Work Psychology Group
Thinking differently

Evaluation of the Impact of the Professional Development Phase in Supporting Veterinary Graduates

Evaluation Report to RCVS & BSAVA

Charlotte Flaxman
Dr Máire Kerrin
Prof Susan Rhind
Prof Liz Mossop
Dr Sheena Warman

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Work Psychology Group in collaboration with Edinburgh, Nottingham and Bristol Veterinary Schools were commissioned by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) to evaluate the Professional Development Phase (PDP) that was implemented across the Veterinary Profession in 2007 to support graduates in their transition between Veterinary School and practice.

1.2 The objectives of the evaluation were to (1) evaluate the impact of the PDP on the development of clinical and non-clinical skills, (2) understand the challenges faced by new graduates and their employers, (3) understand the support needed by graduates and employers to successfully complete the PDP and (4) explore how reflection is understood within the veterinary profession and the impact of reflection.

1.3 A multi-method approach to the evaluation was developed consisting of a desk and literature review, stakeholder and graduate consultations (including interviews and focus groups) and online questionnaires (for both graduates and stakeholders).

1.4 Stakeholders (e.g. employers, mentors, veterinary school representatives, Postgraduate Deans (PGDs), BSAVA representatives and British Vet Association representatives) and veterinary graduates took part in a range of activities as follows; interviews (N=39), focus group (N=6) and graduate (N=734) and stakeholder (N=198) questionnaires. Within the sample, there was representation from the various areas of practice (e.g. small animal, equine, farm, mixed and non-practice including research and government).

1.5 **Six key areas with emerging themes** were evident from the qualitative analysis; (1) Perceptions of the PDP (graduate perspective), (2) Perception of the PDP (employer perspective), (3) Graduate Challenges, (4) Support Available through the PDP, (5) Role of Reflection and (6) Recommendations for Improvement (emerging from the consultations).

1.5.1 **Perceptions of the PDP (graduate perspective):** Overall graduates understood the purpose of the PDP and what it was trying to achieve but felt it was not currently achieving these aims. Many felt it was too much of a 'tick-box exercise' and there was too much emphasis on quantity rather than confidence gained in completing procedures/tasks.

1.5.2. **Perceptions of the PDP (stakeholder perspective):** Whilst it was felt that the concept of the PDP was helpful and needed within the profession, there was a lack of understanding regarding the process and of the current benefits. A need for a greater focus on professional skills and challenges raised regarding being able to find time to support their graduates.

1.5.3. **Graduate Challenges:** Challenges were focussed around the non-clinical skills including independent decision making, client communication and relationship building, in addition to challenges applying 'best-practice' learning and veterinary school to practice. Further, a lack of resilience within graduates was noted leading to low levels of retention.

1.5.4. **Support Available through the PDP:** There were mixed views on the guidance available from the RCVS and in relation to the role of the PGD. Whilst the BSAVA Resource Bank received positive feedback, the majority of stakeholders and graduates were unaware of this resource. The importance of employer support and a broader network of support for graduates was also noted.

1.5.5. **Role of Reflection:** The importance of reflection and associated benefits were recognised across the profession, with many engaging in informal reflection activities on a regular basis. Written reflection was noted as more challenging. It was acknowledged that the PDP helps to provide structure to graduate reflection but that more could be done to improve the quality of these reflections.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

1.5.6. **Recommendations for Improvement:** Recommendations for improving the PDP that emerging from the consultations fell into four themes; redefining the purpose and objective, wider engagement across the profession, resources available and functionality.

1.6. Similar findings were found within the quantitative data analysis across both the stakeholder and graduate questionnaires.

1.7. A number of conclusions and recommendations have emerged following completion of the evaluation. These are organised into three areas; (1) **Communication & Engagement of the Profession**, (2) **Short-Term 'Quick Wins'** and (3) **Medium Term Goals**.

1.7.2. **Tables 16-18** in the main report (Section 7) provide a summary of each recommendation, in addition to the key evaluation findings from where they have emerged, practical implications, benefits and where appropriate supporting research evidence.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Contents

1. Executive Summary 2

Contents 4

2. Background & Context 5

Introduction 5

Objectives 5

Approach 6

3. Evaluation Methodology 7

Desktop & Literature Review 7

Stakeholder & Graduate Consultations 7

Stakeholder & Graduate Questionnaire 8

4. Desktop & Literature Review 9

Desktop Review 9

Literature Review 10

5. Graduate and Stakeholder Consultations 11

Identified Themes 12

6. Stakeholder Questionnaire 27

Stakeholder Questionnaire Sample 27

Summary of Stakeholder Questionnaire Results 28

7. Graduate Questionnaire 36

Graduate Questionnaire Sample 36

Summary of Graduate Questionnaire Results 37

8. Conclusions and Recommendations 45

Conclusions 45

Recommendations 48

Appendix A: Stakeholder Questionnaire Feedback Graphs 57

Appendix B: Stakeholder Questionnaire Qualitative Feedback Word Clouds 63

Appendix C: Graduate Questionnaire Feedback Graphs 66

Appendix D: Graduate Questionnaire Qualitative Feedback Word Clouds 73

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

2. Background & Context

Introduction

2.1. The Professional Development Phase (PDP) was introduced in 2007 by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) to support newly qualified veterinary graduates as they make the transition from life as a veterinary student to working in clinical practice as a professional veterinary surgeon. Specifically, the PDP was designed as a period of structured self-assessment, reflection and development, which could assist new graduates in developing important clinical and non-clinical skills in an orderly, logical and comprehensive manner. The PDP provides a framework within which veterinary graduates, with the support of their employer and an assigned Postgraduate Dean (PGD), can record their clinical cases against a list of clinical skills and procedures, in addition to providing the opportunity for reflection on their progression against the PDP Competencies[1].

2.2. In addition, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) has developed a PDP Resource Bank, which provides free online CPD resources to its members. These resources have been developed to support both graduates and their employers with the development of the professional and clinical skills elements of the PDP and have been matched directly to the RCVS PDP Competences.

2.3. Work Psychology Group have been working in partnership with Edinburgh Vet School, Nottingham Vet School and Bristol Vet School between April – November 2017, to evaluate the impact of the Professional Development Phase (PDP) in supporting veterinary graduates during the transition from veterinary school to veterinary practice. This evaluation is timely; in recent years other professions within healthcare (e.g. medicine, dentistry and pharmacy) have reviewed their own support phases provided for graduates that are similar to the PDP and there has begun to be a shift regarding how this is approached and implemented to ensure maximum benefits for both the graduate and the profession.

Objectives

2.4. The RCVS and BSAVA are committed to improving the PDP and the associated PDP Resource Bank for small animal practitioners, to ensure the overall process, guidance and resources available are providing appropriate support to graduates during their transition from veterinary school to practice. It is therefore important to gain insight through the use of evidence and research, to inform these future developments. At the outset of the project, five core requirements or objectives for the evaluation project were outlined by the RCVS and BSAVA:

- To evaluate the **impact of the PDP** on the development of clinical and non-clinical skills, from the perspectives of both employers and new graduates
- To understand **the challenges faced by new graduates and their employers** in the transition to practice
- To understand what **support is needed by employers of new graduates** in order to successfully complete the PDP
- To explore **how reflection is understood** by employers and used currently by new graduates as part of the PDP
- Understand the **impact of reflection** as perceived by employers and new graduates

[1] The PDP is based on a set of PDP Competences that a veterinary surgeon should normally acquire after about a year in practice. The PDP Competences cover the same general areas as the Day One Competences, which set the minimum standard for graduation, but with the expectation that at the end of their PDP "a graduate who has completed the PDP will be able to perform a range of common clinical procedures, or manage them successfully without supervision". This is the standard that the graduate is asked to apply when making a judgement about their competence. They must consider not only their clinical skills, but also their general professional skills and attributes, which are set out in the general PDP Competences.

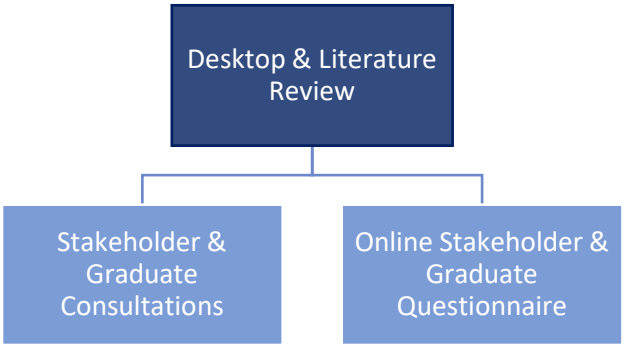
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Approach

2.5. To achieve the objectives outlined above, a multi-method approach to evaluation was undertaken comprising three main components: a desktop review of the PDP guidance and materials and review of the literature, stakeholder[2] and graduate consultations and an online graduate and employer questionnaire. The desktop and literature review were conducted at the project outset, with the outputs feeding into the design of the consultation and questionnaire questions, as summarised in **Figure 1** below. Further detail is provided in Section 3 regarding each evaluation stage.

2.6. By utilising a multi–method approach, feedback has been obtained from a large number of stakeholders across the UK from the questionnaire, whilst ensuring that rich data was also collected through engaging with stakeholders within the consultations, including focus groups and face-to-face or telephone interviews.

Figure 1: Overview of Approach to Evaluation



2.7. This report is broadly structured according to the three different stages of the evaluation. It begins by presenting a summary of the Desktop and Literature Review (Section 4), then findings from the consultation activities with stakeholders and graduates (Section 5). This is followed by a summary of the results from the stakeholder questionnaire (Section 6) and graduate questionnaire (Section 7). Summaries of key messages are provided at the end of each section, with overall conclusions and recommendations presented in Section 8.

[2] Within the context of this report stakeholders include Employers, Mentors, Postgraduate Deans, BSAVA Representatives, BVA Representatives & Veterinary School Representatives

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

3. Evaluation Methodology

Desktop & Literature Review

3.1. The **desktop review** involved reviewing relevant documentation and information received from the RCVS and BSAVA relating to the PDP and PDP Resource Bank. Additionally, Veterinary Schools provided information and resources relating to preparatory material for the PDP and broader resources on reflection. Reviewing these materials provided the project team with an understanding of the PDP process and the guidance and resources available for graduates and their employers to draw upon. For an overview of the specific materials reviewed, please see Section 3. The outputs of this review were used as a basis for the development of the consultation and questionnaire questions.

3.2. A **review of the literature** was also conducted to examine research evidence in relation to the transition phase for graduates as they move from university into practice and to understand the support available to new graduates in roles outside of the veterinary profession. A summary of the evidence is presented in Section 3. This is also drawn upon in the recommendations section.

Stakeholder & Graduate Consultations

3.3. **Stakeholder and graduate consultation** activity included semi-structured interviews (approx. 60 minutes each) with graduates (N=19), employers (N=11), veterinary school representatives (N=4), BSAVA representatives (N=3) and BVA representatives (N=2). Focus groups (approx. 120 minutes each) were also held with graduates (N=3) and postgraduate deans (N=3).

3.4. The consultations asked stakeholders and graduates for their insights on their perceptions of the PDP, including its purpose and the level of engagement in the PDP, the challenges faced by graduates and support required and the perceptions of reflection across the profession and how the PDP supports this.

3.5. Stakeholders and graduates were invited to take part in consultations through a variety of channels, including: direct emails from the RCVS and BSAVA, press releases, invitations on social media including Facebook groups (e.g. Veterinary Voices, graduate alumni pages through Veterinary Schools), through practice briefings within corporate companies and through emails from events that stakeholders/graduates had signed up to (e.g. BEVA congress). There was also an opportunity to register interest in taking part in consultations at the end of both the graduate and stakeholder questionnaires.

3.6. The project team experienced challenges during the consultation element of the data collection phase, particularly in attempting to schedule and run the six focus groups originally planned at the project outset. Whilst the project team were mindful of trying to make attending the focus groups as accessible as possible (through considering location and time of day), feedback was received from graduates that they would be unable to attend unless they took annual leave. Even if graduates had indicated that they would be willing to do this, additional challenges were experienced in that due to often short notice and high levels of workload within the practice, they had been unable to take time off to attend.

3.7. Additional challenges in relation to scheduling interviews including high workload impacting on availability and when interview slots were booked in, often stakeholders and graduates would be required to reschedule due to appointments taking longer than anticipated or additional appointments being scheduled.

3.8. Consultations with both stakeholders and graduates highlighted issues that graduates faced with high workload and in managing a work-life balance, which may also offer an explanation for the lack of engagement (e.g. there was no uptake for focus groups that were scheduled outside of practice hours).

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Stakeholder & Graduate Questionnaire

3.9. Bespoke questionnaires were designed for the stakeholder and graduate population based on outputs from the desktop review. Questions were developed to gain feedback on similar areas to the consultations (e.g. perceptions on the purpose of PDP, engagement in PDP process, challenges experienced by graduates and support utilised and role of reflection), with the questionnaires providing the opportunity to reach a larger number of respondents across the Veterinary profession.

3.10. In addition to the multiple-choice questions, stakeholders and graduates were given the opportunity within the questionnaire to provide free-text responses. These comments have been analysed and key themes are reported on in Sections 6 and 7 respectively.

3.11. Similar communication mechanisms were utilised to circulate the links for the stakeholder and graduate questionnaires as mentioned in the consultations section (see 3.5). In addition to this, links to the questionnaires were included in email signatures for some employees within the RCVS and put on the Vet Surgeon website[3].

[3] https://www.vetsurgeon.org/

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

4. Desktop & Literature Review

Desktop Review

4.1. At the beginning of the evaluation, a desk review was undertaken, which sought to review a number of resources made available to the evaluation team. This included the PDP guidance made available from the RCVS, the PDP resource bank available from the BSAVA and resources in relation to preparing for the PDP or reflective practice provided by veterinary schools. Specifically, the desktop review drew upon the following information:

- PDP guidance available through the **RCVS website** (including videos, weblinks and PDF documents)
- **BSAVA PDP Resource Bank**
- **BSAVA CPD Brochure**
- '**Veterinary Education and Training, A Framework for 2010 and Beyond'**, which consists of a summary of the Education Strategy Steering Group's proposal for an education and training framework
- '**Education Committee Professional Development Phase'**, which includes an update on the take up and completion of the PDP
- **Final Year PDP handout** for veterinary students, which includes information on the PDP process
- '**PDP Guidance – Guidance on the Professional Development Phase**' (information to veterinary graduates and employers about the PDP to help support new and recent graduates as they begin their careers in clinical practice
- '**Vet Futures Report'**, which details six key ambitions, separated into 34 broad recommendations, for the veterinary profession to achieve by 2030
- An **example of an email that Postgraduate Deans send to new graduates** regarding completion the PDP

4.2. Outputs from reviewing the documents outlined above were used to inform the development of the consultation and questionnaire questions, with the aim of exploring the perceptions of the PDP. Questions developed that came from this review included further probing on how useful the existing guidance and resources were for both graduates and employers, how often guidance and/or resources were accessed, what information graduates had received regarding the PDP either from their veterinary school or from their Postgraduate Dean and how complementary the BSAVA resource bank is the PDP.

