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# RCVS Survey of the Veterinary Professions 2014 Synthesis Report

Dilys Robinson

Matthew Williams

Jonathan Buzzeo

## Institute for Employment Studies

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**Institute for Employment Studies**

City Gate  
185 Dyke Road  
Brighton BN3 1TL  
UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1273 763400  
Email: [askies@employment-studies.co.uk](mailto:askies@employment-studies.co.uk)  
Website: [www.employment-studies.co.uk](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk)

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## 1 Introduction

This synthesis report presents an overview and comparison of the results of two surveys – of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses - carried out in 2014 on behalf of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). The surveys were in the field during April and May 2014, and yielded a response rate of 27 per cent (6,988 responses) from veterinary surgeons and 31 per cent (5,496 responses) from veterinary nurses (3,612 qualified nurses and 1,792 students). Throughout this report, the abbreviations ‘VS and ‘VN’ are used for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, the latter to include students unless otherwise specified.

The membership category of VS respondents is given in Table 1.1, which shows that a significant minority of VSs are practising overseas or are non-practising, with 43 per cent of non-practising VSs being in the retired (aged 70 plus) category. Fourteen per cent of VS respondents are not working (due to unemployment, a career break or retirement), compared to just four per cent of VN respondents. It is worth noting that there is no ‘non-practising’ or ‘overseas-practising’ registration category for veterinary nurses.

**Table 1.1: RCVS membership category of respondents: VSs**

	Frequency	%
UK-practising	4,957	72.3
Practising outside the UK	721	10.5
Non-practising	539	7.9
Non-practising (70 years plus)	414	6
Southern Irish	224	3.3
Total	6,855	100

*Source: VS Survey, 2014*

## 2 Biographical profile of respondents

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### 2.1 Gender

For the first time, female VS respondents to the 2014 survey outnumbered males: 54 per cent female, 46 per cent male, suggesting that the 'feminisation' of the veterinary profession is continuing. This gap is even greater for VSs working within the veterinary profession: 57 per cent female, 43 per cent male.

The VN profession is overwhelmingly female, with just two per cent male; this has not changed in comparison with previous VN surveys.

### 2.2 Age

The age of VS respondents ranges from 23 to 93, with a mean average of 44.3 (compared to 45.5 in 2010). Consistent with previous surveys, around 49 per cent of VSs are between 30 and 49 years. Due to the majority of retired VSs being male, and the high proportions of women entering the profession, the average age of male VSs is higher than that for females: 51.6 compared to 38.

VNs, as would be expected in a profession that has far fewer retired members, are much younger on average than VSs, with a mean average age of 31 (similar to the previous two surveys). Male VNs are younger than female VNs on average, and full-time workers and younger than part-time workers. The proportion of young VNs aged under 20 (almost all students) has increased since the 2010 survey, from three to seven per cent of respondents.

### 2.3 Ethnicity

Minority ethnic representation in the veterinary professions remains very low: three per cent of VSs, two per cent of VNs.

### 2.4 Dependants

Altogether 32.5 per cent of VSs, and 23 per cent of VNs, have dependent children living with them; of these, 70 per cent of VSs and 80 per cent of VNs are in their 30s or 40s.

Five-and-a-half per cent of VSs, and three per cent of VNs, provide care to a dependent adult. As might be expected, the majority of respondents caring for adult dependants are over 40.

## 2.5 Disability

Six-and-a-half per cent of VSs, and four per cent of VNs, have a disability or medical condition that limits the work they can do. In both professions, the proportion of respondents with disabilities increases with age; the majority of respondents who report having such a condition are aged 50 or over.

## 2.6 Social mobility

The 2014 surveys asked, for the first time, a series of questions with the aim of assessing the social mobility of individuals.

- 51% of VSs, and 22% of VNs, stated that their parents or guardians had been degree-educated.
- With regard to the type of school attended between the ages of 11 to 16:
  - 26% of VSs, and 71% of VNs, had attended a non-selective state-funded school
  - 20% of VSs, and 17% of VNs, had attended a selective state-funded school
  - 24% of VSs, and 6% of VNs, had attended an independent or fee-paying school
  - A high 30% of VSs, compared to only 4% of VNs, has attended school outside the UK.
- 8% of VSs, and 14% of VNs, had lived in households that were in receipt of income support at some time during their school years.
- 10% of VSs, and 13% of VNs, had received free school meals at some point during their school years.

## 3 Work status

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### 3.1 VSs

The proportion of respondents in full-time work (65.4%) has remained relatively stable since the last survey (2010) after declining from 68 to 64 per cent between 2006 and 2010, although it is worth noting that this was a survey of RCVS members and not all of those who are without work will opt to continue their membership. The number of respondents in part-time work, however, is continuing to rise year on year: 19 per cent

in 2014, compared to 11 per cent in 2000. As in previous surveys, women are more likely to be working part-time than men; however, the proportion of men doing so has more than doubled since the 2010 and 2006 surveys, from five per cent to 11 per cent of respondents. Ten per cent of respondents are currently retired, and the vast majority of these (86.4%) are male. These proportions have not altered significantly since 2010. Table 3.1 gives more detail.

