

RCVS Quality Assurance Policy for Accreditation Activities

Quality Statement

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is the statutory regulator responsible under the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966) for the management of the veterinary profession.

This includes:

- The registration of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the UK
- Accrediting and maintaining the requirements for professional veterinary education

By implementing a robust quality assurance system, the RCVS is committed to safeguarding the interests of the public so that they can be confident in the care that their animals receive.

The quality assurance policy for all activities aims to be transparent, fair, and free from bias and accurately details and records all quality assurance decisions. This includes the monitoring of education accreditation in line with both veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing standards in order to maintain their quality and integrity.

Introduction and aims

This policy is to provide clear guidance and a framework to enable greater consistency of accreditation practice within the RCVS for both Veterinary Schools and Universities awarding licence to practice qualifications in Veterinary Nursing.

The focus is on the quality of accreditation activities and decisions and confirms that the accreditation requirements of institutions are being reviewed and that the required standards are being met. It also provides an opportunity for problems to be identified and remedied and for the recognition and sharing of good practice.

Through the quality assurance process, the RCVS aims to ensure that:

- the education accreditation process is understandable to stakeholders, effectively administered and accountable;
- the qualifications are offered by institutions that have the adequate resources, environment and expertise to ensure valid teaching, learning and assessment of students against the learning outcomes and Day 1 competences and skills;
- fairness, consistency and transparency surround the approval of veterinary education programmes.

Quality Assurance of Accreditation Cycles

The quality assurance of the accreditation cycle must ensure that accreditation activities are, robust, valid and reliable. That they are carried out in such a way as to be open, fair and free from bias and that accreditation panel members adhere to the RCVS Accreditation Standards in the judgement of evidence. The recording of accreditation decisions must be accurate and detailed and demonstrate consistent and transparent implementation of the standards.

The accreditation cycles for both Veterinary Surgeon and Veterinary Nursing education run on a similar format with a few key differences. It is worth noting that the [RCVS Standards Framework for veterinary nurse education and training](#) has been recently updated and the new standards implemented from January 2020. From this date, all accreditation visits will be reviewed against the new standards. The [RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees](#) have been reviewed and are being applied to veterinary programmes from January 2023. The Standards are reviewed regularly by the VN and VS committees to ensure they remain current and fit for purpose.

The Veterinary Degree accreditation cycle runs over 7 years, whereas the Veterinary Nursing accreditation cycle runs over 5 years. Part of the accreditation cycle includes a visit to the educational establishment. For veterinary degree accreditation, the length of the visit is bespoke, and the scope will be confirmed once the accreditation panel have reviewed the evidence in the secure online repository database. This is where all accumulated data and evidence against each of the accreditation standards will be stored (including any annual monitoring data) for each programme. The veterinary nursing degree programme visits typically take place over 2 days. In advance of all accreditation visits, the evidence submitted by the educational establishment is reviewed by the accreditation panels. The veterinary programmes submit the evidence for each standard through a repository database. The repository is accessible at any time, and uploading evidence is not limited to a specified period before a visit is scheduled to take place. Three months before the visit to a veterinary programme is due to take place, the panel will decide on the scope and length of the visit. The application for the veterinary nursing accreditation visit needs to be submitted by the educational establishment no less than 8 weeks before the visit is due to take place.

The outcomes are validated by different committees for veterinary degrees and vet nursing degrees, but the process takes a similar amount of time (around 6 months from visitation to published report). The Education Committee makes reports and decisions for Veterinary degrees. However in the case of a new Veterinary degree, the report will go to the RCVS Council on its first accreditation, as it needs the ratification by Council prior to going Privy Council for a Recognition Order. The Vet Nursing Education Committee makes the decision for all Vet Nursing qualification accreditations and the Vet Nurse Council will ratify all those decisions.