4.3. From conducting the desk review it was recognised that there is a wealth of accessible online guidance materials and resources to support veterinary graduates with completion of the PDP, available through both the RCVS and BSAVA websites. In addition to this, documentation received by individual veterinary schools suggests that they provide further resources, tailored to their own graduates and courses to prepare graduates for entering the profession (e.g. guidance on reflection, information circulated about the PDP).

4.4. The desk review also sought to explore the level of preparation that is provided to veterinary students whilst they are still at University, for undertaking the PDP and reflective practice. Different types of preparatory activity undertaken by Universities that emerged from the review included enlisting the RCVS to deliver presentations to students on 'preparing for life after graduation', encouraging students to engage in reflective thinking as part of modules/assignments, having PDP meetings with tutors and incorporating professional skills as distinct modules within the course.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Literature Review

4.5. In addition to the desk review, a light-touch literature review was conducted. The purpose of this was to examine research evidence relating to the transition phase for new graduates as they move into practice, within other non-veterinary roles, thus allowing learning to be taken from similar evaluations. For example, challenges facing new graduates and their employers in the transition into practice, and understanding the impact that the PDP has on the development of skills.

4.6. As part of this literature review, the UK medical and dental foundation programmes were examined in detail, in terms of the support provided to trainees on these programmes, the evaluation of the support provided, and evidence of challenges faced by foundation doctors and dentists. The majority of materials available to junior doctors and dentists to support their transition into practice, could be obtained from the relevant foundation programme websites[4]. Materials included guidance related to the foundation curriculum and e-portfolio, guidance if foundation doctors or dentists are experiencing difficulties at work, frequently asked questions pages and guidance for sign-off of their foundation year.

4.7. Furthermore, evaluation studies examining the efficacy of support provided in medical and dental settings were examined, with results suggesting that trainees value being provided with support, are more decisive in terms of their career aspirations as a result of the support provided (Beard et al., 2005) and that support increases a graduate's preparedness for the next stage in their training (Gilmour et al., 2012). When examining challenges that tend to be faced by both doctors and dentists as they move from university into practice, evidence fell into distinct themes: physical health, mental health, behavioural and work context.

4.8. Challenges in transitioning between University and practice more generally was also reviewed within the teaching and nursing professions in terms of the challenges faced by these graduates and what evidence suggests is the best way to support these individuals. A key finding was that effective training and ongoing professional learning helped to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy in teachers, therefore leading to the feeling that they are good at their job and increasing retention (Macblain & Purdy., 2009). Within nursing, having structured internship, orientation and mentoring programmes in place, was found to support nurses entering practice, improve nurse retention and decrease new nurse graduate intent to leave the profession after 6 months (Newhouse et al., 2007; Wright et al., 2012; Hom, 2003).

4.9. Based on the research objectives and in light of the findings from the literature review outlined above, questions for both the consultations and questionnaires were developed to ask both graduates and stakeholders about the specific challenges experienced by graduates and the support both available and required during the transition between veterinary school and practice.

[4] Medical Foundation Programme: http://www.foundationprogramme.nhs.uk/pages/home
Dental Foundation Programme: https://heeoe.hee.nhs.uk/Dental_Foundation_Training

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

5. Graduate and Stakeholder Consultations

5.1. Twenty-two graduates and twenty-three stakeholders took part in either a semi-structured interview (N=39) or focus group (N=6). For a full breakdown, see **Table 1**[5].

Table 1: Breakdown of Stakeholders/Graduates Involved in Consultation Process

Stakeholder/Graduate Group	Number
Graduates	22
Employers/Mentors	11
Postgraduate Dean	3
University Representatives	4
BSAVA Representatives	3
BVA Representatives	2
Total	**45**

5.2. Across the graduate and employer/mentor consultations, participants from a range of areas of practice or roles within the profession were targeted to take part in the evaluation, to ensure that all viewpoints were captured. For an overview of areas of work captured through the consultations, see **Table 2**.

Table 2: Breakdown of Area of Practice by Graduates & Employers/Mentors

Area of Practice	Graduates	Employers/Mentors
Small Animal	8	5
Equine	2	1
Farm	1	-
Mixed[6]	8	3
Poultry	1	-
Government	-	2
Research	2	-

5.3. Following completion of the interviews and focus groups, a qualitative content analysis of the transcripts was undertaken to identify themes raised by stakeholders and graduates. Themes were identified based on the four main areas that were discussed during the consultations; (1) perceptions of the PDP, (2) challenges experienced by graduates during the transition from veterinary school to practice, (3) support available to graduates throughout

[5] As outlined in Section 3 multiple channels were used to target potential participants for all elements of the evaluation, and whilst a range of graduates and stakeholders were spoken to, it must be acknowledged that due to this sampling method some bias may be evident within the results.

[6] Mixed practice included a mixture of small animal, farm, equine and exotic animals.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

the PDP and (4) the role of reflection. A fifth theme of recommendations for improving the PDP also emerged during the consultations. **Table 3** summarises the key themes that emerged from the analysis.

5.4. Whilst it had been planned to split the consultation results by area of practice, following the qualitative analysis it was determined that the perceptions in relation to the evaluation areas were very similar across the profession. Therefore, the majority of the findings have been presented together. The exception to this, is the first section where graduate and stakeholder perceptions have been presented separately in relation to their perceptions of the PDP. Where a specific finding was prominent to an area of practice, this has been highlighted in the text.

Table 3: Qualitative Analysis: Summary of Key Themes

Perceptions of the PDP (Graduate)	Perceptions of PDP (Stakeholder)	Graduate Challenges	Support available through PDP	Role of Reflection	Recommendations for Improvement
General Perceptions of the PDP	General Perceptions of the PDP	Perceived Challenges from Vet School to Practice	Information, Guidance Material & Support provided by the RCVS	Engagement with Reflection	Redefine Purpose & Objective
Understanding the PDP Purpose	Limitations of the PDP	Resilience in the Profession	BSAVA Resource Bank	Benefits of Reflection	Wider Engagement Across the Profession
Limitations of the PDP	Challenges with Implementation		Employer Support	Reflection Activities	Resources Available
			Broader Support Network	Role of Reflection in the PDP	Functionality

Identified Themes

5.5. The key themes relating to each of the six areas outlined in **Table 3** are provided in **Figures 2 to 7** below. In each case, a summary of the theme is provided along with some sample quotations.

Figure 2: Summary of Perception of the PDP (Graduate)

Graduate Perceptions of the PDP	
General Perceptions of the PDP	Graduates had mixed views regarding their perceptions of the PDP. A few graduates felt that the PDP was useful in providing a formal way of recording what they had completed in practice through using a checklist of tasks and skills (e.g. writing prescriptions, undertaking vasectomy operation), noting that as they recorded more clinical tasks, this helped to increase their confidence. *"It's nice to be able to have a list of things to check off to say I have done it"* *"Keeping a record of how many times I've done something is quite satisfying."* *"Very helpful for clinical skills development – has a very extensive list"* However, the majority commented that the checklist elements within the PDP made it seem like a 'tick-box' exercise and that instead of being a support, this seemed to be a lengthy and

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	unnecessary task in terms of supporting development. Additionally, some graduates found it difficult to recognise the usefulness of the PDP commenting this was dependent on the level of support provided to them by their practice. *"Not sure the benefits of it outweigh the effort it takes when you're already learning all this stuff taking up the little spare time that you had*. " *"I couldn't see the point of doing it, apart from if I wanted to do a certificate later"* *"I have definitely improved since graduating but not through doing PDP"* *"[Some graduates] can't accept they're not always going to be the best and any mistake or missed opportunity or missed diagnosis makes them think they're a bad vet… the tick-box aspect [of the PDP] is awful for those people and isn't useful"* *"You improve through doing things and this took so much time and seemed completely pointless. I already knew what I needed to improve on - senior vet was looking over me."*
Understanding the PDP Purpose	Overall, graduates appeared to have an understanding of the purpose of the PDP. Specifically, they highlighted that the PDP purpose was to support graduates in their transition into practice. *"The PDP aims to support the graduate in transition period"* Additionally, graduate stakeholders commented that the PDP acts as a mechanism to support reflection, for example, graduates commented on how the PDP had provided them with the opportunity to reflect on cases, encouraging them to consider what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. *"the PDP is encouraging self-reflection, it gets you to do this which is good"* *"It was useful to support reflection by considering the types of cases I had seen and what category and how confident I was in each case helped me become more independent"* Further comments suggested that the PDP is also viewed by graduates as a framework that supports their development and provides confidence in allowing them to identify gaps in their competence and target areas of improvement. *"Way to help you from day 1 until you feel confident and like you have enough experience to be able to look for help when you need it and feel like you've been supported for at least a year"* *"Formal record of the skills and abilities that you've been able to document over your time in practice"* *"Gives a benchmark of what you should be doing"* *"Provides structure to development"*
Limitations of the PDP	Many graduates expressed their frustration with the PDP, noting that they felt it places an emphasis on the quantity of procedures undertaken rather than the quality of work being completed. Specifically, it was noted that it would be helpful to include a gauge of how well each task has gone. However, whilst it was recognised that this approach can be helpful for certain procedures as the more you undertake, the better your skill level becomes for many tasks listed within the PDP this was not viewed as necessary (e.g. writing prescriptions). "*It's a numbers game – how many have I done rather than was this one better than my last one."* Additionally it was noted that the PDP did not support graduates in developing their professional skills or in planning their future professional development. In particular, those

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	who did not work with small animals commented that they had found that many of the clinical skills list was not relevant or applicable, if entering specialty practice. *"Currently the PDP is not good at looking at professional skills"* *"I had to cross things off the list knowing I won't be able to do them"* *"It feels like it's trying to achieve something but having one size fits all across the profession is never going to work"* Finally, graduates pointed to concerns around finding the time to write up cases required as part of the PDP, suggesting that they often struggled to fit this in around work commitments *"Everyone is stressed and busy – at the end of the day as a new grad you just want to relax. If you have to enter 3 passwords and answer a questionnaire you're not going to do it. It needs to be genuinely useful and accessible."*

Figure 3: Summary of Perception of the PDP (Stakeholder)

Stakeholder Perceptions of the PDP	
General Perceptions of the PDP	Stakeholders felt that the concept of the PDP could be helpful, but expressed their concerns in the way that it has been designed and is currently implemented is not as effective as it could be. Overall, there was a lack of understanding regarding the benefits of the PDP, with some stakeholders having little to no knowledge of what the process entails and limited understanding of its benefits, despite having graduates who were currently completing the process. Some viewed the purpose of the PDP as a support for the development of new graduates as they transition from a supportive work environment in veterinary school to working independently. *"The PDP is there to support the development of new graduates as they develop their clinical experience"* *"I feel like the PDP a really positive thing we want to make sure transition is as smooth as possible and we have got a vested interest in ensuring that our graduates are ok"* Stakeholders commented that the PDP provides a structure for graduates' development during their first year of practice, as it can help them to become more aware of how their skills are or are not developing and allows them to identify where they may need to develop further. *"The purpose is to provide support and structure to continuing development after you start in first year or two of practice"* *"it makes them be aware of how their skills have developed or are aren't developing"* *"it allows them to self-analyse their skills and recognise where their strengths and weaknesses lie and how those measure up to their career aspirations"* Several stakeholders shared their concerns that the PDP was viewed by graduates as a 'tick-box exercise' across the profession, particularly for the clinical skills aspect.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	""They view it as tick-box on their career path – tick that box and get it achieved" *"They mostly use as a tick box exercise, as an employer I think it is 'airy fairy' and non-specific"*
Limitations of the PDP	Across stakeholder groups there were concerns raised regarding the extent to which the PDP supports professional skills development. *"I don't think the PDP supports non-clinical skills very well, it's non-specific nature makes it open to interpretation"* *"The PDP touches on this [professional skills] but think it needs to be stressed more to the graduates that these are important"* Stakeholders acknowledged that they had seen that the PDP is helpful for encouraging graduates to reflect. However, they suggested that this may be more useful if graduates had the opportunity to discuss their reflections with someone, for example, a mentor. They highlighted that logging the information does not necessarily facilitate graduates' progression and development. *"I think it's good for allowing graduates to reflect – but there needs to be someone to discuss it with"* *"It's not going to change their learning or progress by logging it – only serves for someone else to see it"* Frustration was also expressed by stakeholders that there was variation in terms of the support that employers were willing to allocate to support graduates with their PDP. *"PDP is another tool for training the next generation of vet surgeons, as such it needs to be easy for everyone to engage with and complete. Anyone that doesn't see the value and engage with the PDP shouldn't take a new graduate"* Finally, comments were raised by some stakeholders that a key limitation of the current PDP is that if a graduate goes into a role outside of practice, then they are unable to complete it at all. *"the current structure of the PDP is entirely practice based so excludes vets working in government, science or industry and doesn't do anything for vets who may start in practice but then move into another field"*
Challenges with implementation	Stakeholders reported that the predominant challenge graduates experience in undertaking the PDP is having the time to complete it (a similar finding to the graduate consultations). *"Should allow time set aside perhaps one hour a week that is protected for them to work on it. Sends the message that it's important for the graduates. Equally some time set aside so they can meet with their mentor"* Stakeholders felt that the PDP was a complicated process that does not fit in with the graduates role, thus making it difficult for graduates to complete. *"I think it is very onerous to complete, you sit down in front of a computer and fill it in, feels very abstract. Doesn't reflect what they are doing in practice"* Finally, a number of stakeholders expressed their concerns with being able to find the time to provide sufficient and appropriate support to graduates amongst other practice responsibilities, or to find employees willing to be mentors for graduates.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	"It's difficult to support them and do a full day's clinical work as well" *"Often [having a mentor] doesn't work so well, for example if have one that doesn't think PDP is of value, or is very busy so doesn't have time to support the graduate"*

KEY MESSAGES

- Overall, graduates and stakeholders suggested that although the **concept of the PDP is helpful**, the **way that it has been designed and is currently implemented is not as effective as it could be**. The **level of engagement varies** across employers and there appears to be a general **lack of understanding of the PDP and its benefits**, with some employers having little to no knowledge of what the process entails.
- Graduate responses around their perceptions of the usefulness of the PDP as a support during the transition into practice were mixed, with it noted that is the **value of the PDP was dependent on the level of support already** available to the graduate. The purpose was viewed by graduates to be to provide support and a structured framework for development during their transition into practice.
- Graduates and stakeholders highlighted a number of limitations of the PDP, with some voicing their concerns that across the profession it is viewed as a **'tick-box exercise'** that is not useful for shaping graduates' future professional development and that **more could be done** to support the graduates through this process.
- For graduates working in particular areas, the **PDP can be difficult to complete** (e.g. farm) due to not having the opportunities to complete the required skills, and is seen not to be relevant for vets who do not work in practices (e.g. work in academia).