**Table 3.1: Employment status by gender, VSs (percentages)**

Employment status	2014		2010		2006	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Full-time work	67.8	64.5	66.5	62	70	64
Part-time work	11.2	26	5.5	26	5	25
Voluntary work	1.2	1.2	0.5	0.3	-	-
Unemployed	1.1	1.9	1	2	0.5	1
Taking a career break	0.7	4	0.5	5	0.5	5
Retired	18	2.4	26.5	5	23	5

Source: VS Survey, 2014

### 3.2 VNs

For VNs, it is age rather than gender that most influences work status. The proportion of respondents in full-time work (67%) has decreased markedly since 2010, while the proportion in clinical work experience has more than doubled to nine per cent. This is partly a reflection of the changing age profile of respondents, with an increase in the proportion aged under 20, the vast majority of whom are student VNs. Full-time working is most common among respondents in their 20s (75%), and declines with age from 30 onwards, while part-time work becomes more common among the older age groups. Table 3.2 gives more detail.

**Table 3.2: Employment status by age, VNs (percentages)**

Employment status	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 plus	All ages
Full-time work	23.2	75.1	67.8	62.5	60.1	38.9	67.1
Part-time work	13.8	8.3	27.4	33.9	35.2	47.2	18.9
Clinical work experience	44.7	11.9	1.3	0.8	0.0	0.0	9.0
Other (voluntary work/ not working)	18.4	4.5	3.7	2.6	4.7	13.9	5.1

Source: VN Survey, 2014

## 4 Country of employment

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Eighty-five per cent of VSs currently in employment, and almost all VNs, are working within the UK, again it is worth noting that there is not a 'practising outside the UK' registration category for VNs. For VSs, the percentage has declined slightly since the 2010 survey, when 89 per cent worked in the UK; the next highest proportions are working within Ireland and other EU countries.

Of those currently working in the UK, 19 per cent of VSs, compared with only two per cent of VNs, are non-British nationals. When non-British nationals were asked to provide the reasons why they came to the UK, the most popular reason given by VSs was 'to work abroad' (49%), while VNs cited 'to study' (31%), 'to work abroad' (29%), or 'marriage/partner' (28%).

## 5 Work location

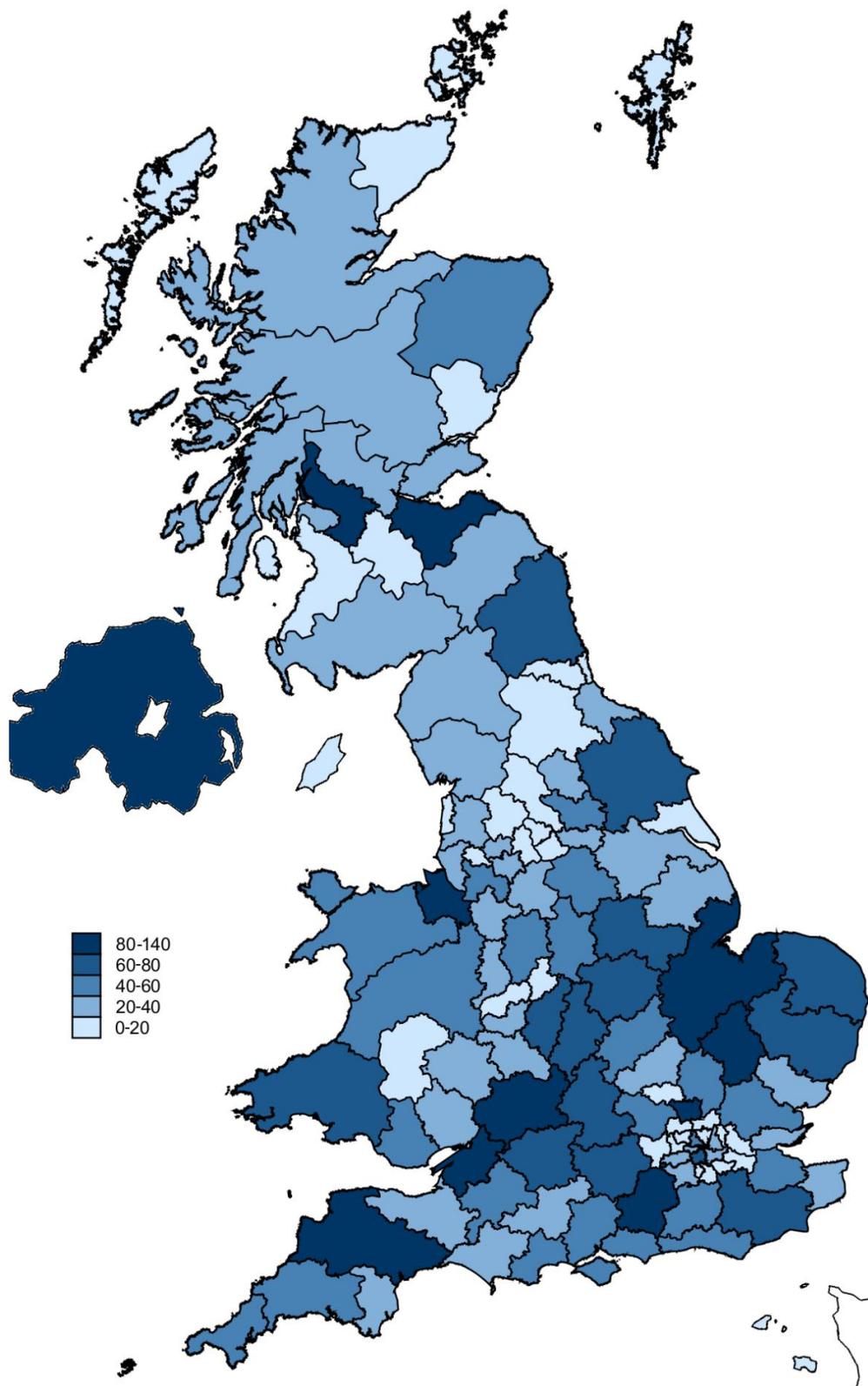
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Figure 5.1 shows the distribution of VS respondents around the UK, using the first part of the workplace postcode to allocate VSs to a geographical area. Figure 5.2 gives the distribution of VNs, using the same method. The data are not related to the population size of postcode areas but merely indicate the number of respondents at workplaces in each postcode area<sup>1</sup> (NB Appendix Tables to the separate reports present the actual numbers of VS and VN respondents in each postcode area).

