Visitation to the
Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies
University of Edinburgh

14 – 18 March 2005

Report to the Council of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) in accordance with Section 5 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, and to the Education Committee of the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) in compliance with European Directive 78/1027/EEC.
LIST OF VISITORS

Professor W Philip H Duffus, BVSc, MA, PhD, MRCVS, University of Bristol
Chairman of the Visitors

Mr Raymond L Butcher, MA, VetMB, MRCVS
Visitor for Small Animal Clinical Studies

Professor Aart de Kruijf, DVM, PhD, University of Ghent
Visitor for Large Animal Clinical Studies

Professor Timothy M Skerry, BVetMed, PhD, CertSAO, MRCVS, University of Sheffield
Visitor for Pre-clinical Sciences

Professor Frans Smulders, DVM, PhD, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna
Visitor for Food Hygiene and Veterinary Public Health

Professor Alexander J Trees, BVM&S, PhD, DipEVPC, MRCVS, University of Liverpool
Visitor for Para-clinical Studies & Vice Chairman of the Visitors

Dr W.A.G. Charleston, BVSc PhD, MACvs, MRCVS, formerly of Massey University, New Zealand, was present as an observer nominated by the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (Inc).

Mr John Parker, MA, VetMB, FRCVS, RCVS President, was present on the 14th and 15th March.

Mrs Freda Andrews, Head of Education at RCVS, was present for the duration of the visit, together with Miss Anne Jermy, Education Committee Manager at RCVS.
INTRODUCTION

1. This report is prepared in accordance with the provisions of Section 5(1) of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, "for the purpose of securing that the courses of study to be followed by students training to be veterinary surgeons and the standard of proficiency required for registration in the register shall be such as sufficiently to guarantee that persons registered in the register will have acquired the knowledge and skill needed for the efficient practice of veterinary surgery".

2. The Visitors were also mindful of the Directive of the Council of the European Communities (78/1027/EEC) of December 1978, and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Veterinary Training (ACVT) for modifications (111/F/5171/7/92-EN) to the veterinary training directive insofar as they affect the primary registerable qualification. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the evaluation criteria defined by the European Association of Establishments of Veterinary Education (EAEVE), which were fully incorporated into RCVS’ visitation criteria in 2001.

3. The Visitors were appointed by RCVS Council and included two nominations from EAEVE, as well as an observer from the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council with which RCVS has a mutual recognition agreement. The Visitors’ remit was to report on the courses of study, staffing, accommodation, and equipment available for training in veterinary surgery, and the other arrangements and facilities for such training with reference to 1 and 2 above.

4. The Visitors were present at the University from 14 – 18 March 2005 inclusive. The Visitors stayed together for tours of the facilities at the veterinary school on both the Summerhall and Easter Bush sites, and for the majority of the meetings with staff and students. The Visitors individually undertook more detailed visits to the individual departments with which they were principally concerned, and to the various clinics and Langhill farm. The Visitors held a final meeting with the University’s Principal and Vice Chancellor, Professor O’Shea, on the final day of the visit in order to feed back their main findings. The programme for the visit is attached at Annex 3.

5. The Visitors thank the Head of School, Professor Elaine Watson, and her colleagues at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies” for their help and hospitality during the visit. A full self-assessment document was prepared by the School and provided to the Visitors before the visit. Extracts have been included as part of this report. Additional documents including timetables, examination papers, external examiners’ reports and detailed course material were provided for reference during the visit.

6. The Visitors commend the University on the quality, commitment and motivation of its veterinary students. Their positive contribution to the visit was most important. Equally, the staff were enthusiastic and committed to the mission of the School and very helpful to the Visitors.

CHANGES SINCE THE LAST RCVS VISITATION IN 1997

7. RCVS last visited the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (R(D)SVS) at Edinburgh in 1997, and held a follow-up meeting with the Dean in 2000. Since the last visitation, there have been
many substantial and positive changes, most notably the opening of the new hospital facilities at Easter Bush. Since the last visit, £11.5 million has been invested in refurbishment, giving R(D)SVS an impressive new hospital for small animals (opened in 1999) and a new large animal hospital catering for both equine and farm animal species (opened in 2000). The first opinion small animal clinic, previously at Summerhall, has been relocated to Easter Bush. In addition, the veterinary school has taken over the management of the 160 hectare Langhill Farm which provides excellent teaching material.

8. Improvements to the curriculum have been made, with a new four year veterinary public health course starting for first year students in 2002, and new courses in Infection and Immunity and in Morbid Anatomy and Histopathology replacing the previous general pathology courses. In an attempt to reduce some of the curriculum overload, the integrated pathology and clinical studies courses in third and fourth year have been modified. More comment is provided on these changes under later sections of this report, but the Visitors were pleased to see that the school has recognised the importance of continuing this process and that work has started on a major curriculum review which bodes well for the future. The establishment of the ‘Veterinary Teaching Organisation’ within the R(D)SVS, headed by a new Director of Veterinary Teaching, will provide the essential management focus needed for this initiative and further demonstrates the R(D)SVS’s commitment to quality in teaching and research.