Figure 4: Summary of Perceived Challenges Facing New Graduates (Stakeholder & Graduate)

Challenges Facing New Graduates

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Perceived challenges from vet school to practice	Across both graduate and stakeholder consultations, it was noted that the majority of the challenges that graduates often face when they enter practice were in relation to professional skills. In particular, the most common included being ability to make a decision independently, adapting communication with clients, and at times, building relationships with colleagues. *"A lot of people struggle with clients, and time management"* *"Owners are asking above and beyond normal clinical questions...it's about knowing the differences and how to communicate/deal with clients differently"* *"Getting to know the building and the staff, working as a team, when you've got so much going on in your head, having to form relationships with staff can sometimes be challenging"* Additionally, several stakeholders and graduates raised that the 'best practice' approach, currently taught in academia is often not applicable in real life cases and that graduates can find it difficult to adjust to the reality of practice. For example, It was noted that graduates tended to struggle with working in a much less supportive environment and find it challenging to accept that they will make mistakes. An equine vet commented that the transition for them is particularly challenging as it required graduates to work in a field on their own and they can only ask questions to someone on the end of the phone. *"There is a miss-match between what university teaches and what practice requires."* *"There's a big step from being supervised in a safe university setting to standing on their own two feet in a consulting room where they don't have member of staff to 'run to'"* *"Have some students who have never made a mistake or done anything wrong"* Further, it was acknowledged that graduates sometimes also struggle to deal with difficult clients and can find it difficult to make compromises (e.g. when know the best treatment or case management but the client can't afford this). *"Dealing with difficult clients on your own – when you're doing work experience – the vet… won't make you go into consultation room to deliver bad news or with someone complaining"* *"Dealing with situations where clients don't or won't pay, compromises they have to make in advising clients – often they know what the best treatment or case management should be but clients can't afford that"* Many raised that graduates find it challenging to maintain a work-life balance and the concept of being on call. *"A lack of free time and hours are so long. You end up working extra time, there are so many consultations done in the same day so have to catch-up on lots of work outside of the consultations"*

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Resilience in the profession	Several stakeholders expressed concern that there were issues around resilience within the profession and that there was a high rate of graduates deciding to leave practice after a short period of time. Reasons highlighted for this were around the high pressured and emotional nature of the role and lack of support. *"Some who are very resilient get tipped over the edge, it's very useful to have multiple entry points into mental wellbeing support systems".* *"The mental effect of going into practice, it was daunting"* *"I think a lot of the problems with retention comes down to those running the practice. We got through the PDP with no support but others could have struggled"* Stakeholders also suggested that that they have a vested interest in ensuring that the graduates are OK and highlighted the importance of providing support at early stages and suggesting the PDP deans could serve a valuable role here. *"If the PDP deans are intervening in practices to talk to employers to advocate on behalf of new graduates, that would be very positive" – presuming the intervention is listened to and is effective* Several stakeholders discussed the positive and negative role that social media plays in the resilience of graduates. Stakeholders also highlighted that there also appeared to be variation across specialties, with it raised within the consultations that equine vets have a particularly high dropout rate. *"It's a high pressure job".* *Does have to be psychological adjustment for them – when the animals do die it has a psychological impact on graduates."* *"They become more emotionally attached to animals, currently attracting people [to the profession] who can form emotional bonds to animals"* *"Some are very resilient and have their own Facebook groups and all support each other through those groups"* *Social media is causing stress and anxiety and because of it, many have lost the ability to stop, pause and think"*

KEY MESSAGES

- Across stakeholder and graduate groups, when asked about the main challenges experienced by graduates, it was noted that these **mainly centred around non-clinical areas**. For example, graduates find it difficult to make decisions independently, and related to this, managing client interactions on their own. In particular, the ability to communicate effectively was raised, with some graduates finding it challenging to adapt their communication style for different clients.
- Through the consultations it was highlighted that there was some **disparity between what students were being taught in veterinary school and how applicable this is to apply to real life cases,** which for some, had caused additional challenges.
- **Concerns were raised across all respondents regarding resilience within new graduates** and the impact this is having on retention within the profession. The role of social media was noted as both supporting graduates in dealing with challenging situations but also adding to the stress felt by graduates.

Figure 5: Perceived Resources & Support Available to Graduates (Stakeholder & Graduate)

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Resources & Support Available to Graduates	
Information, guidance material and support provided by the RCVS	There were mixed views on the PDP guidance provided through the RCVS, with some stakeholders expressing quite positive perceptions (e.g. that the guidance is informative) and others noting they were unaware of it or that it was not accessed regularly and was not particularly helpful. *"Quite formal but informative – if you read it, the information is there that's important!"* *"There are a lot more clinical resources out there and they're much better organised"* *"We got no guidance from the RCVS at all, I inherited a 'second hand graduate' and we had nothing to help them with their PDP, nothing from graduate or the college"* Some had positive perceptions of the PGDs' role, particularly for graduates with less supportive employers, suggesting that they have a role both in supporting the students and in supporting the aims and objectives of the RCVS. "*PDP Deans….provide a source of listening, advice and support for new graduates and…..guide this transition from day one skills into year one competencies"* *"For the employers who don't engage as well with the system as they could do then PGDs are good fall-back mechanism for good graduates to go to."* However, some graduates suggested that it might have been helpful to be allocated a PGD who worked within their animal practice type. Many expressed that they were aware that each PGD oversaw the PDP for a large number of students and because of this, made the assumption that they would be unlikely to have much time to provide guidance or support for individual graduates. *"The talk given by PGD to the students is uninspiring, boring and awful….may be better promoted by recently completed PDP grads"* "*Would have been nice to have someone who was an equine vet. My postgraduate Dean had no idea what I was doing"*
BSAVA Resource Bank	Stakeholders and graduates who had seen the BSAVA Resource Bank were very positive about its content and specific resources available, in particular that it complimented what graduates were required to capture as part of their PDP in an engaging way. *"Looks brilliant!"* *"Really impressed with how much employer support there is"* "*Complements the PDP quite well – splits it up into employer support, clinical skills and general skills."* *"This is something that will make a big difference to your happiness and success in practice."* However, across graduate and stakeholder groups (including all areas of practice), a general lack of awareness around the existence of the PDP Resource Bank was highlighted. One employer commented that this may be due to the perception of the PDP more broadly, rather than due to the specific Resource Bank. *"Everyone I talk to about them didn't know they existed"* **"**Probably could do with a relaunch of the PDP resource bank" *"seen as irrelevance so doesn't matter how good this resource is, it's the view of the PDP"*

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	Many expressed frustration that they were unable to see unless they were a member of the BSAVA. "*Not helpful that you have to a member – would be useful for members of other specialties e.g. farm and equine people too….can't understand why they've hidden them behind a firewall".*
Employer Support	It was acknowledged across stakeholders and graduates that the amount of support from employers and senior colleagues is variable. Additionally, the importance of employers ensuring that graduates were allocated sufficient time to complete the PDP during work, including time to complete the paperwork and for regular meetings to discuss cases and the PDP with their supervisors was highlighted. *"In the end its employers that need to do more, don't know if that's something the RCVS can impose but if you're an employer and you take on a graduate then you have certain responsibilities"* *"There's variation in individual veterinary practices in how much support and mentoring new graduates receive from their practice principle or senior colleagues"* *"I think we [employers] should help them complete PDP, indicate where more research or knowledge was needed, CPD provider is helping them with their skills for PDP, talk about problems personal development, client skills – think what they will gain from this"* *"Sitting down look at it and chatting around it as well helps – trying to link it to situations within work that make it relevant for each graduate as well"* Further, there was a consensus that it was important to provide graduates with a mentor within the organisation to help support them with the PDP and their transition into practice. One equine graduate noted that she had found it particularly helpful that her boss had been supportive in boosting her reputation with more difficult clients. *"You need a point of contact in your practice that you can go to and ask for help and get them to look at parts of your PDP as you go through"* *"Use the appraisal and monthly meetings to discuss what they're doing and how they feel"* *"Support within the practices who should provide them with some sort of mentor to help them with completing the PDP"*
Broader Support Network	Stakeholders outlined that it was also important to draw upon a wider support network during the PDP, with examples of support drawn upon including their association support, peer network, forums, colleagues, friends and family, social media and good role models. *"Been to BVA vet network meetings – was chance to catch up with others my age and have a drink nice to meet other people"* *"They should also have a peer network as well. If have that at University there's no reason with modern communication and social media why they shouldn't be able to maintain network."* *"They need a forum that is honest, open and trusting either for people you were at college with or not, need someone outside of your employer"* *"We have a whatsapp group – tell each other silly things we've done"* For support in completing the PDP, graduates found that having a colleague who had recently been through the process was very helpful as they could give helpful guidance on completion of the PDP.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	"Good role model within their local environment will be the best support they could get – they will see all the attributes of a good efficient veterinary clinician -not just clinical skills but soft skills of communication self-reflection etc." *"I went through things with a vet there who did PDP a few years ago".* *"My colleagues have been extremely supportive….I can ask does this sound like the right thing to do, does it sound like best option?*

KEY MESSAGES

- Many stakeholder and graduates felt that **employers had a responsibility to support graduates** through completing the PDP. This support should include allocation of time for graduates to complete their PDP and provision of a mentor within the practice/organisation to support graduates with their transition into practice and the PDP more broadly.
- Additionally, the **graduates' wider support network** (e.g. peers, friends/family and social media) was recognised as an important source of support.
- Regarding In the support provided through the RCVS, there were **mixed views on the helpfulness of the PDP guidance** with many noting that they did not access the guidance regularly.
- Across stakeholders and graduates groups, it was noted the **PGDs are often not utilised** as a source of support by the graduates.
- Responses regarding the **BSAVA Resource Bank were largely positive**, with consensus that further guidance would also be useful. However, there was a **lack of awareness** that the bank existed and a desire for similar resources to be available across the profession.

Figure 6: Summary of the Role of Reflection Within the Profession (Stakeholder & Graduate)

Role of Reflection	
Engagement with reflection	Across the profession, stakeholders and graduates acknowledged the importance of engaging in reflection, specifically noting that when reflecting on cases, they consider what went wrong and take learning from this to plan steps on how to prevent it happening again. *"Recognising that it's in their control to change that for the future empowers them and makes them engage in reflection."* Several stakeholders and graduates raised that whilst they found conversations with colleagues lend themselves well to reflection, written reflection more a lot more difficult. *"I personally find chatting through a case is more helpful. Writing about It felt more artificial"* *"Easier to write about it if it's about a conversation that went wrong, it's easier to reflect"* It was also suggested that the reflection that graduate's engaged in, tended to focus on areas required for development, rather than on their strengths. *"Very easy to focus on the negative as that's the bit that makes you worry and no-one usually says well done for doing it so you forget that it's gone well"* When discussion reflective activities undertaken during Veterinary school, there were polarised views across the graduates. For some, they valued the guidance and practice on how to reflect

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	which helped them when beginning the PDP. However, some did not value this opportunity to reflect during their undergraduate degree. *"Either loved doing pebblepad [ePortfolio software used by some schools] or hated it… in hindsight I'm glad we were made to do it."*
Benefits of reflection	Stakeholders and graduates outlined that reflection is crucial to the way that all individuals in the profession learn and develop. It was also suggested that reflection can prevent graduates from repeating mistakes, encouraging them to turn errors into positive learning experiences rather than catastrophising, which has a positive impact overall on their mental health. Further it was noted that reflection must have an end point, in which the individual takes the learning from the situation and moves forward, otherwise the consequences could be severe. *"It can be a helpful way to develop on your own without guidance from others."* *"I try to make something that doesn't go well into a positive learning experience rather than something to* dwell on - can be good for your mental health as well as professional development" *"Stops people feeling that they're failures – it's about that one event not you as a whole, it feels much more positive and constructive."* *"If reflection goes bad (e.g. dwelling on a situation) it can be the gateway to suicide"* *"you see so many graduates hanging on to cases that have gone wrong – and this ends up in them not being able to make decisions"* Stakeholders highlighted that greater reflection amongst younger members of the profession can also help to ensure that an individuals practice continues to develop and that they will be able to identify potential errors of challenges before they arise. *"Will help people to recognise when those situations are arising and stop them happening. Will end up in right part of profession for them where they will be happy"* Stakeholders highlighted that reflection can also improve the working environment through encouraging individuals to improve and also by encouraging others in their team to reflect and move forward. *"Changes the way I do things or behave or come across or think and encouraging that in my colleagues, and work as a team to do our job more effectively and hopefully more harmoniously when working in a group as a whole".* *"Useful to reflect on your position in the veterinary team and working in the best manner"*
Reflection Activities	Across the stakeholders and graduate groups it was noted that reflection often takes place through group meetings to discuss successes and adverse events. Specifically employers noted that they often guide the reflection of the team to talk about what happened and what is important to change going forward. One stakeholder highlighted that reflecting on others' experiences through collective learning can be just as beneficial as individual learning. *"It's interesting to hear conversations that occur in those groups from reflecting on others' experiences – it's collective learning not individual learning"*