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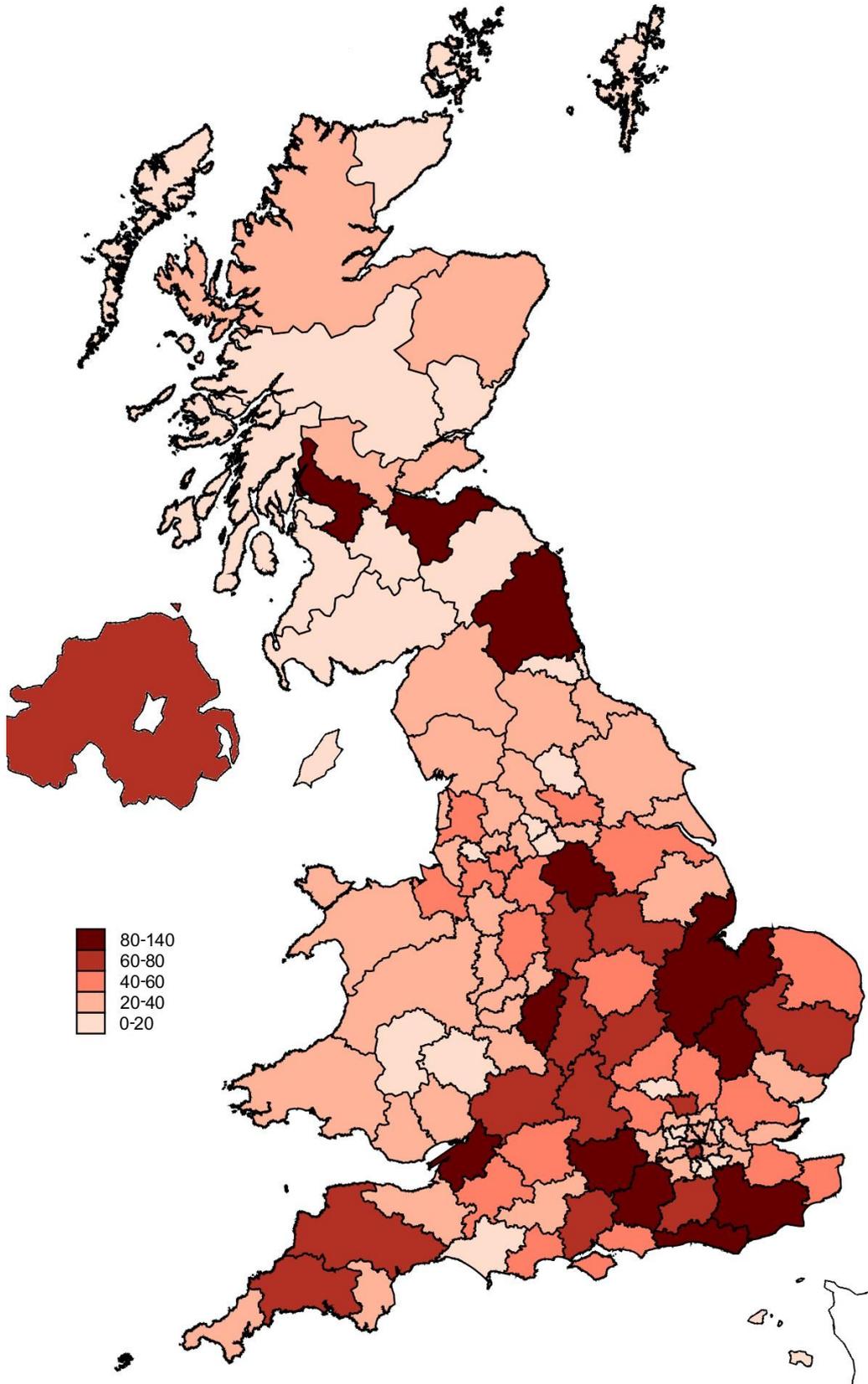
<sup>1</sup> The eight London postcodes (E, EC, N, NW, SE, SW, W and WC) are geographically small, with each having low to medium numbers of respondents and the largest numbers of respondents working in SW postcodes, but taken together there are 230 VS respondents and 201 VN respondents working across all eight postcode areas.