9. In common with other UK veterinary schools, Edinburgh has made progress in introducing formal communication skills training for students in their clinical years. The school has also begun to invest in e-learning, with a virtual learning environment – the “Edinburgh Electronic Veterinary Curriculum” – introduced in 2002 to support all courses. This has great potential not only as a teaching support for students, but also as a communication tool for staff, providing a medium that will foster greater integration of the curriculum across all years of the course.

10. The University underwent restructuring in 2002, with all faculties now reorganised into four colleges. The veterinary school has become part of one, namely the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM). The incorporation of the R(D)SVS as one of four schools in the CMVM has strengthened the research links between veterinary and bio-medicine: ten interdisciplinary research centres have been created, including the Centre for Infectious Diseases which is hosted by R(D)SVS, and the Centre for Neuroscience Research, co-hosted by R(D)SVS with the School of Biomedical and Clinical Laboratory Sciences.

11. Increased collaboration with the University of Glasgow has been taking place, evidenced by the establishment of a joint veterinary public health/food hygiene teaching unit. The two universities were also successful joint applicants in the DEFRA veterinary research training initiative, securing funding of £7.5 million over 5 years to fund veterinary undergraduate vacation scholarships, intercalated degrees and postgraduate training in farm animal genomics and epidemiology. Collaboration has also extended to developments in computer-aided learning, and there are regular meetings of clinical training scholars. The Visitors hope to see further collaborative ventures succeed in the future, and note that the University is exploring collaborative postgraduate training programmes, shared pathology teaching and external lectures, continuing professional development (CPD) courses for the profession, as well as a possible Scottish ‘centre of excellence’ in animal biosciences.
SUMMARY OF VISITORS’ COMMENTS AND FINDINGS

12. The Visitors were unanimous in their view of the high international standing of the Royal (Dick) Veterinary School at Edinburgh. The staff at the veterinary school are an impressive resource, being both dedicated and committed to veterinary education in Edinburgh, often way beyond their normal duties.

13. The facilities at Easter Bush are excellent and are functioning well, especially the new small animal and large animal clinical facilities. Accommodation for more didactic teaching at Easter Bush, such as the lecture theatre, library and seminar rooms, are good facilities for the current size of the student body.

14. The Visitors felt there was a good and varied caseload of clinical cases within the small animal unit, from first opinion to referrals. The Visitors were especially impressed with the commitment of the first opinion small animal practice and would emphasise the necessity of keeping this facility separate from the main referral clinics at Easter Bush. Similarly, the first opinion farm animal practice is to be commended: it makes very good use of the clinical material available locally. Langhill Farm also serves as an excellent and vital teaching resource.

15. The student feedback given to the Visitors was positive about both the course and the teaching staff.

16. The administration and delivery of both pre-clinical and clinical extra-mural studies (EMS) has been tightened up since the last RCVS visit in 1997. Of special note was the improved integration between preclinical EMS and the animal husbandry/production course.

17. There is a strong residency programme in veterinary pathology although, with the senior pathologist retiring in the not too distant future, and one other pathologist increasingly involved with the administration of teaching, there is an urgent need to recruit more pathologists in order to maintain this strength. The Visitors therefore recommend that the recruitment of pathologists is made a priority in the School’s future staffing plans.

18. A dedicated veterinary public health/food hygiene team has made great strides since 1997, and the staff involved have essential and concrete plans to continue the development of this important course. The Visitors will be interested to hear about progress in this area at a future follow-up meeting.

19. The mandatory Friday afternoon seminars for final year students are delivered by an excellent series of national and international speakers and are a useful innovation.

20. The introduction of the ‘Edinburgh Electronic Veterinary Curriculum’ (EEVeC) shows great promise and should act as a template for other courses both at Edinburgh and elsewhere.

21. The Visitors were impressed by the variety and content of the final year assessments which are based on a mixture of clinical cases, spot tests and vivas; the Visitors positively support the
retention of the vivas for these professional exams and recommend that these are retained for veterinary students.

22. The Visitors were pleased to note an increasing awareness amongst the veterinary undergraduates at Edinburgh of the possibility of research as a career, with opportunities provided for them, for example, through vacation scholarships and the Veterinary Training and Research Initiative awards.

23. In view of the many significant developments that are taking place at the Edinburgh veterinary school, the Visitors emphasised the need for a leader with drive and vision to push forward these changes, in particular the replacement of the Summerhall facilities at Easter Bush. The Visitors felt that the current head of the Veterinary School is an ideal individual to perform this task.

24. The planned curriculum review based on a mapping of RCVS ‘day one competencies’, followed by a planned implementation “drilled” down throughout the course to deliver these competencies, is an important initiative, and, if managed well, has the potential to reduce some of the curriculum overload as well as make space for longer elective programmes. In order to ensure that this project succeeds in its aims and can be implemented effectively, the review will need a budget and resources to provide for a facilitator, as well as clear moral support from the School, and the Visitors recommend that this be treated as a priority. The Visitors suggest that a relatively small group of similarly committed individuals be given the task to drive the review forward.