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	Stakeholders also discussed the importance of informal reflection, for example through self-analysis or critical appraisal of own performance in free time either independently or when talking to peers or friends. *"What I do is self-analysis of all case material and reviewing what I've done in the clinic"* *"I drive a lot so thinks a lot when driving"* *"Critically appraising your performance in a given situation"* Discussions with supervisors or mentors were also highlighted as critically important to support graduates with continuous improvement. *"we sit down with new graduates regularly and try and get an overview from other members of staff what they do well and what they are struggling with – and come up with things that we can do to help them"*
Role of reflection in PDP	It was acknowledged by stakeholders and graduate that the PDP provided new graduates with a structured format to reflect during the transition into practice. However, views about the level of reflection undertaken by graduates varied. It was highlighted that the PDP can be helpful in ensuring that when critically appraising performance within a situation, graduates look at the situation in its entirety to describe the whole sequence of events rather than focusing on one issue that is salient to them. *"It was useful to support reflection by considering the types of cases I had seen and what category and how confident I was in each case helped me become more independent"* *"Case reports are very good for that [reflection] - describing whole sequence of events is much more useful to reflect on"* It was further noted that recording clinical skills as part of the PDP enables graduates to reflect on whether they are performing particular tasks or skills on a regular basis. *"Reflect on numbers of things initially".* *"Quantifying things rather looking at the quality"* However there was also acknowledgement that the PDP does not require candidates to reflect on the quality of the tasks being undertaken, but rather the quantity. However, some stakeholders noted that reflections during the PDP were not meaningful and that reflection is something that occurs naturally without requiring the structure of the PDP. *"I don't really know why it's something dictated that you have to do as a person you do it anyway"* *I don't think it helps them to reflect because I don't think its structured enough to organise their reflection, it says reflect on this but doesn't give them anything that they need to consider – graduates need more guidance on what that they're reflecting on"*

KEY MESSAGES

- Across the veterinary profession, the **value of reflection was noted** with a number of benefits associated with reflection highlighted. These included including improvements in performance and a positive impact on mental health.
- Many noted the **importance of informal reflection** through regularly discussing cases, and at practice meetings, with graduates and stakeholders commenting that **written reflection is a lot more challenging**.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

- The **negative side to reflection was discussed**, with employers noting that it is important when reflecting to come to an end point on the reflection and not continue to dwell.
- The role of reflection in the PDP was discussed, with some benefits noted including that the PDP does provide graduates with a structured and regular opportunity to reflect, however, it was noted that more could be done to ensure that the **reflections were meaningful**.

Figure 7: Summary of Proposed Recommendations for Improvement to the PDP (Stakeholder & Graduate)

Recommendations for Improvements on the PDP	
Redefine Purpose & Objective	In relation to redefining the purpose and objectives of the PDP, a number of changes were proposed by graduates and stakeholders. Firstly, it was noted that the PDP should be reviewed to move away from being a 'tickbox' exercise and be adapted to ensure that it becomes more future-focused to support long-term professional development. *"What the PDP should be doing is identifying where they [graduates] should be in 5 years' time"* *"I would like it to be merged into continuous CPD model"* *"Would like to see a shift from the PDP towards a model similar to the modern apprenticeship that he has seen worked well. Apprenticeship standards, rather than a list of clinical skills. Identify what you need to know for your job and then demonstrate evidence base"* Additionally, it was suggested that the focus should be around development objectives and providing graduates with general guidance to determine whether they are progressing in the right direction and at the right pace, with it noted that this is important for building the confidence of graduates. *"There needs to be better structured so we have definite targets to hit and not worry about timelines as much* *"As well as putting numbers in having a traffic light system so can put things to green once happy"* Stakeholders and graduates felt that further clarity should be provided around requirements for completion would be helpful, through the provision of more structured guidance. "*Know it's flexible but some sort of guidance would be good as to when you should feel like you're ready to send it off"* It was noted that the RCVS should engage with employers to encourage them to support the graduates through the PDP. In relation to this, several stakeholders suggested that a section should be added to the PDP for supervisors to complete monthly/bi-monthly to encourage their involvement, for example a short update on the progress of the graduate. *"The person who's your mentor actively logs in and looks at or request that you share it with them so they're part of the process as well"* *"If someone at work could contribute - so when you sign up they sign up with you"* *"Designated coach who understands the process, watch you do it and sign you off on doing it. Seems to work really well for the student nurses"* Within the consultation, it was suggested that the scope of the curriculum within the PDP needs to be widened to ensure relevance across all areas of veterinary practice (e.g. academic graduates), and the purpose and objectives updated to ensure that they are equally meaningful and relevant to all roles. A more flexible system could, for example, enable academic graduates to more easily complete the PDP or to acknowledge that graduates may be working with different animals. *"Needs to be a more flexible and fluid system"*

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	"Because I moved from mixed to farm only it would have been nice to differentiate between case numbers between cows vs sheep vs pigs etc. Trying to figure out how many things e.g. a caesarean on pigs and cows rather than on the total population – and being able to differentiate between species in terms of my confidence in each individual area/specie would have been helpful." *"Skills log should be different depending on what you do…..makes large animal vets feel they're an afterthought – my columns look very empty"* *"Approach things differently and cross out sections that you know you're not going to be able to do"* Finally, inclusion of and more emphasis regarding professional skills development within the PDP was suggested as another change that should be made. *"more about skills, and behaviours in a generic way…more demonstrating evidence (from their context around core areas) e.g. health and safety, mental health (resilience), communication and behavioural competence…research etc."*
Wider engagement across the profession	Improvement in communication across the profession (e.g. between the veterinary schools, employers and the RCVS) was highlighted as a way to support graduates' development. By joining up communication across the profession it was felt that this would help in ensuring that graduates had a better understanding of what to expect when entering practice. *"Annual meeting or brainstorming meeting held by RCVS and PDP Deans with Directors of teaching/education at the different schools to look at the issues arising and how they can work together – their job is to prepare students for practice….sitting down and seeing people face to face is far more effective than doing things by email"* *"Sending vet schools more information about it and promoting it to the schools could help to improve their students' engagement in it [PDP]"* It was also suggested that more could be done across all groups to endorse the PDP. For example, veterinary schools could do more to promote the PDP and employers could be encouraged to prioritise supporting graduates through the PDP (e.g. through introducing the PDP into appraisals and discussions). *"If we as a university endorse it as something very crucial – if they can all say they believe in it as a good support mechanism that would be helpful"* It was felt that wider engagement across the profession would help to raise awareness of the benefits of the PDP , in addition to increasing understanding about the support required across the profession to support new graduates. *"Better quality of information about the benefits and value of the PDP and getting that out widely in the profession"* *"If chat to most people around the vet school – most people think it's a box ticking exercise. Not sending a good message to the students as what the general profession feels will have impact on graduates"* *"Only way to improve is to educate all employers out there of the benefits of PDP"* *"Need practitioners who are employers to have been through a PDP and understand how that PDP was helpful to them and have been through and can understand that system"* *"Want it to be led by the mentors in the practice, using a bottom-up approach not top-down approach"*
Resources available	Across stakeholder and graduate groups, many suggested that the inclusion of further information and resources on the RCVS website would be useful, highlighting the importance of raising awareness across both graduates and employers/mentors that new content exists. In particular, employers suggested that additional guidance on how to support graduates to develop professional skills (e.g.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	communication, resilience) and encourage reflection would be helpful as many have not been taught about this themselves. *"Information presented on websites is great, as long as you tell people that want to read it firstly that the information exists and secondly where to find it"* *Guidance for employers would also be useful to help new employers to have some understanding of the way in which the previous students have been taught to do things such as reflection"* Those that were aware of the BSAVA resource bank had very positive perceptions of current video material available within this and suggested that further video resources either within the resource bank or on the RCVS website, would be very helpful. *"Videos highlighting the benefits inspiring people to do it"* *"Videos of people talking about how they achieved – how they managed their time to fit it in, how they used their mentor"* Despite examples of reflective practice available through the RCVS website, feedback from graduates was that they would benefit from more guidance on and being provided with some examples from the RCVS of how to write reflections. *"More explanation about reflection more of the soft skills than anything else. Spend so much time teaching students about soft skills but it's difficult to get across. Never have enough on reflection and soft skills"* *"If there was something more about what are the elements of reflection, what are the outcomes of it and how it's measured, validated system of reflection would be very helpful"* *"Examples would have been really helpful for us, for example the thought process of how to reflect"* Other suggestions included 'cheat sheets' (e.g. how to deal with difficult situations). *"It would be useful to have a section in the FAQ about working in a specialised area and how you should go about using the guidelines in this case. For example, with pig and poultry they're much more focused on post mortems and a different approach."* *"Information sheets on dealing with difficult clients"* Finally, many graduates expressed the need for more affordable CPD. *"Cheaper CPD. Guidelines on what it might look like to have completed it to an acceptable level. Can just get info overload and if give loads won't read any of it. Good to know things are there"*
Functionality	Stakeholders and graduates suggested an improvement in the functionality of the PDP site is needed due to frustrations. One example was regarding the similarity between the two tabs on the website with one for experience and one containing the skills log, with being noted that it is particularly cumbersome to increase the numbers on the skills log. *"First is that there's a problem with the website - there are two tabs one is to add experience and one is skills log. So, in order to change the numbers, you need to go to 'add experience' tab which looks exactly the same"* *"Very frustrating as you can have the wrong tab open and not know as they look very similar, then spend time updating it and nothing happens – it's the log"* *"Suggestion for improvement would be to change the functionality [of the website] so you can't change the numbers on the PDP skills log"* Additionally, the appearance and modality of the PDP recording system was viewed as being tired and outdated. Stakeholders and graduates commented that more could be done to make the system more visually engaging and that the development of a mobile app could help to encourage graduates to log on and record cases/reflections on a more regular basis.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	"Perhaps the development of an app could help with graduates being able to log things more frequently" *"The appearance of the PDP is starting to look a bit dated"* *"The continual development of the web platform is an important part of keeping it looking fresh and modern"*

KEY MESSAGES

- Across stakeholder and graduate groups, it was recommended that work be undertaken to update the PDP curriculum and content (e.g. to ensure a **greater focus on professional skills**), and many felt that the purpose and objectives should be reviewed to ensure that it is **meaningful and relevant to all graduate roles across all sectors**.
- Additionally, several individuals suggested that the focus should **shift away from the quantity of activities** completed and focus the confidence and competence of graduates, ensuring that clarity and requirements for completion are communicated.
- Many graduates commenting that it would also be **helpful to have someone in the practice to have a regular discussion with regarding their PDP**, who would also be responsible to complete a section within the PDP report on a regular basis, thus helping to encourage involvement.
- Additional useful online resources were also recommended including video resources, information sheets and guidance on reflection.
- Finally, it was noted that **wider and more personal engagement with the PDP across the profession** would be particularly important, with an aim to raise awareness of its benefits and what is required to support graduates to **improve current levels of engagement.**

6. Stakeholder Questionnaire

6.1. The stakeholder questionnaire was designed to elicit views and perceptions regarding the PDP, with specific sections relating to evaluating the impact of the PDP on clinical and non-clinical skills, understanding the challenges faced by employers/mentors in support new graduates in their transition into practice and understanding the impact of reflection as perceived by employers. 198 employers completed the online questionnaire. Demographic questions were collected in relation to practice type, gender, age and ethnicity of respondents.

Stakeholder Questionnaire Sample

6.2. **Practice Type:** Across the 198 responses, there were a mixture of areas of practice reported. The most frequent was small animal practice (74.2%) followed by Mixed (13.1%) and Other Non-Vet Practice, for example government and research (5.6%). For a full breakdown, see **Table 4**.

Table 4: Overview of Area of Practice for Stakeholder Sample

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Small Animal	Equine	Farm	Mixed	Other Vet Practice	Other Non-Vet Practice
74.2% (N=147)	3.5% (N=7)	2.0% (N=4)	13.1% (N=26)	1.5% (N=3)	5.6% (N=11)

6.3. **Corporate versus Non-Corporate:** 35.4% (N=69) of respondents noted that they work in a corporate practice and 64.6% (N=126) noted that they work in an independent practice.

6.4. **Gender:** 38.6% (N=76) of respondents identified themselves as male, 59.9% (N=118) identified themselves as female and 1.5% (N=3) selected that they would prefer not to say.

6.5. **Ethnicity:** The majority of respondents for the stakeholder questionnaire identified themselves as white (95.9%). For a full breakdown of responses by ethnicity, see **Table 5**.

Table 5: Overview of Ethnicity of Stakeholder Sample

White	Asian / Asian British	Black / Black British	Chinese	Mixed	Other Ethnic Group	Prefer Not to Disclose
95.9% (N=189)	1.0% (N=2)	0.5% (N=1)	-	-	-	2.5% (N=5)

6.6. **Age:** 86.3% of respondents within the stakeholder questionnaire were between 26 and 55 years old. For a full break down of age, see Table 6.

Table 6: Overview of Age Range of Stakeholder Sample

<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56+	Prefer not to disclose
0.5% (N=1)	23.7% (N=47)	28.3% (N=56)	34.3% (N=68)	11.6% (N=23)	1.5% (N=3)

Summary of Stakeholder Questionnaire Results

6.7. The following sections summarise the outputs of the stakeholder questionnaires. Unless otherwise stated, each item within the questionnaire was measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). For the purpose of analysis, the mean responses (based on the 5-point scale) for each question were examined. The stakeholder questionnaire also comprised five free response questions in order to allow respondents to provide more detailed comments. The outputs of each are summarised in the sections below.