Figure 5.1: Postcode of main workplace, VSs



Source: VS Survey, 2014

Figure 5.2: Postcode of main workplace, VNs



Source: VN Survey, 2014

## 6 Second jobs

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VNs (but not VSs) were asked if they had a second job, and almost 18 per cent said they did. Of these, around half work in an animal- or veterinary-related field in their second job, although student VNs with second jobs are more likely to do retail, catering or bar work.

## 7 Working outside the veterinary profession

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Five per cent of both VSs and VNs are currently working outside the veterinary profession (i.e. in a role that does not require a veterinary qualification or the use of veterinary skills). Of these, two-thirds of VSs, and one half of VNs, are working within non-animal-related organisations.

Half (51%) of the VNs currently working outside the veterinary profession, compared to only 26 per cent of VSs, intend to re-enter the profession, while 24 per cent of VSs, and 33 per cent of VNs, are undecided. The rest, 50 per cent of VSs and 16 per cent of VNs, do not intend to return.

Of those who had, at some point in the past, worked in the profession, the majority had done so for a considerable time before leaving. VN leavers had worked for an average of 11 years in the profession, while the majority (57%) of VSs had over ten years' service in the profession.

## 8 Working within the veterinary profession

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Of the 95 per cent of respondents who currently work within the veterinary profession, 54 per cent of VSs, and 69 per cent of VNs, work in small animal/exotic practices; 16 per cent of VSs, and 18 per cent of VNs, work in mixed animal practices; and eight per cent of VSs, and 11 per cent of VNs, work in referral practices/consultancies.

Outside clinical practice, the most common types of organisation in which respondents are employed are, in order, for VSs veterinary schools, charities and trusts, and commerce and industry; and for VNs charities and trusts, and education organisations.

## 8.1 Hours of work

VSs working in mixed practices, small animal/exotic practices and equine practices work the longest hours on average per week (including overtime but excluding on-call time) across all practice areas (i.e. over 40 hours). For VNs, those working in small animal/exotic practices work an average of 36 hours per week, in mixed practice 35 hours per week, and in referral practices/consultancies 34 hours per week. Working hours for VNs have decreased since 2010 when average working times in these practice areas were 39-40 hours per week.

Both VSs and VNs who work outside clinical practice tend to have somewhat shorter working hours; for VSs, those working in veterinary schools and in 'other UK government agencies' work the longest hours on average during a typical week (39.3 hours in both instances).

## 8.2 On-call time

For VSs, the highest on-call hours away from respondents' place of work were found in practice, particularly in the areas of equine, mixed practice and farm/production animal practice work (see Table 8.1). The balance of on-call on and off the premises has changed between 2010 and 2014. On-call *on* the premises has increased noticeably in every practice type, apart from 'farm and production animal practices', while on-call *off* the premises has decreased in every practice type.

**Table 8.1: Average hours worked and on-call by different areas of practice (UK VSs)**

Type of practice	Hours worked	On-call (off premises)	On-call (on premises)
Mixed practice	41.0	20.2	3.8
Small animal/exotic practice	40.9	6.6	3.1
Equine practice	40.4	23.2	9.4
Farm practice/production animal practice	37.4	18.7	1.3
Other first opinion practice	33.5	6.9	11.8
Referral practice/consultancy	34.8	13.4	3.5

Source: VS Survey, 2014

For VNs, on-call hours off the premises were similarly longer than those on the premises (see Table 8.2); although the differences are not so marked as they are for VSs. For VNs, on-call hours are broadly similar to those in 2010.

**Table 8.2: Average hours worked and on-call by different areas of practice (UK VNs)**

	Hours worked	On call (off premises)	On call (on premises)
Mixed practice	34.6	17.8	12.7
Small animal/exotic practice	35.7	18.4	13.9
Equine practice	34.6	21.4	11.2
Farm practice/production animal practice	23.3	-	-
Other first opinion practice	33.0	-	7.8
Referral practice/consultancy	34.4	20.4	14.9

Source: VN survey, 2014

### 8.3 Employer benefits

There was some variation in the employer benefits received by VSs and VNs. For VSs, the most commonly-received benefits are training/CPD support (85%), personal indemnity insurance (60%), no/reduced pet fees (55%) and uniform/work clothing (52%). For VNs, the 'top four' benefits are uniform/work clothing (87%), training/CPD support (86%), no/reduced pet fees (73%) and RCVS retention fees paid in whole or part (46%).

