agreement on the principles, the task now is to test out some of the ideas in practice, and to work up more detailed plans for each of the main recommendations.
5. ESSG has sought to develop a clear vision for the future, and its proposals aim to present a holistic, strategic view of education and training for the profession. **It has sought to develop a consensus on approaches, and firmly believes that change should be managed, rather than imposed prematurely on the profession.** The proposed framework is therefore intended to be flexible and adaptable to change in the light of pilot testing and further discussions on implementation. Dependent upon the outcome of feasibility studies and further consultation, the aim is to move towards implementation of some features by 2005. Nothing is yet cast in stone – RCVS is keen to continue to involve the profession in developing the proposals further, and will take account of feedback and results of pilot exercises before finalising any particular aspect of the Framework.

## SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

6. The proposed Framework is based on the key points outlined in Table 1 below.

<b>TABLE 1 – PRINCIPLES OF THE VETERINARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING FRAMEWORK</b>	
a.	The broad, science-based 5-year veterinary degree, should equip graduates at least with the core 'day 1 competences'.
b.	A professional training programme (PTP) should follow graduation.
c.	Pre-graduation differentiation electives could count towards PTP and eventual licence to practise.
d.	The new graduate should work in a registered practice until 'year 1 competences' have been achieved. A license to practise within a broad named area would be awarded.
e.	Self-assessment and appraisal of competence during PTP would be based upon a portfolio approach similar to that used by the dental profession.
f.	A network of RCVS Postgraduate Deans would oversee assessment of PTP.
g.	There should be a statutory requirement for all veterinary surgeons to maintain their competence, linked to the periodic renewal of their licence to practise.
h.	Those who wish to change direction and work in areas other than that covered by their initial licence would need to undergo conversion training leading to a revised licence to practise
i.	By 2010 practices should be registered to undertake work in particular areas, dependent upon the qualifications and experience of the staff.
j.	The RCVS Certificate should be restructured to become modular in structure, and more accessible for those in practice.
k.	Achievement of a Certificate, or working towards Certificate modules, should become the norm for new practitioners.
l.	The RCVS Fellowship should be retained as the highest award of the College, and there should be greater convergence with European Colleges for the award of Diplomas where appropriate.
m.	Inclusion on the RCVS Recognised Specialist List should be open to Fellows, RCVS Diploma and European Diploma Holders.