6.8. Stakeholder Perceptions of the Impact of the PDP on the Development of Clinical and Non-Clinical Skills.

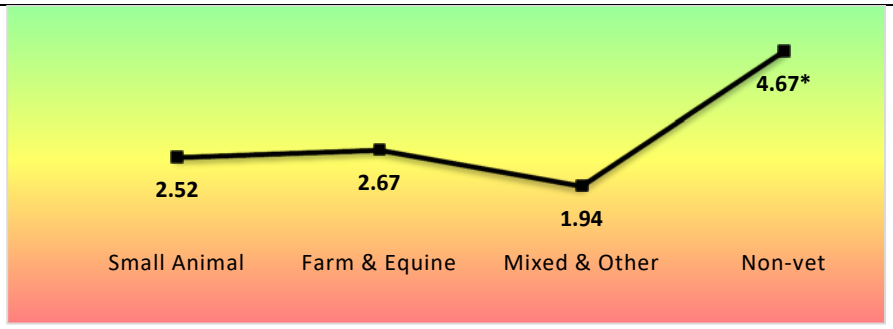
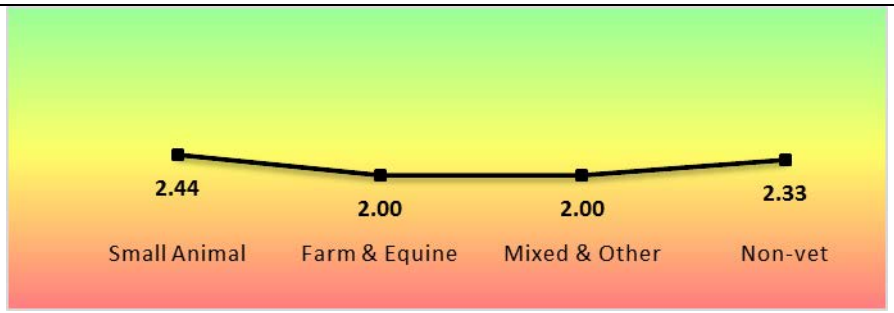
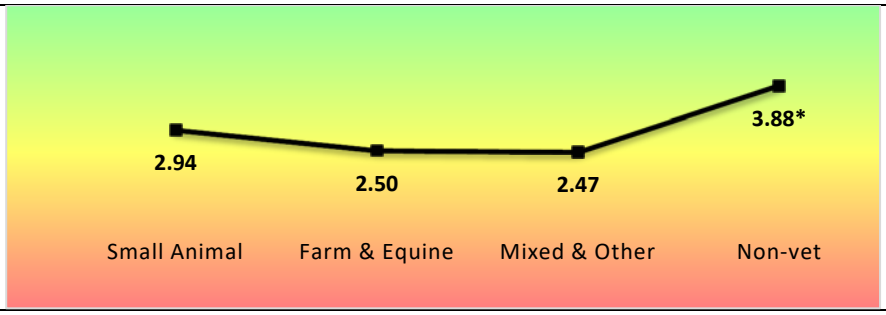
6.8.1. In Section 1 of the stakeholder questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements regarding how useful the PDP guidance is for employers who are supporting veterinary graduates in their transition from veterinary school into practice.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

6.8.2. For the purpose of exploration, respondents' answers were categorised in accordance with their field of work; Small Animal, Farm & Equine, Mixed & Other and Non-Vet practice[7] (e.g. Education, Head Office, Locum, Industry). A series of variance analyses were also conducted to investigate any significant differences between the four fields of work on each item in this section of the questionnaire[8].

6.8.3. **Figure 8** reflects a broad summary of the key findings within this section of the questionnaire. To see the full set of graphs detailing the results from the full questionnaire, please see **Appendix A.**

Figure 8: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Impact of the PDP on the Development of Clinical and Non-Clinical Skills

I have received guidance from the RCVS regarding the PDP (N=132) *Non-vet is significantly higher than both Small Animal and Mixed & Other	
Having access to the RCVS PDP guidance has made me feel supported in appraising new graduates (N=93)	
The PDP supports the development of graduates' non-clinical skills (N=127) *Non-vet is significantly higher than Mixed & Other	

6.8.4. Those who do not work in a veterinary practice tended to agree or strongly agree that they had received guidance from the RCVS regarding the PDP while, on average, stakeholders working in other fields had a more negative view. Statistical analysis for this question found significant differences in mean responses between those working in Small Animal practices and Non-Vet practices and also between those working in Mixed & Other Practices and Non-Vet practices. ***However, as noted due to the very small sample size within the 'Non-Veterinary Practice' category (N=11), any results relating to this group should be interpreted with caution.***

6.8.5. Overall, stakeholders across all fields of practice tended to disagree that the PDP guidance had made them feel supported in appraising new graduates. However, as noted already, all three groups working in

[7] Farm & Equine and Mixed & Other (Vet Practice) were combined due to the number of response rates.
[8] Results should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size (N=11) for the non-vet practice category.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

veterinary practices tended to disagree that they had received guidance in the first place and as such, this finding may not be reflective of the support felt by those who noted that they had received guidance.

6.8.6. In addition, those working in Non-Vet practices tended to agree more than the other three groups that the PDP supports the development of graduates' clinical and non-clinical skills with those working in veterinary practices viewing it in a more negative light. Statistical analysis found a significant difference between those working in Mixed & Other practices and Non-Vet practices in terms of their perceptions in relation to these two questions.

6.8.7. The results from the stakeholder questionnaire indicate that there is a moderate level of understanding of the purpose of the PDP across the various fields. However, this may be slightly higher for those stakeholders that do not work in veterinary practices. Based on our understanding from the consultations, it is anticipated that stakeholders who are not working in practice are likely to be less involved with supporting new graduates and as such, the PDP when comparing to those working in practice. As previously noted, it is recommended that the feedback from the 'non-vet practice' group within this section is ***interpreted with caution.***

6.8.8. When considering if the PDP can be used to monitor the progression of graduates, those working in Small Animal practices, Farm & Equine and Mixed & Other practices tended disagree with this statement, whereas those working in Non-Vet practices tended to agree.

6.8.9. An open-ended question asked stakeholders to identify areas of the guidance provided by the RCVS that they have found to be most useful. Analysis of this revealed that the most frequent comments made included: stakeholders were unaware of the guidance, they accessed it infrequently, they found it unhelpful and suggested that there should be better access to guidance for employers. Please see **Appendix B** for a word cloud outlining the most frequently mentioned themes.

6.8.10. Finally, stakeholders were asked how often they access the RCVS PDP guidance. There were N=47 respondents to this question and a breakdown of the frequency of access is presented in **Table 7**.

Table 7: On average, I access the RCVS PDP guidance:

Every Day	Twice a week	Once a week	Once a fortnight	Once a month	Never
0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	4.3% (N=2)	4.3% (N=2)	91.5% (N=43)	0% (N=0)

KEY MESSAGES

- Overall, across each of the fields of practice (excluding Non-Vet practice respondents) perceptions were similar across the questions in that respondents tended to **disagree or had a neutral view**.
- Those working in **Non-Vet practice tended to have a more positive view of the impact of the PDP** on the development of clinical and non-clinical skills with significant differences found between this field of practice and the other three in relation to these two questions.
- Stakeholders working in Small Animal, Farm & Equine and Mixed & Other practices tended to **disagree that PDP guidance made them feel supported in appraising new graduates** but also tended to disagree that they had received guidance in the first instance.

6.9. STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE BSAVA RESOURCES

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

6.9.1. In Section 2 of this questionnaire, stakeholders were asked again to rate their level of agreement with several statements regarding how useful the BSAVA PDP resource bank is for employers/mentors currently supporting veterinary graduates in their transition from Veterinary school into practice.

6.9.2. As the BSAVA is only available to those working in Small Animal practice, these questions were only asked to respondents who identified themselves as working in either Small Animal or Mixed & Other practice.

6.9.3. Stakeholders were initially asked to specify whether or not they were familiar with what the BSAVA PDP resource bank is and where to access it with N=108 respondents answering this question. The results are presented below in **Table 8**.

Table 8: I am familiar with what the BSAVA PDP resource bank is and where to access it:

Yes	No
25.9% (N=28)	74.1% (N=80)

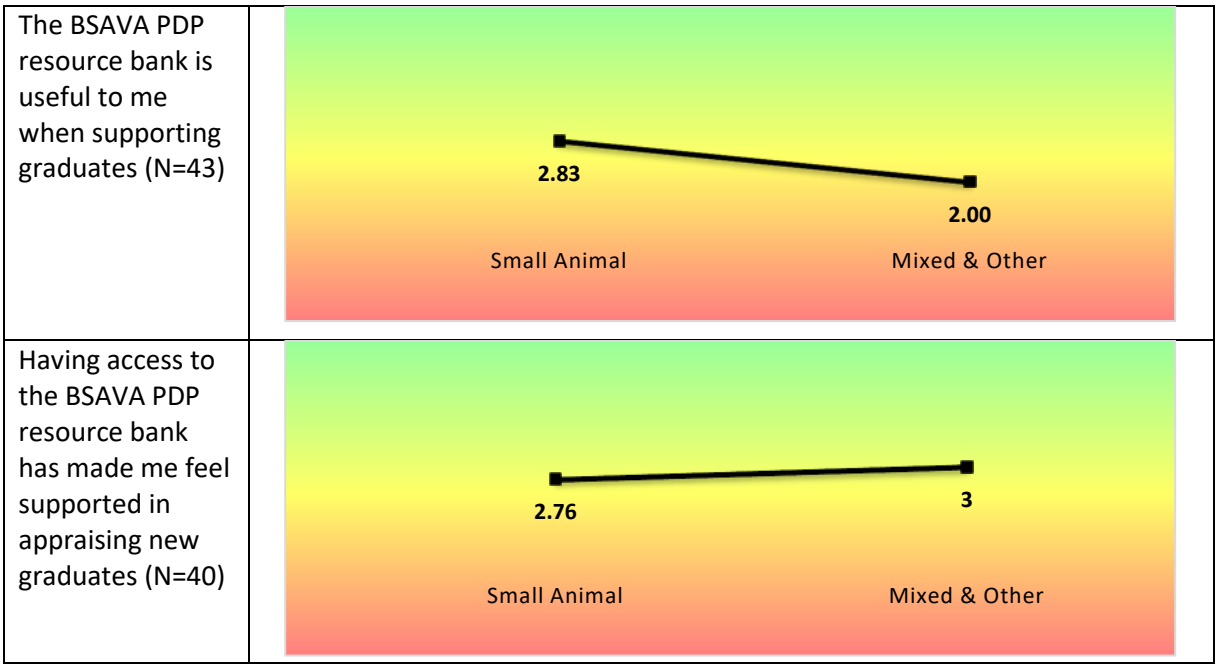
6.9.4. Respondents were then asked how often they accessed the BSAVA PDP resource bank. N=20 respondents answered this question, the results of which are presented below in **Table 9.**

Table 9: On average, I access the BSAVA PDP resource bank:

Every day	Twice a week	Once a week	Once a fortnight	Once a month	Never
0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	10% (N=2)	90% (N=90)	0% (N=0)

6.9.5. **Figure 9** reflects a broad summary of the key findings from within this section of the questionnaire with the full set of graphs available in **Appendix A**.

Figure 9: Stakeholder Perceptions of the BSAVA Resources



© 2017 Work Psychology Group

6.9.6. Overall, the results from this section of the stakeholder questionnaire indicate that the majority of stakeholders disagreed or responded neutrally that the BSAVA PDP resource bank is a useful source of guidance for supporting veterinary graduates in their transition from Veterinary school into practice.

6.9.7. Those stakeholders who were familiar with what the BSAVA PDP resource bank is and how they can access it, did not tend to view it in a positive light. These findings were similar across both those working in Small Animal practices and in Mixed & Other practices. The results within this section of the questionnaire indicate that opinions on the BSAVA PDP resource bank may be slightly more positive for those who work in Mixed & Other practices, but statistical analysis revealed that these differences were not significant.

6.9.8. Open-ended questions asked the respondents to consider the BSAVA PDP resource that has been most useful to them. In line with the quantitative data and the feedback received within the consultations, most of the responses suggested that stakeholders were unaware of this resource, they accessed it infrequently and that there needs to be better access for employers. Those who were aware of the resource and use it described it as a support tool for development, although some suggested that it may be too field-specific. Please see **Appendix B** for a word cloud showing an overview of the most frequently mentioned themes.

6.9.9. In addition, stakeholders were asked about how they felt they could improve the BSAVA PDP Resource Bank with a majority of comments suggesting that there needs to be more awareness of the resource bank with an understanding of what it is and a wider range of resources available. Please see **Appendix B** for a word cloud showing the most frequently mentioned themes.

KEY MESSAGES

- Overall, stakeholders tended **not to be familiar the BSAVA PDP resource bank** or where to access it.
- Some comments from stakeholders noted that the BSAVA PDP resource bank acted as a **support tool for development**. However, many tended to view it in a negative light noting that it was not a very helpful resource and too field-specific.
- Respondents suggested that there needs to be an **increased awareness and understanding of the resource bank** while improving access for employers and utilising a wider range of resources.

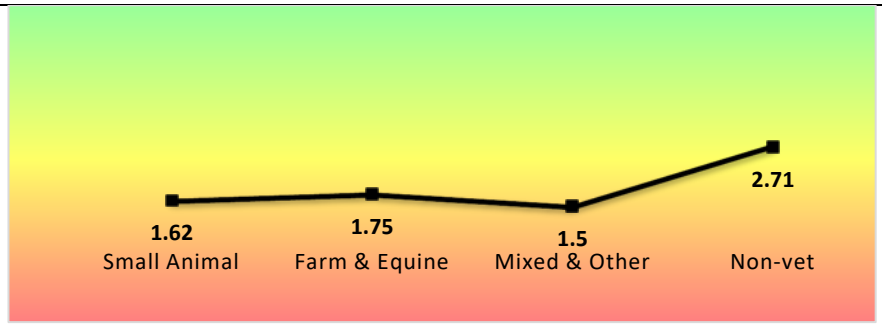
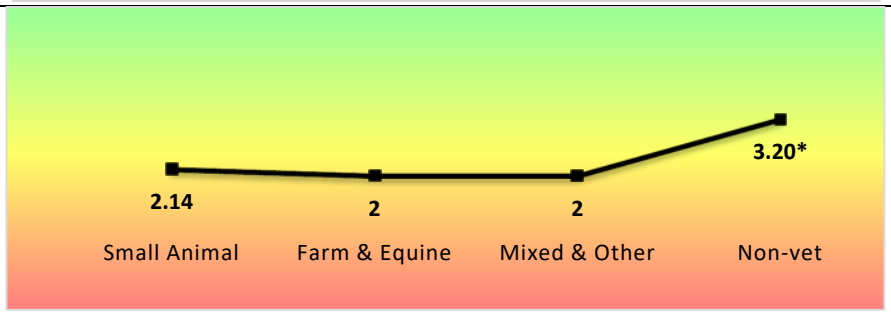
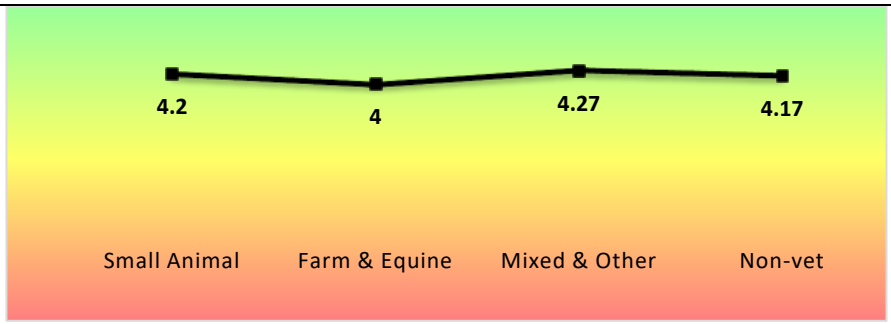
6.10. STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY EMPLOYERS/MENTORS OF NEW GRADUATES

6.10.1. In Section 3 of the stakeholder questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements regarding the challenges that employers and mentors may face in supporting new graduates in their transition from Veterinary school into practice.