### 8.4 Career intentions

When asked about their future career plans, 83 per cent of both VSs and VNs working in the UK plan to stay in the profession for the foreseeable future. However, 16 per cent of VNs, compared to only nine per cent of VSs, intend to leave the profession for reasons other than retirement at some point over the next five years.

For VSs, dissatisfaction with veterinary work (e.g. working hours, stress) is the most commonly cited reason for planning to leave the profession. Other reasons provided by the majority of intended leavers are being 'fed up with the way the veterinary profession is going' and not feeling that their work is adequately rewarded or valued in non-financial terms. For VNs, the reasons are somewhat different: pay is the most commonly-given reason, followed by not feeling rewarded or valued in non-financial terms.

## 9 Working within clinical practice

Of VS respondents working within the veterinary profession, 85 per cent are currently engaged in clinical practice work within the UK. For VNs, the proportion is higher, at 89 per cent.

### 9.1 Position in practice

Over half of VSs currently working in a clinical practice (57%) hold the position of either a full-time or part-time assistant, the same proportion as in 2010. The proportion of VSs working as equity partners, however, has more than halved since 2010. There has also been a steady decline in the proportion of VSs working as sole principals, from 11 per cent 2006 to five per cent in 2014. A breakdown by gender shows considerable differences in the positions held by men and women (see Table 9.1). However, compared to the 2010 survey, the proportion of female respondents working as directors has increased (from 4.9% to 6.5%).

**Table 9.1: Position in practice by gender, VSs (percentages)**

Position	Male	Female
Sole Principal	7.6	3.1
Director (of limited company)	24.5	6.5
Equity Partner	11.8	2.8
Salaried Partner	2.9	1.4
Assistant (or employee of limited company)	36.2	70.7
Consultant	5.1	2.2
Locum	8.1	8.5
Vet working as a veterinary nurse	0.1	0.3
Other	3.7	4.5

*Source: VS Survey, 2014*

For VNs in clinical practice, the most common position is 'Nurse' (44%), followed by 'Student nurse' (31%) and 'Head nurse (including deputy & senior)' (22%). One in ten VNs work in more than one practice, and this proportion rises to 58 per cent of locum VNs.

## 9.2 Work undertaken

On average, VSs in practice spend a large share of their working time (77% of their working hours) on treating small animals, particularly dogs and cats; nine per cent is spent on horses. By contrast, the average amount of time that respondents report spending on farm animals, in particular cattle, has declined since the last survey and is now at seven per cent. VNs, similarly, spend the majority of their time (79%) on dogs and cats, with most of the rest spent on either practice management or administration (9%), or on rabbits (8%).

The most common tasks undertaken by VNs are clinical cleaning and administering medicines by injection, with more than three quarters of respondents stating they do these tasks every day. Other tasks undertaken every day by most VNs include caring for hospitalised animals, dispensing medications to clients, administering anaesthetic pre-medication, monitoring anaesthesia, and general domestic cleaning. Tasks rarely or never undertaken by VNs included performing minor surgical procedures, and dental extraction or dental hygiene work. Almost three quarters of VNs (73%) are involved in some nursing clinics, most commonly nutrition and puppy/kitten clinics, while 70 per cent have particular areas of expertise, with weight management and nutrition/diabetes the most commonly mentioned. Fifteen per cent of VNs undertake visits to clients, a much lower percentage than in 2010 (28%); almost all these visits take place during normal clinical hours.

## 9.3 Out-of-hours work and 24/7 emergency cover

Only nine per cent of VSs in clinical practice work in the UK are based primarily at a dedicated out-of-hours service provider; this compares with 16 per cent of VSs working overseas. The 91 per cent who do not primarily work at such a provider were asked to describe their practice's approach to providing 24/7 cover. Over half (56%) stated that their practice covers its own out-of-hours work, a lower proportion than in 2010 (61%). An increased proportion of VSs reported that their practice utilises a dedicated out-of-hours service provider for 24/7 cover compared to the previous survey (34.7% compared to 25.6% in 2010).

## 9.4 Emergency cases

Over the last 12 months of practice, on average, VSs dealt with an average (mean) of 73.5 emergency cases out-of-hours at their workplace. However, this average figure has been influenced by a relatively small number of respondents who reported very high numbers of emergencies. A better indication of the 'typical' VS experience is provided by the median value: this shows that 50 per cent of respondents had dealt with 40 or fewer emergency cases over the past year. In terms of the average number of emergency cases that respondents dealt with out-of-hours *away* from their practice

over the past 12 months, the mean value was over 30, although 50 per cent of the sample had dealt with ten cases or fewer.

## 9.5 Working time arrangements

Key findings regarding working time arrangements include:

- 50% of VSs currently working in a UK clinical practice manage to have a minimum rest period of 11 hours in each 24-hour period. By contrast, a much higher 79% of VNs do so. Of those who do not have this rest period, ten per cent of VSs, and 11 per cent of VNs, have signed up to a workforce agreement that provides other compensatory rest.
- 86% per cent of UK-practising VSs, and 94% of VNs, reported that they have at least two rest days in every 14-day period.
- 87% of VSs, and 91% of VNs, take at least 20 days' paid holiday each year (plus bank holidays).