## VETERINARY UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION – BROAD PRINCIPLES

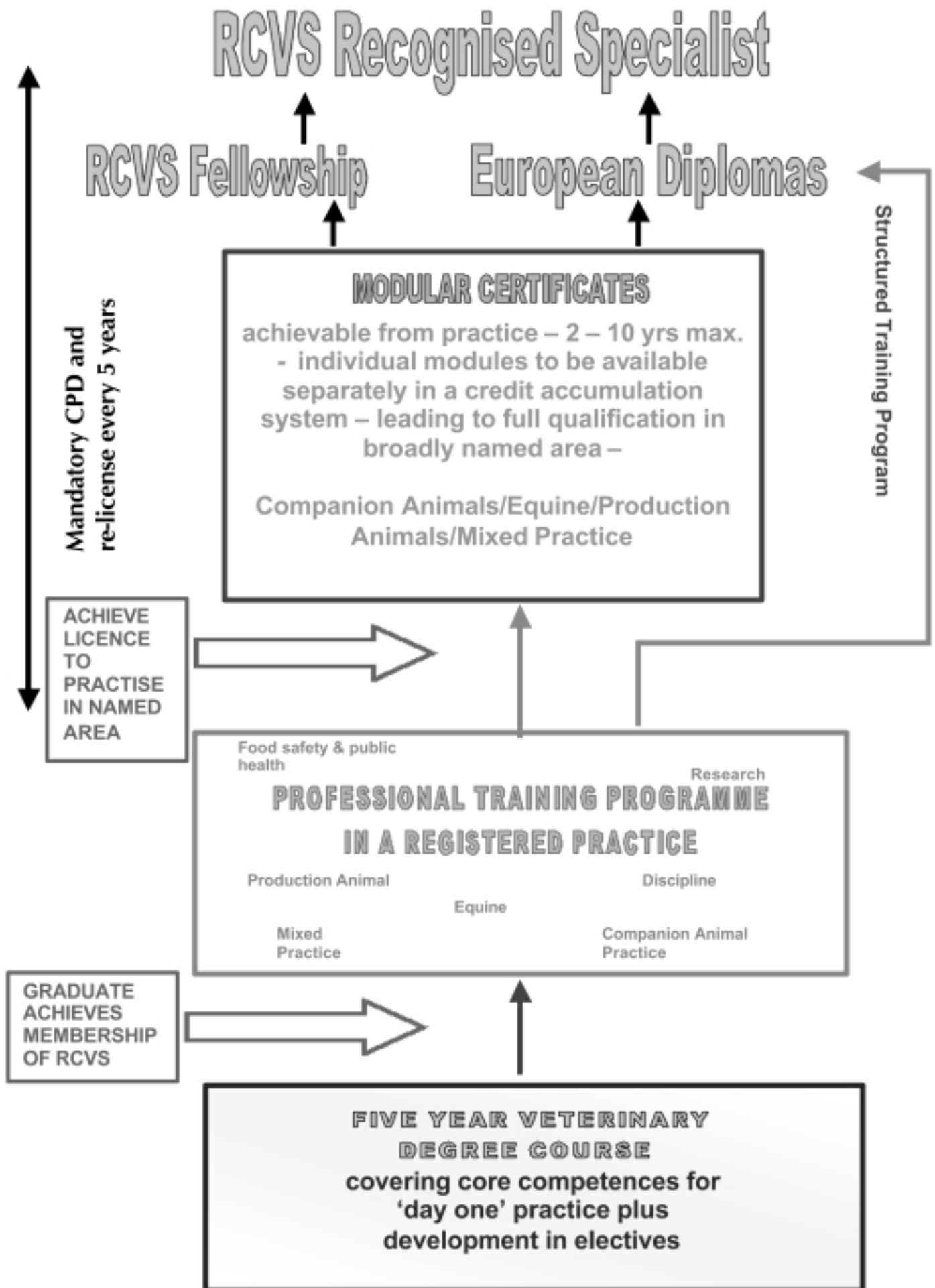
7. The veterinary curriculum has been the subject of various reports over the last 10 years or so, and ESSG felt that detailed curriculum planning was more properly a matter for the individual veterinary schools to address. The registerable veterinary degree must, however, be designed to cover the RCVS essential 'day one' competences, which the ESSG has refined and reconfirmed. RCVS has also worked closely with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to define the 'benchmark' statement for veterinary science degrees, which all the veterinary schools must follow. The RCVS 'day one' competences form a part of that benchmark statement, which can be viewed on the QAA website at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk). In addition to the 'day one' competences, a number of broad principles concerning the primary veterinary degree have been defined, set out in Table 2 below.

**TABLE 2 – PRINCIPLES FOR THE PRIMARY VETERINARY DEGREE**

- a. The veterinary degree should continue to provide a broad, vocationally directed, science-based education sufficient to prepare graduates for life-long development within diverse veterinary careers – it should be seen as the “springboard” for professional veterinary careers, rather than as the final assessment of full professional competence.
- b. The well being of animals and the protection of public health should be the primary concern of the veterinary degree course.
- c. The degree should cover clinical training across all common, domestic species, and should cover all the 'day one' competences.
- d. The degree should allow for pre-registration differentiation, through a curriculum covering core and elective subjects.
- e. Vertical integration of subject matter within the curriculum should be promoted to emphasise to students the relevance of basic sciences to clinical studies, and vice-versa.
- f. Generic clinical skills, such as history taking, problem solving, sample collection, evaluation of data and communication skills, must be emphasised throughout.
- g. Extra-mural studies (EMS) should continue to play an essential role in the education of undergraduates.
- h. More imaginative co-operation between universities, between universities and practice, and between universities and research and other institutes should be sought, not only for EMS purposes, but also to develop clinical research opportunities.
- i. The schools should seek to reduce the current overall teaching hours where possible, by reference to the 'day one' competences, to allow continued and extended development of elective programmes. (The development of the PTP should not, however, be seen as an opportunity to reduce clinical or practice skills already covered within the degree course, but rather as an opportunity to demonstrate competence at performing these tasks and to consolidate knowledge.)

## PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME

8. The aim of the Professional Training Programme - PTP - will be to provide greater direction, structure and support for new graduates during their critical first year after graduation, whilst they continue to develop their clinical and practice skills. The concept builds on what already happens within good practices, where new graduates are supported and mentored until they have the confidence to provide a full professional service themselves. Professional development of this nature cannot be simulated by extra-mural studies, and can only take place in the real work context. Supervision of the new graduate will not necessarily be “over the shoulder”, but more a matter of ensuring they have a structured system for guidance, mentoring and appraisal. For PTP to work effectively, there is an assumption that practices employing new graduates will need to meet certain standards and become ‘registered’ to provide veterinary services in particular areas: mixed practice, production, equine or companion animal. RCVS has already set up a Practice Standards Working Party, which is looking at standards for practices.
9. The graduate would become MRCVS on graduation as now, qualified at ‘day one’ level and legally able to undertake acts of veterinary surgery, including emergency work. Typically after one year (more or less, depending on the individual and the area of practice) the graduate would be assessed by means of a portfolio demonstrating their experience and clinical competence and given a licence to practise in their chosen area. It is the intention to develop the portfolio around the self-assessment model that has been successfully tried and tested over a number of years by the dental profession. In this way, it is hoped to keep it reasonably simple to complete and minimise bureaucracy. Information technology-based solutions will be developed, and could build on work already underway within the university sector and other professions with on-line personal development files.
10. It is proposed that coordination and quality assurance of PTP would be via a network of RCVS postgraduate deans working with graduates and their practices, BVA specialist divisions and universities. Options for financing the scheme need to be explored. New graduates undergoing PTP would be likely to receive a lower salary for their first year in return for receiving supervision and mentoring by the licensed practitioners, although market forces would determine salary levels.
11. There should be continuity between electives available within the undergraduate degree, and components of the PTP, and CPD provision. Achievement within certain electives at undergraduate level could count towards PTP for some clinical skills. CPD provision should be directed to cover aspects of the PTP (eg. practice management), as well as Certificate modules (see below), with a continuum of provision to encourage continued study at higher levels.
12. Seen another way, the PTP would be, in effect, the first year of mandatory CPD for the new graduate, and as such it is possible that it could be made mandatory for all new graduate registrants, whether they had graduated in the UK or elsewhere. The General Dental Council has implemented a similar policy for European dental graduates whom it is currently obliged to register under the EU sectoral directive.



## MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

13. The medical profession's plans for revalidation have received much publicity recently. The dental profession introduced its mandatory CPD scheme in January 2002 as the basis for re-certification, and many other professions have schemes in place that are more structured and demanding than the current RCVS CPD policy. Public expectations in this respect have grown and ESSG has therefore recommended that there should be a statutory requirement for all veterinary surgeons to maintain their competence in their licensed area of work. Undertaking CPD should not be seen solely as clocking up a certain number of hours, but more about the professional obligation of all Members to maintain and improve their competence. Although a new Veterinary Surgeons Act will be needed before CPD could be made a statutory requirement, the College will look to strengthen its requirements under the current legislation. More formal monitoring of CPD activity could be a first step towards emphasising its importance to members.
14. The proposed licence to practise should be subject to periodic renewal, based upon competence having been maintained in the licensed area of work. Work will be needed to develop detailed plans for implementing this proposal, including the necessary legislative changes. However, whereas the medical professions have the support of NHS structures and funds to support revalidation, the veterinary profession will need to develop a system that is manageable within its limited resources.
15. An important component of a new, strengthened CPD policy should be the encouragement for all veterinary surgeons in practice to work towards RCVS Certificates, or modules within them. RCVS will be reviewing its range of Certificate titles, ensuring that those that remain cover broad areas of clinical practice, and are not seen as quasi specialist qualifications. The route to specialist status should be via the Fellowship, or RCVS/European Diploma route. The Certificate system has been a success to date, but more needs to be done to ensure that these qualifications are readily achievable by those in practice.
16. A modular Certificate system, allowing achievement of a mixture of discipline and/or species based modules, will provide a more flexible structure to meet the varying needs of practitioners. Achievement of individual modules along the route to a full Certificate should be recognised and credited, and a significant proportion of CPD provision should be geared to those modules. The standard of the RCVS Certificate must not be lowered in the process.