These cycles are shown in figures 1 and 2

Figure 1: Accreditation cycle for Veterinary degree programmes

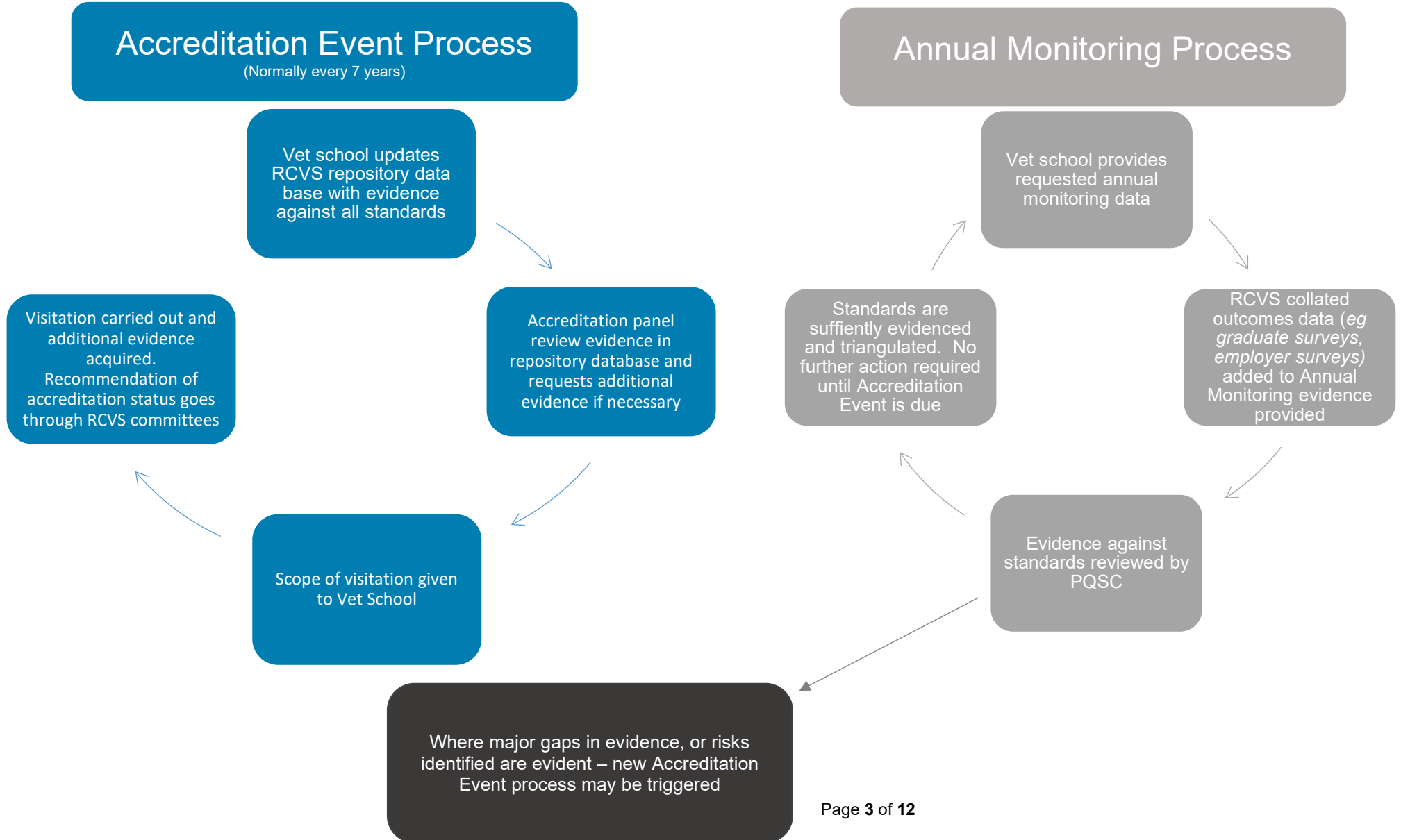
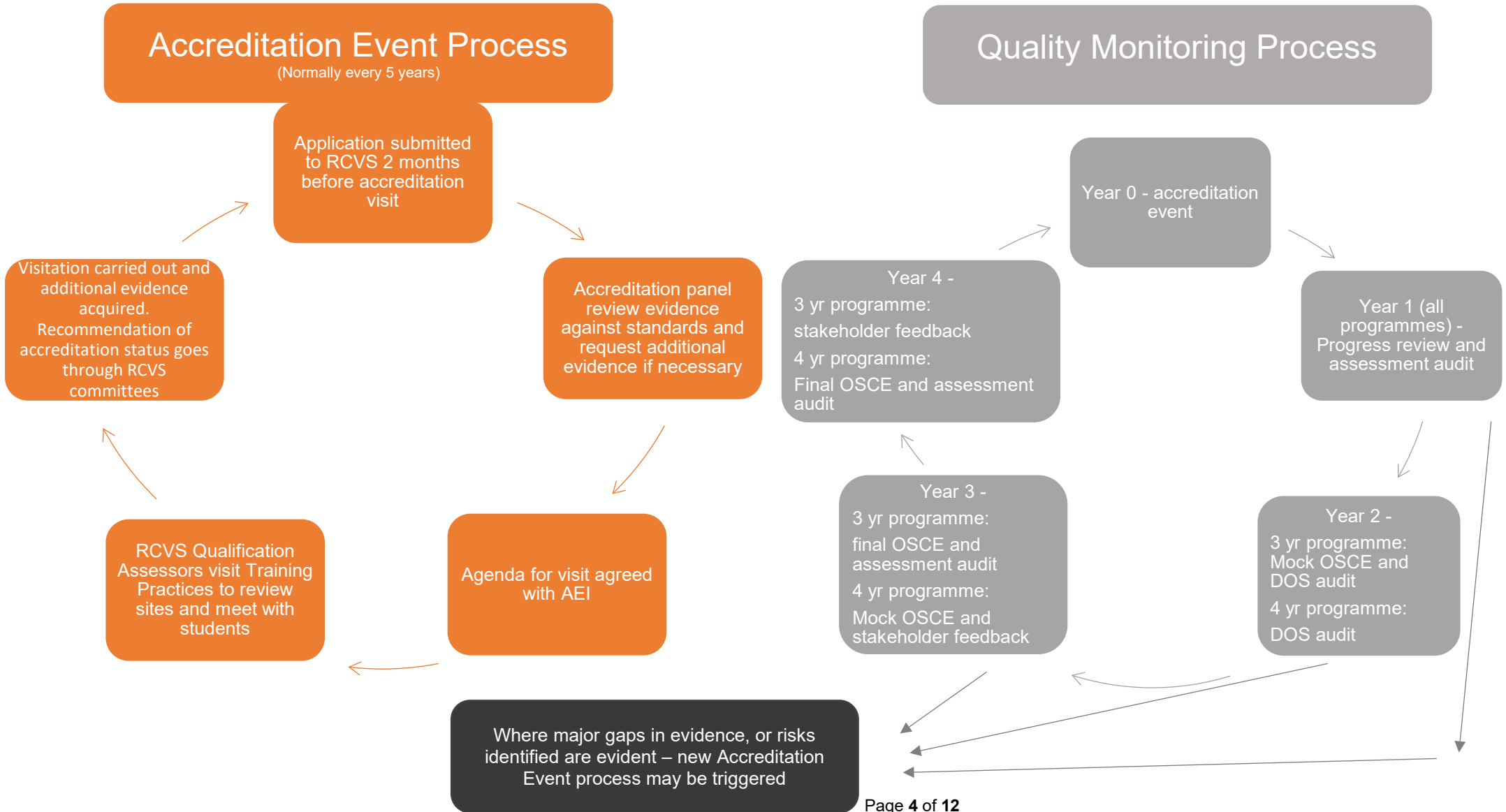