## 10 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

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Of those VS respondents who have engaged in CPD activities over the past 12 months, a large proportion (85%) have undertaken ad hoc, undocumented private study. Other popular CPD provision methods include attending lectures by external providers (77%) and engaging in distance learning via webinars (70%). An average of 47 per cent of this provision was funded by their employer, while 28 per cent was free and 18 per cent was self-funded. Qualified VNs favoured somewhat different CPD methods: the most commonly used methods are lectures by external providers (70%), distance learning via webinars (64%) and ad hoc, undocumented private study (61%). On average, 43 per cent of this provision had been funded by their employer, and 41 per cent was free. For both VSs and VNs, there has been a big shift from employer-funded provision towards free provision since 2010.

### 10.1 Further education

A substantial proportion (44% of VSs and 26% of VNs) currently hold an additional veterinary-related qualification, other than their primary qualification. Over a fifth (21%) of VSs, and 12 per cent of VNs, are currently studying for further work-related qualifications, while 33 per cent of VSs and 28 per cent of VNs plan to do so over the

next five years. For VNs, the RCVS DipAVN is the most common qualification being studied for or planned.

## 11 Electronic communications and use of the internet at work

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Forty-seven per cent of VSs, compared to a much lower 29 per cent of VNs, use smart phones or tablets for work purposes. Among VSs, the use of such devices at work declines with age; however, for VNs there is less variation by age, with 26 per cent of those in their 50s using smart phones or tablets. The most commonly-used social networking site used for work purposes for both VSs and VNs is Facebook, although among VNs [www.vetnurse.co.uk](http://www.vetnurse.co.uk) is popular. Older VSs and VNs (in their 40s and 50s) are more likely than their younger counterparts to use LinkedIn.

## 12 Recently-qualified VSs

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Among those respondents who had become qualified as VSs from 2011 onwards (N = 642), over half (52%) stated that after graduating they went straight into practice; however, 17.8 per cent of respondents indicated that they took some time out of work following their graduation as they were unable to find employment. Table 12.1 gives more detail.

Comparing respondents' answers to this question based on whether or not they qualified in the UK, it is clear that a much higher share of non-UK qualifiers (23%) began an internship following graduation compared to those who had attained their veterinary qualification in the UK (5%). However, 59 per cent of UK qualifiers went straight in practice post-graduation, compared to only 33 per cent who qualified outside the UK.

**Table 12.1: Activities of recently-qualified VVs following graduation (percentages)**

	Post-2011 qualifiers (%)
Went straight into practice	52
Began postgraduate studies	1.4
Began an internship	10
Worked abroad for a charity or other practice	7.6
Took some time out for travel	6.5
Took some time out as you were unable to find a job	17.8
Other	4.7

Source: VS Survey, 2014

## 13 VN students and recent qualifiers

Around half (52%) of the 1,363 VN student respondents intend to remain employed in their training practice when they qualify (somewhat lower than the 61% in 2010), and a higher proportion now intend to move to another practice (31% compared with 23% in 2010). Just over a third (36%) of student VNs had obtained a training position in the first practice they approached, although one in five (20%) had to approach more than 20 practices before they were taken on.

