Postgraduate qualifications – a position statement by the RCVS and BSAVA

For thirty years, veterinary postgraduate qualifications at certificate level have been available within the UK; until recently, these were organised through and awarded by the RCVS. In recent years the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice has been introduced, with assessment of accredited modules by a range of universities, and the final award made by the RCVS. With the development of the BSAVA Postgraduate Certificate programmes, questions have naturally arisen regarding the equivalence of these two programmes, and whether a stated requirement for ‘a certificate’ for a particular purpose refers to the general level of postgraduate qualification or to one particular qualification. It is natural that prospective candidates and employers should ask such questions when considering options for postgraduate study.

Representatives from the RCVS CertAVP subcommittee and BSAVA have therefore discussed the RCVS and BSAVA certificate programmes in detail. The statement here is intended to set out agreed principles which might be needed to allow resolution of any future questions about equivalence or accreditation.

- The RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (CertAVP) and the BSAVA Postgraduate Certificates (PGCertSAM and PGCertSAS) are academically equivalent. Each qualification is positioned at Level 7 (Masters) within the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and carries 60 academic credits at this level. The qualifications are therefore, by definition, academically equivalent.

- The RCVS CertAVP and the BSAVA PGCert are similar, but not identical, in content (depending on the modules studied). They differ in structure. The two qualifications are therefore likely to appeal to different groups of individuals, depending on their interests and preferred style of learning. Both qualifications are intended to develop practitioners who are able to deliver a consistently high standard of care to their patients.

- Transfer of academic credits between the two programmes (RCVS CertAVP and BSAVA PGCert) would, in theory, be possible. The two programmes have a different modular structure, and some difference in content (depending on the modules studied). Formal requests by candidates to transfer credit from partial completion of one programme towards the other would be considered on an individual basis, according to the guidelines of the RCVS or BSAVA (with guidance from Nottingham Trent University), as applicable. The concept of academic credits from either qualification being accepted towards a full Masters degree in the future is welcomed by RCVS and BSAVA.
• Accreditation of the RCVS CertAVP and the BSAVA PGCert for any particular purpose would be considered against defined objectives. The principles pertaining to academic equivalence and credit structure would apply. No universally applicable principle would be in place, but accreditation arrangements should usually consider outputs, or statements of competency, rather than inputs, such as specific qualifications. Therefore where the particular purpose requires evidence of postgraduate development, this is the wording that should be used rather than to detail specific qualifications. It is acknowledged that such an approach is already being taken with respect to the Practice Standards scheme, and the remaining RCVS Diplomas.

The ‘middle tier’ postulated in the current RCVS Consultation on Specialisation, and the proposed ‘acknowledged veterinarian’ status under consideration in Europe, are not currently sufficiently defined to allow a position to be agreed.