Figure 2: Accreditation cycle for Veterinary Nurse degree programme



The RCVS Council will have the accreditation outcomes for established programmes reported through the minutes of Education Committee and Vet Nurse Council.

Through the accreditation processes, the RCVS determines whether programmes leading to registration as a veterinary professional have met the relevant Standards for Education. This enables the RCVS to be assured that the programmes are of the required level and that those who are awarded a qualification are eligible to apply for registration with the RCVS, as either a veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse.

The IQA process gives confidence to the RCVS and stakeholders that the accreditation processes within the cycle are operating consistently and fairly within the published policies and procedures. The Procedures are detailed in a separate document, but are linked to the IQA activities listed here. The Quality Improvement Manager is responsible for ensuring the activities are completed. This is through the completion of a range of IQA activities within the accreditation cycle to include, but not limited to:

- An audit of the evidence in the repository (VS) or Application Form (VN) in preparation for the accreditation visit. (Item 1 in Procedure Document)
- Ensure the selection of the visitation team is free from conflict and training is sufficient to meet the demands of the role to ensure visitor decisions are consistent, reliable and free from bias. (Item 2 in Procedure Document)
- An audit of the evidence submitted and gathered for each Standard to check for accuracy (Item 4 in Procedure Document)
- An audit of measures in place to ensure the security of all potentially sensitive records and activities made available by the educational establishment for the purposes of the accreditation process. (Item 5 in Procedure Document)
- Ensure verbal feedback given on completion of a site visit is consistent with the findings and subsequent written report. (Item 6 in Procedure Document)
- Ensure the decision making of the final report is free from bias and is based on meeting the published Standards (Item 7 in Procedure Document)
- Thematic analysis of the outcomes of an accreditation review to enhance future practice. To be carried out by the Quality Improvement Manager.