25. Summerhall is in need of urgent attention and the Visitors were pleased to hear of the University’s plans to relocate the veterinary school to Easter Bush. The Visitors believe it would be unacceptable to maintain the status quo at Summerhall, even for the current number of veterinary undergraduates. For example, the facilities in the recently updated multipurpose laboratory would not stand up to a detailed health and safety scrutiny; the computing facilities are scattered and many of the other teaching facilities are outdated and not up to acceptable modern standards. The Visitors therefore acknowledge and support the plans to move to Easter Bush. The Visitors were especially pleased to note the support for this planned relocation at the highest level within the University, i.e. in commitments given by the Principal, and by the head of the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. The Visitors have taken these plans into account in reaching their conclusions about the course and its facilities. The planned move will need considerable financial and personal commitment and, although this commitment was expressed to the Visitors, they recommend that progress towards meeting these goals should be monitored by RCVS.

26. The Visitors noted that the University intends to expand student numbers markedly in the veterinary school by recruiting a considerable number of full-fee paying students. These plans will have a significant effect on the nature of the school, and the Visitors gave careful consideration to these plans. The Visitors were pleased to note the commitment of both the Principal and head of the college to retain the current staff/student ratio by utilising a proportion of the extra income for staff recruitment. The Visitors consider that this will be vital in order to maintain the standard of teaching at the Veterinary School, and recommend that the planned expansion in student numbers should only proceed on condition that an acceptable staff/student ratio is maintained.
27. The expansion in graduate students will undoubtedly increase the numbers entering directly into the second year of the course and, in time, may lead to the number of full-fee students exceeding those taking up the 72 SHEFC supported places. The Visitors would wish to be reassured that this expansion in student numbers will not have a detrimental effect on delivering an adequate first year for the remaining 72 undergraduates and recommend that any effect on the overall delivery of the curriculum should be closely monitored to ensure that the first year of the course is not marginalised in the future.

28. The Visitors agree with the views expressed by many members of staff that the curriculum is still somewhat overloaded. They would support any effort to give students more time for reflection and self-directed learning and expect that the planned curriculum review will help in this respect.

29. The Visitors suggest the purchase of some basic additional equipment to help improve the teaching of food hygiene. The Visitors would also encourage the staff teaching veterinary public health and food hygiene to take advantage of the opportunities provided by being organised as a single college with medicine. They should be encouraged to link with colleagues in the medical school who deliver similar teaching to medical students, for example to run a series of joint seminars on public health related matters.

30. As regards pre-clinical teaching, the Visitors believe that the courses ‘Cells, Tissues and Development’ (CTD) and ‘Body Systems 1’, which have as their stated aim “molecules to the whole animal”, would be improved by focussing more on the whole animal approach. By way of comparison, the topographical anatomy teaching in second year is working well and is certainly appreciated by students.

31. The Visitors are of the view that the vertical integration within the first two years of the veterinary course still needs to be improved, and that attention should also be given to improving the curricular transition from year two to year three. The Visitors are confident that this matter will also be tackled during the forthcoming curriculum review. However, dispersal of key staff to three sites following the redevelopment programme (to Little France, the Kings Buildings and to Easter Bush) will present considerable challenges to ensure the extent of integration to which the School aspires.

32. The Visitors felt that during the forthcoming curriculum review, it would be useful to increase the exposure of 4th year students to more clinical material, if possible by increasing the time that students can spend in clinics in the fourth year.

33. The Visitors would strongly encourage the School to provide more time for electives during the course, and recommend that this should be carefully considered during the forthcoming curriculum review.

34. The Visitors would encourage to School to seek to increase the amount of soft-tissue surgery in small animals. The Visitors heard some comment from both students and employers that students may be graduating with minimal experience in this area. The Visitors suggest that this could be partly rectified by a course in cadaver surgery as well as by increasing the length of the surgery elective. Again, this should be attended to in the curriculum review.
35. The Visitors were pleased to learn of the school’s plans to promote e-learning projects for postgraduate degrees and suggest that further expansion of CPD courses will need to be supported by a more market-driven approach with resources provided for a dedicated professional organiser.

36. The Visitors look forward to learning more about progress with the major reorganisation in facilities and implementation of the School’s plans for meeting the major expansion in student numbers. They recommend that RCVS should convene a routine follow up meeting with the Dean in two or three years time to consider a detailed progress report from the School on all the matters raised above.

CONCLUSION

37. The Visitors recommend to the Council of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and to the Joint Education Committee of the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) and the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) that the course of study and examinations in veterinary medicine at the University of Edinburgh justifies the continuance in force of the Privy Council’s Order recognising the veterinary degree and that the course also meets the requirements of the Directive of the Council of the European Communities.