6.10.2. **Figure 10** reflects a summary of the key findings from this section of the questionnaire with the full set of graphs detailed in **Appendix A**.

Figure 10: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Challenges faced by Employers/Mentors of New Graduates

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

There is a sufficient communication between the Vet schools and the practice when graduates enter the profession (N=113)	
The Postgraduate Dean is a useful resource to support graduates' progression (N=92) *Non-vet is significantly higher than Small Animal and Mixed & Other	
I make the time to support graduates in their professional development (N=112)	

6.10.3. Across all four groups, the results indicate that respondents tended to disagree that there is a sufficient amount of communication between the veterinary schools and practice when graduates enter the profession. This is line with feedback received during the consultations. The overall level of agreement with this statement was slightly higher from those working in Non-Vet practice, however, statistical analysis revealed that this was not significantly higher than the other three fields.

6.10.4. Overall, stakeholders tended to disagree that they were aware of the function of the Postgraduate Dean, which again is in line with consultation findings. However, those working in Non-Vet practices, were more likely to agree that they were aware of the Postgraduate Dean's function. In addition, those working in Small Animal practice, Farm & Equine and Mixed & Other practice tended to disagree that the Postgraduate Dean was a valuable resource in supporting graduates' progression. Statistical analysis revealed that those working in Non-Vet practice differed significantly from this in that they tended to respond neutrally to this statement, ***however, as noted previously, due to small response rates in this group, this finding should be interpreted with caution.***

6.10.5. Furthermore, the results from this section of the questionnaire suggest that respondents across the four groups tended to agree that practices are able to assign graduates a mentor. Reponses were slightly more neutral for those working in Farm & Equine and Mixed & Other practices, however statistical analysis showed that these differences were not significant. In addition, stakeholders across all four groups agreed that they make the time to support graduates in their professional development. These findings are in contrast from some of the findings evident within the consultations, where it was noted that additional employer support was required.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

6.10.6. Finally, an open-ended question asked stakeholders to identify what they felt were the three biggest challenges in in supporting veterinary graduates in their transition from Veterinary school into practice. The most common challenges identified included: graduate expectations, practical skills, commercial awareness, confidence and communication skills. Please see **Appendix B** for a word cloud showing an overview of the most frequently occurring themes for this question.

KEY MESSAGES

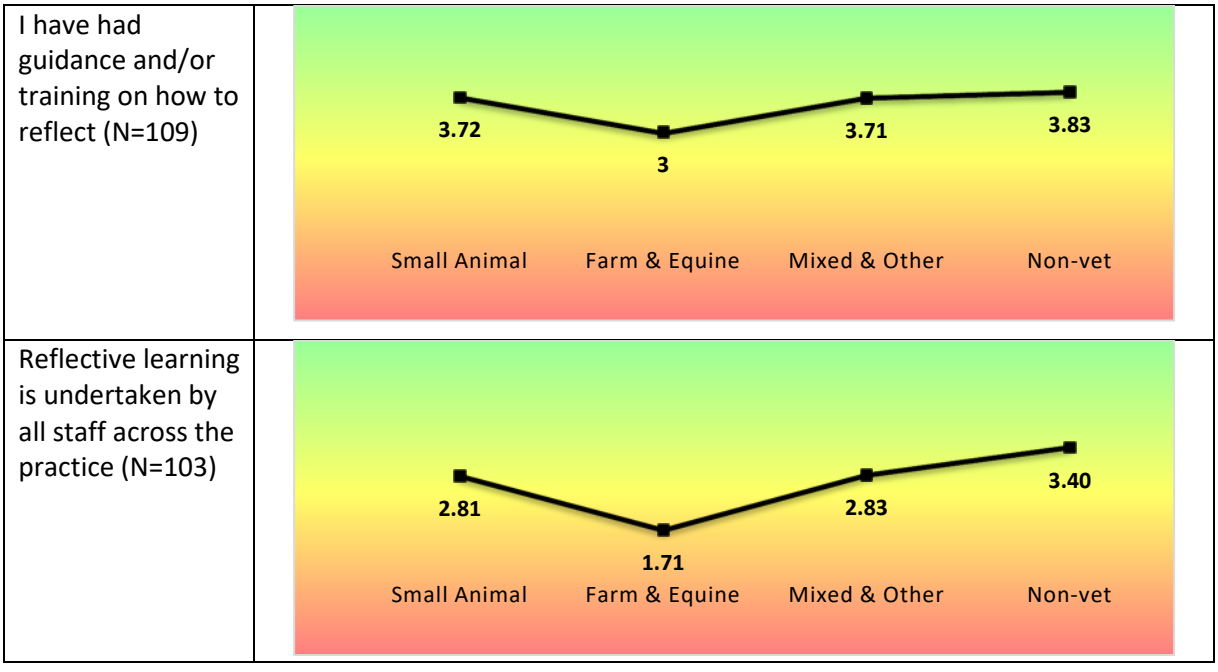
- Overall, respondents across all four fields of practice **disagreed that there was a sufficient amount of communication between veterinary schools and practices** with these findings mirrored in the feedback received during the consultations.
- Stakeholders across all four fields of practice agreed that they are able to **assign graduates a mentor** and that they make time to support graduates in their professional development.
- In line with feedback from the consultations, the **main challenges identified in supporting veterinary graduates were non-clinical and** included graduate expectations, practical skills and commercial awareness.

6.11. STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF REFLECTION

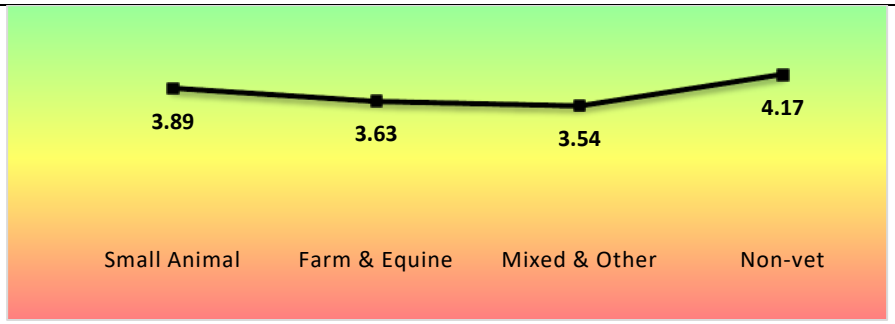
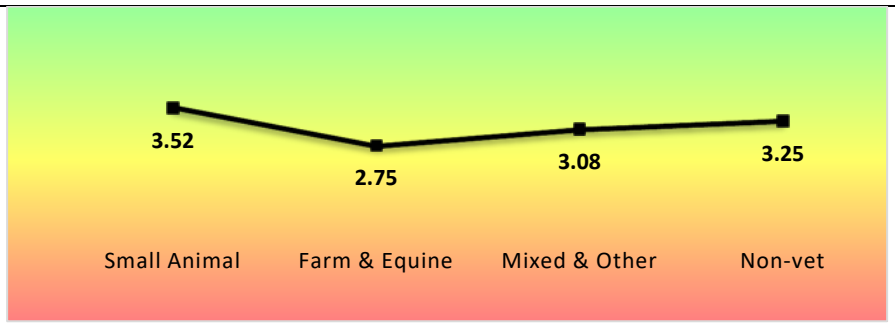
6.11.1. In Section 4 of the stakeholder questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements regarding their perceptions of the impact of reflection and its role in the working environment.

6.11.2. **Figure 11** reflects a broad summary of the key findings from this section of the stakeholder questionnaire; separated by the four groups. To see the full set of graphs detailing the results, please see **Appendix A**.

Figure 11. Stakeholder Perceptions of the Impact of Reflection



© 2017 Work Psychology Group

As an employer/mentor, I encourage a culture of feedback and reflection on performance day-to-day (N=107)	
Graduates are supported in meeting the standard of reflection required within the PDP (N=96)	

6.11.3. In contrast to the feedback received during the consultations, stakeholders across each group tended to neither agree or disagree that they regularly engage in reflection at work. However, a similar finding is that stakeholders working in Small Animal practice, Farm & Equine and Mixed & Other practice tended to disagree that they have had guidance and/or training on how to reflect while those who work in Non-Vet practice were more likely to agree with this statement. The tendency to reflect could be influenced by whether or not the stakeholders have received any guidance/training on how to reflect.

6.11.4. Stakeholders across all four fields of work tended to slightly disagree that reflective learning is undertaken by all members of staff. Those working in Farm & Equine tended to strongly disagree with this statement, however, statistical analyses showed that these results were not significantly different from those working in the other areas of veterinary practice and Non-Vet practice.

6.11.5. In line with evidence from the consultations, stakeholders across all four groups were agreed that they encourage a culture of feedback and reflection on performance. However, stakeholders across all four groups tended to respond neutrally or with a slight degree of agreement that graduates are supported in meeting the standards of reflection required within the PDP.

KEY MESSAGES

- Overall, stakeholders across all four fields of practice neither agreed or disagreed that they engage in regular reflection with respondents from Small Animal and Mixed & other practices **disagreeing that they have received guidance or training on how to reflect**.
- While stakeholders across all four fields of practice agreed that they **encourage a culture of feedback and reflection**, they tended to slightly disagree that graduates are supporting in meeting the standards of reflection required within the PDP suggesting a disparity between guidance and practice.

6.12. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

6.12.1. Finally, an open-ended question asked respondents if they felt that the format and structure of the RCVS PDP is appropriate and if not, what changes they would like to see to better support them and their graduates in the transition into the profession. The most common recommendations mentioned were in

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

relation to its relevance, more of a focus on practical skills, less box-ticking and the development of a more formal process. Please see **Appendix B** for a word cloud showing an overview of the most frequently occurring themes for this question.

7. Graduate Questionnaire

7.1. As with the stakeholder questionnaire, the graduate questionnaire was designed to elicit views and perceptions regarding the PDP, with specific sections relating to evaluating the impact of the PDP on clinical and non-clinical skills, understanding the challenges faced by new graduates as they enter practice and understanding the impact of reflection as perceived by new graduates. 734 graduates completed the online questionnaire. Demographic questions were collected in relation to practice type, gender, age and ethnicity of respondents.

Graduate Questionnaire Sample

7.2. **Practice Type:** Across the 734 responses, there were a mixture of areas of practice reported. The most frequent was small animal practice (62.1%) followed by Mixed (17.1%) and Equine (9.9%) For a full breakdown, see **Table 10**.

Table 10: Overview of Area of Practice for Graduate Sample

Small Animal	Equine	Farm	Mixed	Exotic	Other Non-Vet Practice
62.1% (N=456)	9.9% (N=73)	6.7% (N=49)	17.2% (N=126)	0.7% (N=5)	3.4% (N=5)

7.3. **Corporate versus Non-Corporate:** 36.3% (N=266) of graduates noted that they work in a corporate practice and 63.7% (N=466) noted that they work in an independent practice.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

7.4. **Gender:** 18.4% (N=140) of respondents identified themselves as male, 78.0% (N=592) identified themselves as female and 0.1% (N=1) selected that they would prefer not to say.

7.5. **Ethnicity:** The majority of respondents for the stakeholder questionnaire identified themselves as white (94.5%). For a full breakdown of responses by ethnicity, see **Table 11**.

Table 11: Overview of Ethnicity of Graduate Sample

White	Asian / Asian British	Black / Black British	Chinese	Mixed	Other Ethnic Group	Prefer Not to Disclose
94.5% (N=692)	0.8% (N=6)	0.1% (N=1)	0.8% (N=6)	2.2% (N=16)	0.4% (N=3)	1.1% (N=8)

7.6. **Age:** 77.6% of respondents within the graduate questionnaire were between 24 and 29 year's old. For a full break down of age, see **Table 12**.

Table 12: Overview of Age Range of Graduate Sample

<23	24-26	27-29	30-32	33+	Prefer not to disclose
6.8% (N=50)	49.8% (N=365)	27.8% (N=204)	8.9% (N=65)	6.3% (N=46)	0.4% (N=3)

Summary of Graduate Questionnaire Results

7.7. This section provides feedback from the graduate questionnaire. Each item of the questionnaire was measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). For the purpose of analysis, the mean responses for each question were examined. There were also seven open ended questions which allowed graduates to give a more detailed response.

7.8. Graduate Perceptions of the Impact of the PDP on the Development of Clinical and Non-Clinical Skills.

7.8.1. In Section 1 of the graduate questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements regarding how useful the PDP outlined by the RCVS is for veterinary graduates in their transition from Veterinary school into practice and the impact that this may have on the development of graduate's clinical and non-clinical skills.