Appeals procedure

In the event that an institution wishes to question the formal outcomes of the accreditation process, appeals procedures are detailed in “Standards and Procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees” and “RCVS Veterinary Nurse Visitation and Accreditation Appeals Procedure” both available on the RCVS website. Both procedures have recently undergone an update which has been ratified by the relevant committees.

Visitor training and Standardisation

Panel members for vet school accreditation events all undergo on-line training that is run on the RCVS academy platform. Training consists of 9 modules:

- Module 1 – purpose of accreditation and the process, to include panel member's responsibilities, approach and behaviours, unconscious bias, questioning techniques and use of the accreditation rubric
- Module 2 – Accreditation methodology
- Module 3 – Domain 1: The Learning Environment
- Module 4 – Domain 2: organisation, Culture and Values
- Module 5 – Domain 3: Educational Governance and Quality Improvement
- Module 6 – Domain 4: Supporting Students
- Module 7 – Domain 5: Supporting Educators
- Module 8 – Domain 6: Curriculum and Assessment
- Module 9 – Chairing a panel

The expectation is that all panel members will review all standards and domains, and will not be limited to specific domains.

Panel member training for vet nurse accreditation events follows a standardised approach for new panel members. Prior to the accreditation for which they are booked, new panel members attend a day training session delivered on-line. This training comprises a presentation, covering:

- the rationale behind accreditations
- agendas and timetables
- expected conduct and behaviours
- detailed review of the standards
- The IQA policy and procedures

Approximately 8 weeks before the visit, the VN panel members meet and have a brief reminder of their role and how to review the application sent by the educational establishment. All panel members are reminded that they can seek support and guidance from the VN team whenever needed. They are asked to complete a comments and questions form for each standard, to be discussed as a panel three weeks before the event.

Three weeks before the accreditation event, the panel members meet to share the comments and questions from their review of the evidence for each standard. Any further evidence required from the educational establishment is requested, and the focus for the visit is agreed.

The evening before the accreditation, all panel members attend a meeting in order to discuss the common themes, the timetable, good practice measures to ensure robust evidence gathering and reaffirm the agreed conduct and behaviour expected.

This training is also available to members of the PQSC and VNEC committees if they wish, to ensure thorough understanding of the processes linked to accreditation reviews.

The IQA policy is integral to the induction process of accreditation visitors and decision makers. The panel Chair will ensure that all accreditation panel members and decision makers have a responsibility to give full and active support for the policy by ensuring that it is known, understood and implemented appropriately.

All accreditation/re-accreditation reports will be published on the relevant part of the RCVS website.

Visitation activities

Before the visit, the panel assesses the evidence submitted in support of vet school and university accreditation applications. Based on the assessment, it is the role of the panel to identify and design suitable activities to ensure robust evidence of RCVS Accreditation Standards is obtained to inform recommendations and decisions. The planning of the visit and the visitation activities are monitored by the Quality Improvement Manager (QIM) to ensure that the accreditation activities are being conducted properly and consistently and that regulatory accreditation standards are being interpreted accurately. Any arising issues are identified before the visit and appropriate activities for the visit are recommended.

During the visit, it is the role of the panel Chair (supported by the staff member from the RCVS Education Department for Vet School visits, or Vet Nursing Department), to ensure that the accreditation process is conducted by the panel in a supportive manner and that accreditation practice is consistently applied, is of consistent quality, is sufficient and meets regulatory standards. This is also detailed in item 3 of the IQA Procedures

Once the visit is completed, the panel will develop accreditation reports identifying recommendations and actions for discussion by PQSC and VNEC respectively. For VN only, they will also review agreed action plans, and the panel is also on hand to provide guidance and support to vet schools and universities awarding licence to practise veterinary nursing qualification to achieve compliance with the RCVS Accreditation Standards as requested.

As a result of the visit, the QIM will use the data from observations and the evaluation of feedback to identify themes and trends within the veterinary schools and universities awarding licence to practise veterinary nursing qualifications as well internal quality improvement.