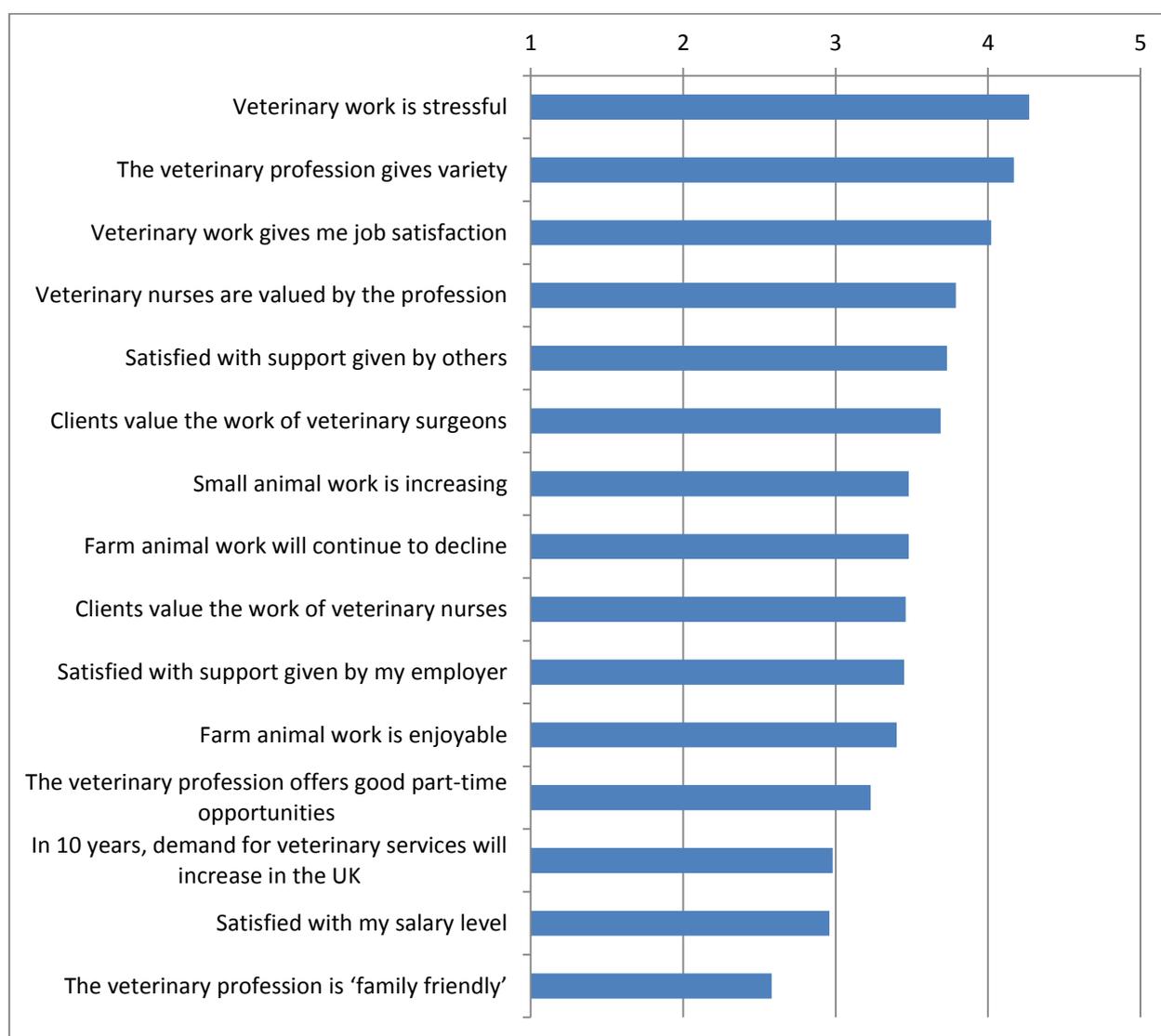
Among those respondents who had become qualified as VNs from 2012 onwards (N = 553), nearly two thirds (65%) remained employed in their training practice. This proportion is above that of current students who intend to remain in their training practice, but that was also the case in the 2010 survey. Three quarters of recent qualifiers (78%) are still in their first post-qualification position, somewhat below the proportion in the 2010 survey of 88%.

Day-release courses are the most common course structure, with 55 per cent of students and recent qualifiers studying in this way. However, those who did or are doing day-release courses are less satisfied with the quality of their training practice and college/university experiences than those who did or are doing block-release or full-time degree courses.

## 14 Views about the profession

The average (mean) scores of VSs, indicating their views about various aspects of the profession, are shown in Figure 12.1.

**Figure 14.1: Views about work and the profession (mean scores)**



Note: Scale is based on 1 = strongly disagree, 2 =disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree

Source: VS Survey, 2014

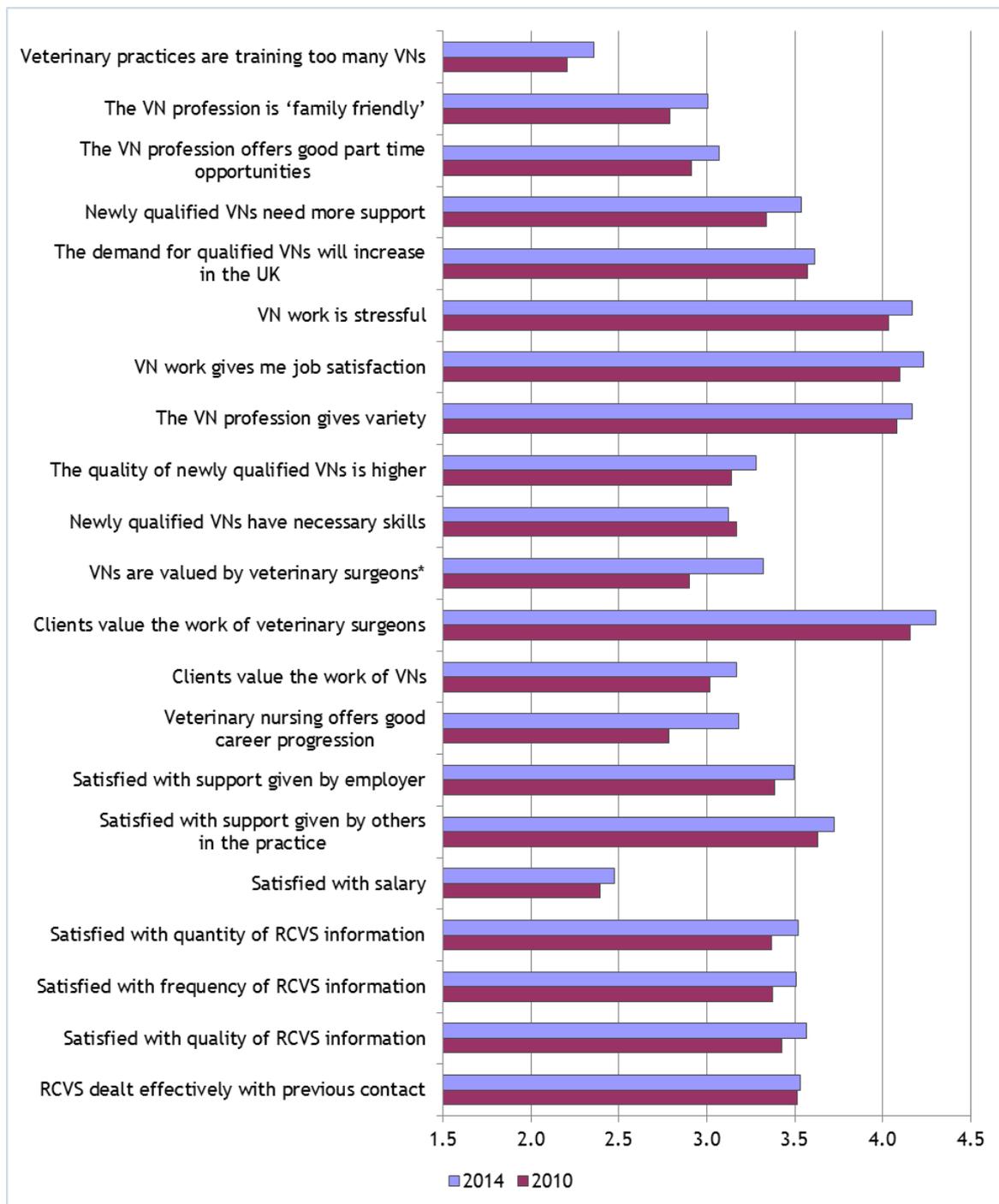
A very large majority of VSs (almost 90%) agrees that veterinary work is stressful. However, a similar proportion agrees that veterinary work gives variety, and over 80