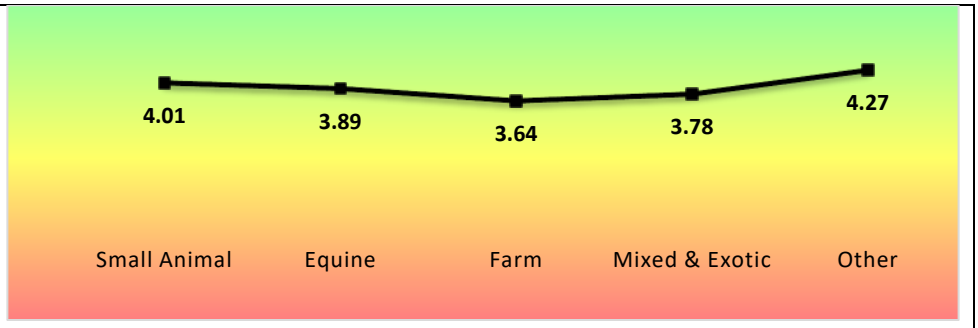
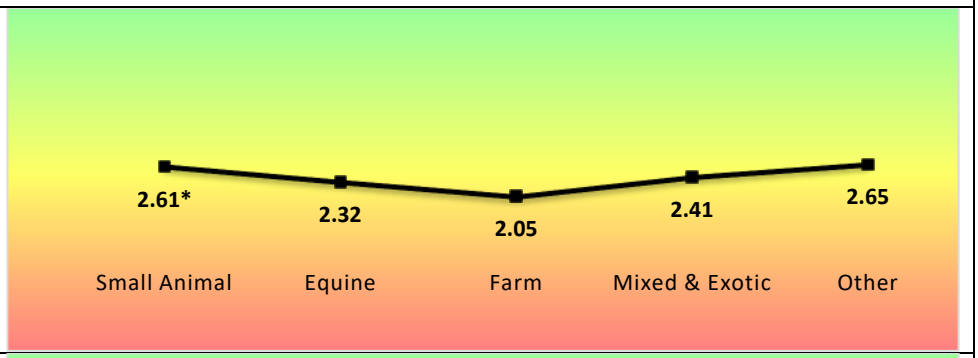
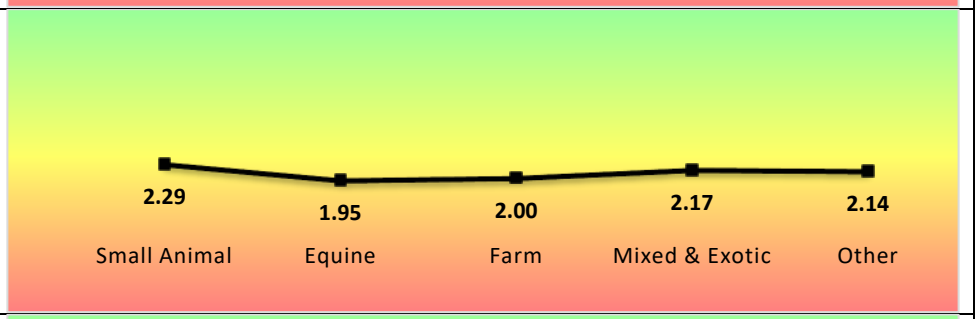
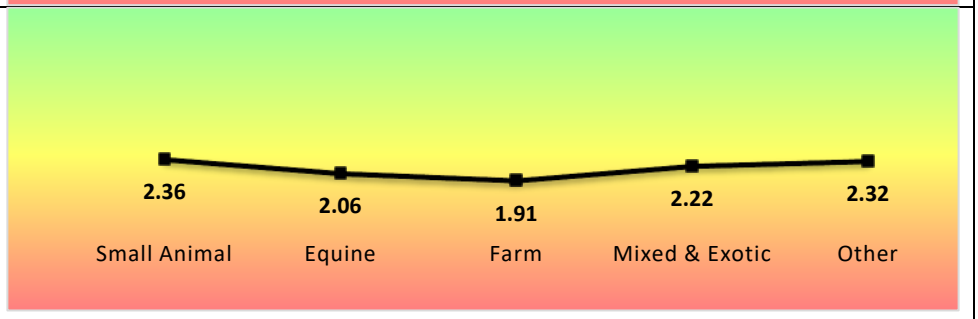
7.8.2. For the purpose of exploration, respondents' answers were categorised in accordance with their field of work; Small Animal, Farm, Equine, Mixed & Exotic[9] and Other (e.g. Locum and Research/Academia). A series of variance analyses were conducted to investigate any significant differences between groups on each item of this section of the questionnaire.

7.8.3. **Figure 12** reflects a broad summary of some of the key findings within this section of the questionnaire. **Appendix C** is comprised of the full set of graphs detailing the results from the full questionnaire.

Figure 12: Graduate Perceptions of the Impact of the PDP on the Development of Clinical and Non-Clinical Skills

[9] Mixed and Exotic were combined due to the number of response rates.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

I understand the purpose of the PDP (N=663)	
The structure of the PDP supports me with the development of my clinical skills (N=652) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Farm	
The structure of the PDP supports me with the development of my non-clinical skills (N=652)	
The learning that I have gained by engaging with the PDP has been useful in my day-to-day work (N=650)	

7.8.4. Across each of the five fields, graduates tended to agree that they understood the purpose of the PDP with the lowest level of understanding coming from graduates working in Farm practice and the highest level of understanding coming from those who work in Other practices.

7.8.5. Overall, the results of this section of the questionnaire suggest that graduates across all areas of practice tend to disagree that the structure of the PDP supports them with the development of their clinical or non-clinical skills. However, responses tend to be slightly more positive with regards to the clinical skill development, which is a finding that also emerged from within the consultations. This is a key finding in terms of evaluating the PDP as the results indicate that whilst graduates are aware of what the purpose of PDP is, they do not feel that this purpose is being fulfilled within its current format. This is also reflective of the outputs gained from the graduate consultations.

7.8.6. In addition, the results of this section of the questionnaire indicate that graduates tend to disagree that the PDP is useful in supporting their professional development. Statistical analysis revealed a significant

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

different between those working in Small Animal practices and those working in Farm and Equine with those working in Small Animal practices tending more towards a neutral opinion in this regard.

7.8.7. Furthermore, respondents tended to slightly disagree that they had received sufficient information about the PDP whilst at Veterinary school and similarly, they tended to slightly disagree that they understood the role of the Postgraduate Dean in relation to the PDP.

7.8.8. Respondents were then asked to identify how often the accessed the PDP materials. N=519 respondents answered this question, with the results presented below in **Table 13.**

Table 13. On average, I access the PDP materials:

Every day	Twice a week	Once a week	Once a fortnight	Once a month	Never
1.2% (N=6)	5.8% (N=30)	16.2% (N=84)	18.5% (N=95)	58.4% (N=303)	0% (N=0)

7.8.9. Respondents were then asked to provide information on the aspect of the PDP that has had the largest impact on their development. Results from this open-ended question revealed that graduates have found the skills list and cases summary to have had the biggest impact on their development. Time constraints to engage with and complete the PDP record were also evident. To see a word cloud demonstrating the most common responses to this question, please see **Appendix D**.

7.8.10. In addition, respondents were asked what elements they would add to the existing PDP. The most frequently mentioned elements included skills logging, adequate time, the introduction of a confidence tracker, and a reduction of box-ticking. To see a full word cloud demonstrating the range of answers given to this question, please see **Appendix D**.

KEY MESSAGES

- Overall, graduates agreed that they **understood the purpose of the PDP**, however they disagreed that the structure of the PDP supports them in their clinical skill, non-clinical skill and professional development suggesting a disparity between the purpose of the PDP and the achievements of the PDP in light of its purpose. This finding was consistent across all five fields of practice.
- Graduates tended to **disagree that they received sufficient information regarding the PDP** and were also **unaware the Postgraduate Dean's role** in relation to the PDP. This finding was consistent across all five fields of practice.

7.9. GRADUATE PERCEPTIONS OF THE BSAVA RESOURCES

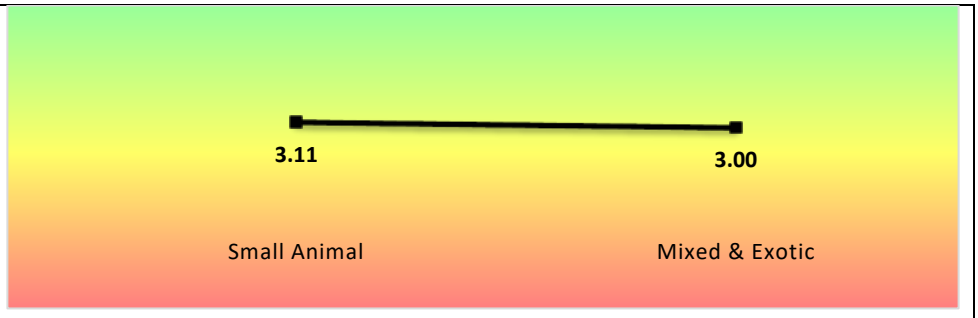
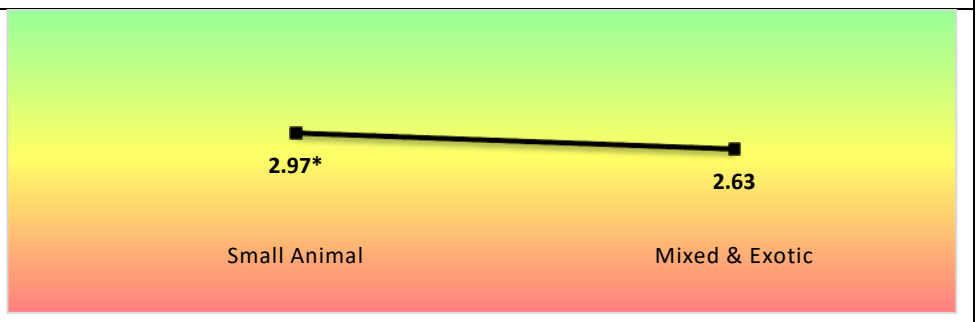
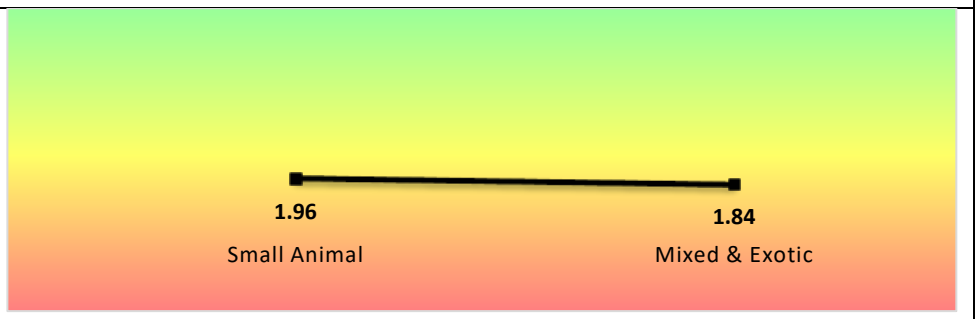
7.9.1. In section 2 of this questionnaire, graduates were asked to rate their level of agreement with a number of statements relating to how useful the BSAVA PDP resource bank is for veterinary graduates in their transition from Veterinary school into practice and the impact that these have on the development of their skills.

7.9.2. As the BSAVA PDP resource bank is only available to those who working in Small Animal practice, these questions were only asked to respondents who identified themselves as working in either Small Animal or Mixed & Exotic practice.

7.9.3. **Figure 13** reflects a broad summary of some of the key findings from within this section of the graduate questionnaire with the full set of graphs available in **Appendix C**.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Figure 13: Graduate Perceptions of the BSAVA Resources

Having access to the BSAVA resource bank has made me feel supported in my transition from Veterinary school to practice (N=267)	
I think that my employer is aware of my PDP requirements (N=450) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Mixed & Exotic	
My awareness of the PDP requirements influenced my decision to become a paying BSAVA member (N=356)	

7.9.4. Overall, the results from this section of the questionnaire indicate that both the Small Animal and Mixed & Exotic tended to neither agree nor disagreed with statements surrounding their perceptions of the BSAVA Resource Bank.

7.9.5. However, statistical analysis showed that there was a significant difference between those working in Small Animal practices and those working in Mixed & Exotic practices with Small Animal vets agreeing significantly more that their employer is aware of their PDP requirements. This finding is unsurprising given that the resources are available to Small Animal vets.

7.9.6. Both those working in Small Animal practices and Mixed & Exotic practices tended to disagree that their awareness of the PDP requirements influenced them to becoming a paying BSAVA member.

7.9.7. Respondents were then asked to identify how often they accessed the BSAVA resource bank with N=156 answering this question. The results are presented below in **Table 14.**

Table 14: On average, I access the BSAVA resource bank:

Every day	Twice a week	Once a week	Once a fortnight	Once a month	Never
3.8% (N=6)	7.1% (N=11)	11.5% (N=18)	10.9% (N=17)	66.7% (N=104)	0% (N=0)

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

7.9.8. Finally, respondents were then asked about the BSAVA resource that has had the largest impact on their development. The most common answers indicated that a majority of graduates are unaware of this resource or else do not have access to it or are not a member of the BSAVA. Please see **Appendix D** for a word cloud containing the most frequently discussed elements.