A representative sample of accreditation activities will be selected taking into account, as appropriate:

- Accreditation activities and events
- Accreditation and annual monitoring reports
- Schedules of activity
- Risk assessments
- Accreditation decisions
- Accreditation training and standardisation activities
- Feedback from all stakeholders

Report checking and approval by committees

Accreditation visitors and RCVS staff are responsible for undertaking accreditation activities and collecting robust supporting evidence that veterinary schools and universities awarding licence to practise veterinary nursing qualifications are compliant with RCVS Accreditation Standards.

The Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee (PQSC) will make recommendations to the Education Committee, based on the accreditation visit to Vet Schools. The Education Committee will make the final decision of the outcome of the visit. In the case of a new programme, the final outcome will rest with the RCVS Council. The Vet Nurse Education Committee (VNEC) are responsible for decision-making based on the evidence put forward by the accreditation visitation teams, which is then ratified by the VN Council.

These committees will ensure:

- The identification and design of suitable activities within the visitation to enable the gathering of robust evidence of RCVS Accreditation Standards to inform recommendations and decisions;
- The production of developmental advice and support for regulatory requirements
- Advice and guidance is given for all those working with the accreditation standards;
- Only approved individuals enter the accreditation visiting pools and that the visitation panels are reviewed and approved in advance
- Accreditation activity reports are appraised and will then decide on any recommendations and actions to agree accreditation status decisions;
- The monitoring of accreditation action plans and annual monitoring reports;
- Attendance at standardisation meetings as required.

The RCVS Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) has the overall responsibility to ensure compliance with the IQA Policy and Procedures and that the appropriate evidence is being correctly completed and submitted. This is completed on an annual basis. This committee in turn updates the RCVS Council by reviewing the comprehensiveness and reliability of assurances and internal controls.

IQA Procedure

Aim

To provide evidence of appropriate and effective accreditation practice to stakeholders and RCVS members'

In order to be successful, the quality procedure needs to focus on the following elements:

- valid and reliable evidence that accreditations are carried out in line with our policy and procedures
- Competent and efficient analysis of the evidence.
- Clear and consistent practices for judging evidence of best practice

Policy Aim	Action steps: What will need to be done to implement the aim	Who is responsible	Resources needed in order to complete the action	Evidence: The result of completing the action
1. An audit of the evidence in the repository (VS) or Application Form (VN) in preparation for the accreditation visit.	Repository / Application Form checked to ensure all standards are addressed by educational establishment. Triangulation of the Application Form against the visit agenda to ensure all standards are evidenced.	Lead for Undergraduate Education (VS) Qualifications Manager (VN)	Repository / Application Form	Ensures the visitation schedule has sufficient time allocated to it to gather the required evidence for all standards
2. Ensure the selection of the accreditation panel team is free from conflict and training is sufficient to meet the demands of the role to ensure panel member decisions are consistent, reliable and free from bias	Complete a training register to ensure all members of the team have: * undergone the relevant training to VS or VN panel members * have read the relevant standards documents and methodologies. * have observed at least one visit if appropriate * are fully aware of their responsibilities as an accreditation panel member.	Training for VS panel members is carried out online using the RCVS academy platform. Training for VN panel members is carried out by the VN Qualifications Manager,	Spreadsheet showing the list of panel members, the visits they have undertaken and their training record. "Visitors conflict of interest declaration" forms.	Spreadsheet of panel members and their experience is up to date Annual review of panel members takes place List of conflicts for each panel member