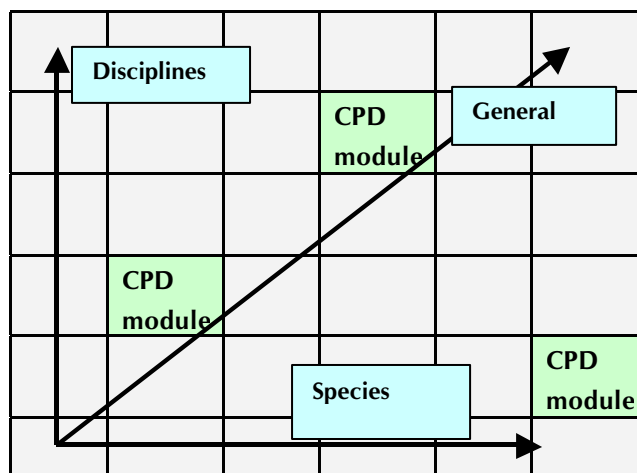


Figure 2 - A modular Certificate system, based around individually achievable CPD modules

17. RCVS Diplomas represent a high standard of achievement, but the number of Diploma candidates continues to be limited, as the qualification is generally difficult to achieve from practice. The European Colleges are developing rapidly, and although there are teething problems in certain areas, RCVS will be seeking greater convergence between its Diplomas and those of the European Colleges.

## THE WAY AHEAD

18. The July 2001 consultation document contained a set of **'Day 1' and 'Year 1' competences** which form the cornerstone for consideration of the primary veterinary degree on the one hand, and the PTP on the other. The Year 1 competences included a list of practical skills that have subsequently been refined as a result of consultation. The revised skills list now needs to be piloted so that the documentation can be finalised and used during the second stage of the pilot. Stage 1 of the Pilot study will start in the summer of 2002 to test out the validity and usefulness of the Year 1 competences and skills list. Members of the ESSG will aim to work with a cohort of 10 new graduates from each of the six veterinary schools to coordinate responses and refine the lists further.
19. Stage 2 of the Pilot study, from 2003, will involve a similar sized group of new graduates, and will test out the feasibility of the PTP from the perspective both of the graduates and their employing practices, following their progress for two years. Members of ESSG will again act as coordinators for groups of graduates. Depending on progress with these pilots, work can then be commissioned to develop the PTP for full implementation in 2005.
20. It is proposed that PTP will eventually be overseen by a network of RCVS Postgraduate Deans who will liaise with PTP graduates in their region and provide the necessary quality assurance for the programme. This network would need to be in place by 2005.
21. IT solutions will need to be developed during 2004 to support PTP. Work is already underway within the university sector and elsewhere to develop on-line personal development files, and ESSG will seek to build on this and other work to produce tools to assist with assessment.
22. The outcomes of the Practice Standards Working Party will be crucial to developing the concept of the registered practice, within which ESSG recommends that PTP should take place.
23. Work will begin immediately on developing modular Certificates, which will provide the necessary structure for CPD provision.
24. Mandatory CPD should be introduced, if necessary through a new Veterinary Surgeons Act (VSA), but in any case by strengthening current requirements, and linking CPD provision to Certificate modules. RCVS' CPD sub-committee will be re-established to take forward the work in this area. It is recommended that a new VSA should include powers to require veterinary surgeons to maintain their competence, linked to the periodic renewal of their licence to practise.
25. Work should continue to move RCVS Diplomas towards the European Colleges, and liaison with the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation and others will continue to this effect.

26. Work will be needed to define the funding model.
27. Members of the ESSG, reporting to RCVS Education Committee, the Specialisation and Further Education Committee and Council, will oversee progress on each of these areas. Separate working groups, each including a member of ESSG, will be set up to progress work in particular areas, such as CPD, modularisation of Certificates, PTP, and re-validation. Further liaison will also be needed on the international front, particularly within Europe to ensure that the framework aligns with the emerging new Directives, and with the veterinary schools in continuing the review of the undergraduate curriculum.
28. Last, but not least, RCVS and ESSG will continue to communicate and encourage debate within the profession on these important topics, to ensure that there is a consensus on how to implement the Framework. If you have views on any aspect of the proposals, or if you are interested in taking part in pilot studies, please write to Mrs Freda Andrews, Head of Education, RCVS, Belgravia House, 62 – 64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF, or email her on [f.andrews@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:f.andrews@rcvs.org.uk).

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