per cent agree that being a VS gives job satisfaction. There is also general agreement that clients value the work of VSs, and that VNs are valued within the profession.

Among VNs, views are very positive about VN work giving job satisfaction and variety, but there is dissatisfaction with pay and with stress levels in the job. However, for VNs views have generally become more positive since the 2010 survey about most aspects of working life; much of this improvement is related to younger respondents (mostly students) being generally more positive than their older counterparts about job satisfaction and with a career in the profession. The average (mean) scores for VNs are shown in Figure 12.2, with the 2010 scores for comparison to demonstrate the shift in opinion.

Survey respondents were also asked to consider the best aspects of the profession, possible improvements and the challenges it currently faces. VSs stated that the best aspects of their work were the job satisfaction and the challenge and stimulus it provided them with. However, respondents believe that the profession could be improved through better pay/remuneration for VSs, and expressed concern at the high demands placed on them by clients and the levels of stress that they felt they were under.

Figure 14.2: Views of VNs about their profession, 2014 and 2010, mean scores



\* wording of statement changed from 'VNs are valued by the veterinary profession' in 2010 to 'VNs are valued by veterinary surgeons' in the current survey which may have influenced responses

Source: VN survey, 2014 and 2010

VNs had a somewhat different set of best aspects and desired improvements: the best aspects of their work are working with animals and job satisfaction, while the main

challenges and suggestions for areas for improvement centred around pay and getting respect and recognition from the public.

In terms of views about their career choices:

- 60% of VNs, compared to a notably lower 46% of VSs, stated that they would still opt for a career in the veterinary profession if they had the choice again. The VNs percentage has improved since 2010, when it was 54%.
- 25% of VSs would definitely not choose to pursue a veterinary career again, compared to a much lower 15% of VNs.

Not surprisingly, the views of both VSs and VNs who would still opt for the profession if they could start their career again are notably more positive than those who had doubts or who would not opt to do so, across the full range of aspects of working life.

## 15 Well-being

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For the second time, respondents to the RCVS survey were asked to respond to a short series of questions concerning their well-being in both their professional and personal lives. To do this, a 14-item scale of mental well-being known as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) was used. Individual items are scored from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time) and a total scale score is calculated by summing the 14 item scores. The minimum score is 14 and the maximum is 70. The average population mean is around 51.

The mean WEMWBS score for VSs is 49, slightly below the average population mean; respondents to the 2010 survey had the same average score. Female VSs have a lower average score than male respondents (47.8 compared to 49.5), although this gender divide has narrowed slightly since 2010 when female respondents had an average WEMWBS score of 48, while males had a mean score of 50.

The mean WEMWBS score for VNs is lower than for VSs, at 47.5. Again, this is below the average population mean although it has not decreased since the 2010 survey. Compared with the 2010 results, VNs now feel more useful, are thinking more clearly and are dealing with problems better, but feel less relaxed and less loved. As for VSs, female VNs have a lower average score than male respondents (47.5 compared with 49.3). It is also noteworthy that VNs aged under 20 (48.9) have higher scores than their older counterparts.