	<p>Ensure the institution being visited and the panel members have had the opportunity to declare any potential conflicts of interest.</p> <p>Regular review of the panel members on the approved list</p> <p>Training to be available to members of the reviewing committees (PQSC and VNEC) if requested.</p>	<p>Lead for Undergraduate Education / VN Qualifications Manager co-ordinate conflicts of interest declarations.</p> <p>Lead for Undergraduate Education / VN Qualifications Manager to review panel member list with the Quality Improvement Manager.</p>	<p>Annual review of panel member lists</p>	
<p>3. Ensure that the panel conducts the accreditation process in a supportive manner and that accreditation practice is consistently applied, is of consistent quality, is sufficient but does not demand more than specified, and meets regulatory standards.</p>	<p>Training for panel Chair to enable them to accurately guide the activities of the visitors. Refresher training to take place regularly, as well as initial training.</p> <p>Visitor training to include guidance on consistency of application of standards.</p> <p>Quality Improvement Manager or RCVS representative to have an active role in checking activities being carried out by each member of the panel and ensuring compliance with standards.</p>	<p>Panel chair</p> <p>VN Qualifications Manager / RCVS academy</p> <p>RCVS representative at accreditation event</p>	<p>Internal Audit of Panel Member Activity</p> <p>Panel member training</p>	<p>The feedback from the University indicates that the process has been fair and supportive.</p> <p>There is an audit trail of panel member activity to provide evidence of sound practice.</p> <p>Any feedback can be used to guide and develop the panel member training.</p>
<p>4. An audit of the evidence submitted and gathered that contributes to a decision to check for validity and</p>	<p>For VN accreditation events, each panel member reviews all the evidence for every standard and is then allocated a standard(s) according to their particular specialism. For VS accreditation events, all panel members review evidence across all domains and standards.</p>	<p>Lead for Undergraduate Education / VN Qualifications Manager / Quality Improvement Manager</p>	<p>Standards for VN and VS</p>	<p>The final report details triangulated evidence of how each standard has been met, and each standard is evidenced.</p> <p>Any areas of good practice can be shared.</p>

triangulation if required.	At the end of each day of the visit (VS) or at interim points during the day (VN) the panel will come to together and review the evidence seen to accredit each standard. The panel will decide if more evidence is required to accredit the standard and plans put in place to achieve this. RCVS staff will be part of this activity to ensure the standard requirements are met.			
5. An audit of measures in place to ensure the security of all records and activities are in line with RCVS policies and procedures	Panel member training includes security and confidentiality measures in place during a visit. Panel chair to ensure compliance by the panel members during and after the visit. Compliance confirmed by RCVS staff on visit	Panel chair RCVS representative at accreditation event	Panel member training Log of security breaches and subsequent investigations	There are no breaches in confidentiality of potentially sensitive documents made available to the accreditation panel during the visit.
6. An audit of the verbal feedback given on completion of a site visit to ensure standardisation	The verbal feedback is compared with the written report to ensure that there are no “surprises” in the final report, ie that everything mentioned in the verbal report appears in the written report. Ensure that the verbal feedback is delivered appropriately and in a constructive manner. Check that the verbal feedback follows the published rubric	Panel chair Quality Improvement Manager or RCVS representative	Verbal report template Final written report	The verbal feedback is triangulated against the final report and the details are consistent. The verbal feedback rubric can also feed into the thematic analysis.
7. Ensure the decision making of the final report is free from bias and is based on evidence that the published Standards have been met	Once the panel members have written the report, it is returned to the educational establishment for them to provide a factual check. This is returned to the RCVS who then amend accordingly and then send the final report to the educational establishment for their response.	Accreditation panel	Standards for VN and VS Visit report	The feedback from the university on the visit indicates that the details are factually correct

	<p>When the report is returned by the university, it is then forward to the panel members to triangulate the evidence against the responses from the university.</p> <p>The report is then forwarded to the relevant RCVS committee (VN reports go to the VN Education Committee and the VS reports go to the Primary Qualifications Sub Committee) who review the report and ratify the decisions made.</p> <p>The report is then published on the RCVS website. The number of checks in place ensures that the decision making is free from bias.</p> <p>The recommendations and suggestions will be checked by RCVS staff to ensure the evidence provided from the visit and self-assessment triangulates the decisions.</p>	<p>Committee members Lead for Undergraduate Education VN Qualifications Manager Quality Improvement Manager</p>		<p>The committees who have viewed and validated the report are in agreement with the commendations, recommendations and suggestions for improvement</p>
<p>8. Feedback on the accreditation process from all stakeholders (Vet School, University, panel members)</p>	<p>All stakeholders who are involved in the accreditation process have the opportunity to feedback on their experience without prejudice. The stakeholders are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vet School Staff / VN staff • Students at Educational establishment who are directly involved in the accreditation process through meetings and panels • Other stakeholders such as employers and alumni • Panel members 	<p>Quality Improvement Manager</p>	<p>Feedback questionnaires are on-line and are individualised for each role</p>	<p>Each stakeholder is able to provide feedback without prejudice. The methodology will allow for feedback to be gained that can then be used to guide future accreditation visits.</p>