KEY MESSAGES

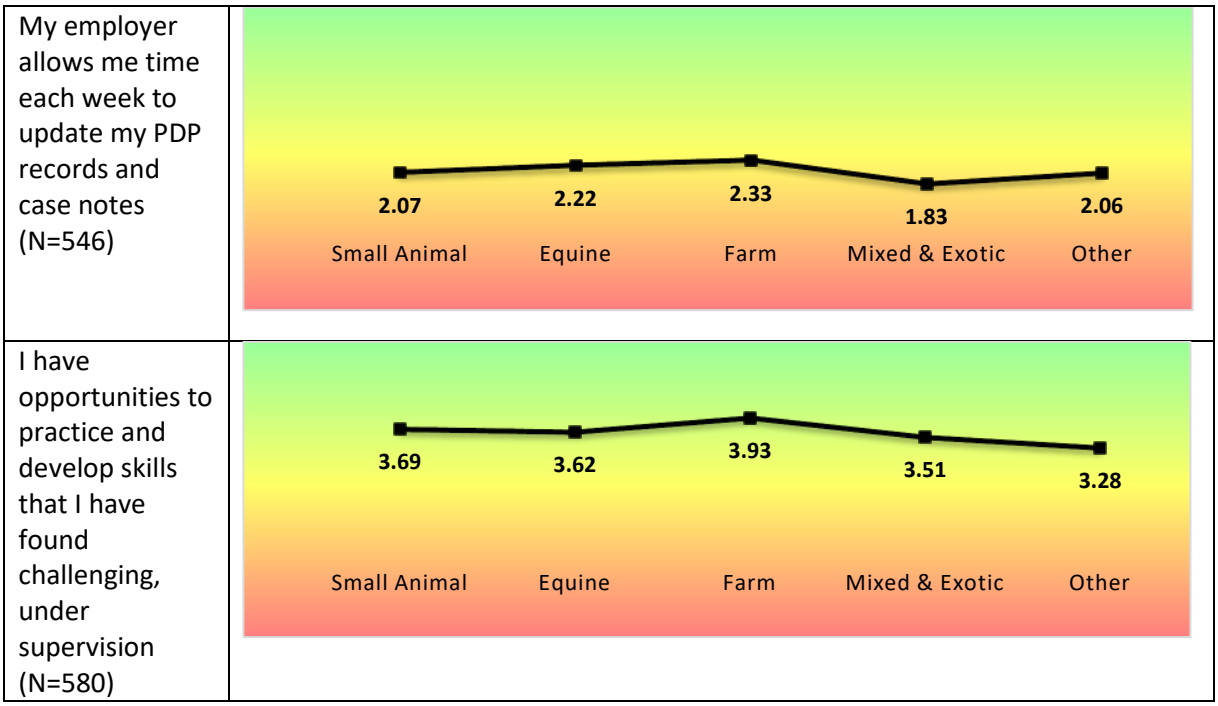
- Overall, those working in Small Animal practices tended to agree more that their employers were aware of the PDP requirements than those working in Mixed & Exotic practices, suggesting that having access to the Resource Bank **supports employers with their understanding of the PDP.**
- Respondents from both fields of practice **neither agreed or disagreed that the BSAVA PDP resource bank was helpful** in their transition from Veterinary school with the majority of those who utilise it accessing it, on average, once a month.

7.10. GRADUATE PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW GRADUATES

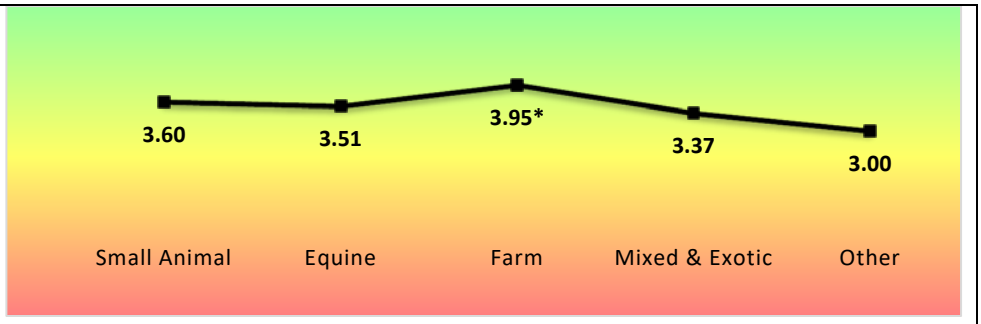
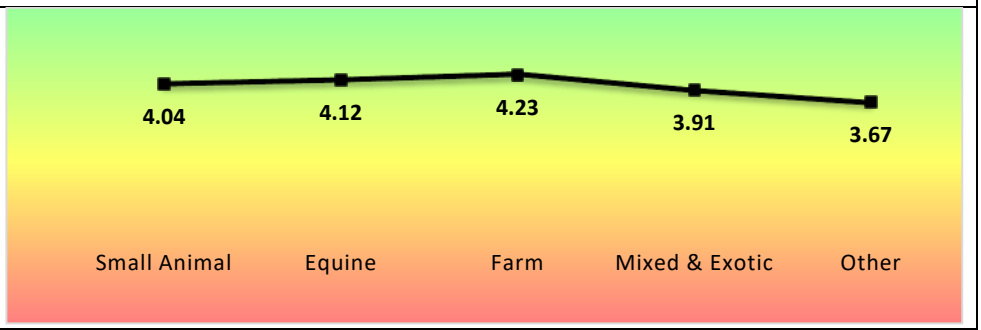
7.10.1. In Section 3 of the graduate's questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding their perceptions of the development opportunities that are available to veterinary graduates when in practice.

7.10.2. **Figure 14** reflects a summary of some of the key findings from this section of the graduate questionnaire. To see the full list of graphs representing the findings from this section of the questionnaire, please see **Appendix C.**

Figure 14: Graduate Perceptions of the Development Opportunities Available



© 2017 Work Psychology Group

The feedback that I receive from my supervisor/line manager is informed and constructive (N=553) *Farm is significantly higher than Other	
I am provided with sufficient support from my veterinary colleagues to effectively do my role (N=584)	

7.10.3. The results of this section of the questionnaire indicate that, across all areas of practice, graduates tended to disagree that their employers provide them with sufficient time to update their PDP records and case notes. This was particularly negative for those working in Mixed & Exotic practices, although statistical analysis found that this was not significantly different from the other fields of work.

7.10.4. In addition, the results of this section of the questionnaire suggest that all graduates are inclined to slightly agree that, under supervision, they have adequate opportunities to practice and develop skills that they have found challenging. They also tended to slightly agree that the feedback they receive from their supervisors is informed and constructive. Statistical analysis revealed that those working in Farm practices agreed with this statement significantly more than those working in Other practices.

7.10.5. Results indicated that graduates across all areas of practice tended to agree that they were provided with sufficient support from their veterinary colleagues.

7.10.6. Respondents were then asked to identify how often they engaged with the RCVS Postgraduate Dean with N=146 responding to this question. The results are presented below in **Table 15.** All graduates that responded to this question indicated that they had engaged with their Postgraduate Dean at least once throughout the PDP process.

Table 15: On average, I engage with the RCVS Postgraduate Dean

Every day	Twice a week	Once a week	Once a fortnight	Once a month	Never
0.7% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	1.4% (N=2)	4.8% (N=7)	93.2% (N=136)	0% (N=0)

7.10.7. Finally, respondents were asked to describe what they thought are the three main challenges faced by graduations in the transition from Veterinary school to practice. Results indicate that the most common challenges noted include dealing with clients, time, available support and pressure. To see a word cloud of the full list of most common answers, please see **Appendix D**.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

KEY MESSAGES

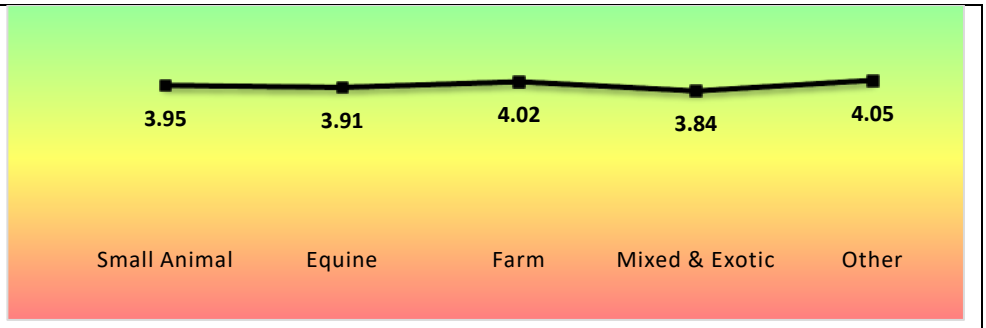
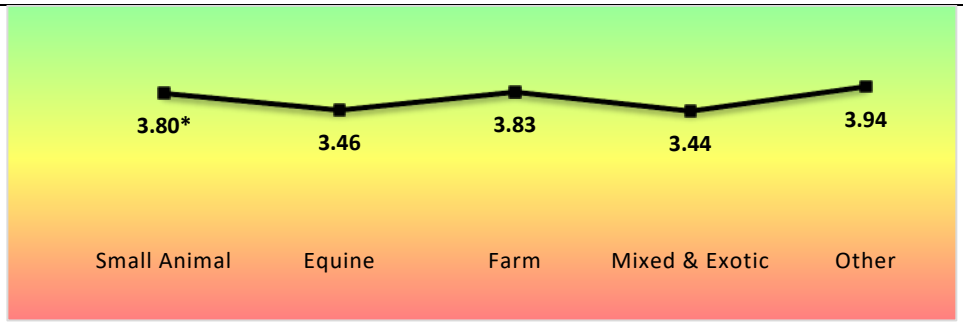
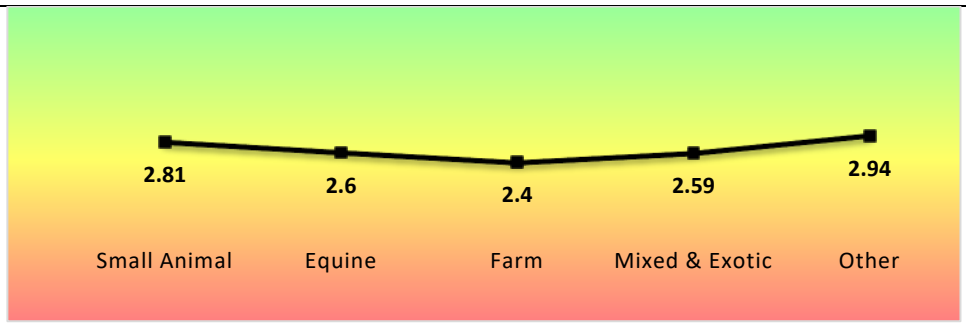
- Overall, all graduates slightly agreed that they were provided with **adequate opportunities for skill development** and have **appropriate support from colleagues** in order to effectively do their role.
- However, respondents tended to **disagree that they were provided with sufficient time to update their PDP records** and case notes which may suggest that reflective practice for skill development is being undertaken but not necessarily documented as to the PDP guidelines.

7.11. GRADUATES PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF REFLECTION

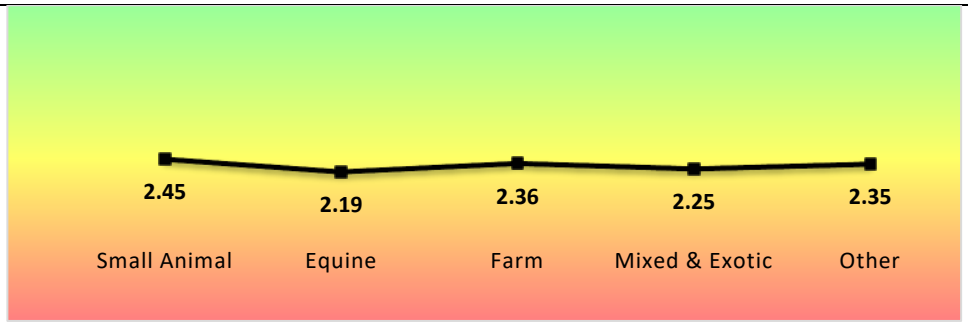
7.11.1. Section 4 of the graduate's questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding their perceptions of the impact of reflection during the professional development phase.

7.11.2. **Figure 15** reflects a broad summary of some of the key findings from this section of the graduate questionnaire. The full set of graphs detailing the results of this section can be found in **Appendix C**.

Figure 15: Graduates Perceptions of the Impact of Reflection

I understand how to reflect appropriately (N=557)	
Reflection helps me to identify my development areas and what I need to do to improve in these areas (N=554) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Mixed & Exotic	
Regularly spending time writing up my cases helps me to reflect more effectively (N=527)	

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

It is clear what the standard of reflection required is during the PDP (N=550)	

7.11.3. Overall, the results within this section of the graduate's questionnaire suggest that graduates tend to agree that they understand how to reflect appropriately and tended to agree that reflection helps them to identify their development areas and areas they need to improve on. However, across all areas of practice, graduates tended to disagree that regularly writing up their cases helped them to reflect more effectively. In addition, the results demonstrate that graduates were inclined to disagree that it is clear what standard of reflection is required during the PDP. This perception was further evident within the feedback received by graduates during the consultations.

7.11.4. Furthermore, the results suggest that graduates tended to neither agree nor disagree that the PDP has supported them in being able to reflect on their experiences as a graduate in veterinary practice. Moreover, the results indicate that graduates tended to slightly agree that they gained sufficient experience in reflection at Veterinary school to be able to engage with the PDP. Therefore, whilst graduates may understand the principles of reflection, they are unsure about the value of the PDP as a mechanism for supporting their reflective practice. Again, this finding is similar to what emerged during the graduate consultations.

7.11.5. The results of this section of the questionnaire indicated that graduates tended to only slightly agree that that their supervisors and/or line manager provide them with constructive feedback. Statistical analysis showed that the level of agreement with this statement was significantly lower for those working in Mixed & Exotic practices.

7.11.6. The results of this section of the questionnaire suggested that graduates tended to only slightly agree that they were encouraged to reflect on things that have gone well but also those that haven't. Statistical analysis revealed that the level of agreement was significantly lower for those again working in Mixed & Exotic practices. This finding is in contrast to the results from the employer consultations, where many spoke of how they actively encouraged graduates to do this. This therefore indicates that there may be a disconnect between what employers are seeking to do and how this is perceived (although it is recognised that the samples do not necessarily match directly).

7.11.7. Finally, respondents were asked to describe what activities they engage in to support their reflection. Some of the most frequently mentioned activities included case discussion, thinking about cases and informal discussions with colleagues. A word cloud showing the most commonly referenced activities is available in **Appendix D**.

KEY MESSAGES

- Overall, all graduates agreed that they **understand how to reflect appropriately**, and that reflective practice helps them to **identify development areas**. However, respondents tended to disagree that the PDP reflection guidance was comprehensible and effective.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

- Respondents indicated that they understand the principles of reflection but that they are **unsure about the value of the PDP as a mechanism for supporting their reflective practice**.
- In addition, there is an indication that there is a discrepancy between what employers are seeking to do, with regards to reflective practice, and how this is perceived by graduates.

7.12. Additional Comments

7.12.1. Section 6 of the questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions allowing respondents to make additional comments on the PDP and BSAVA.

7.12.2. In the first instance, respondents were asked what other resources, if any, they have used to support them in completing the PDP (other than those available through the RCVS and BSAVA). The majority of the answers to this question indicated that respondents did not use any additional resources, however, some noted that they use resources such as colleagues and clinical cases. A word cloud is available in **Appendix D** with an overview of the common responses emerging from this question.

7.12.3. Finally, respondents were asked if they felt that the format of the RCVS PDP is appropriate and, if not, what would they like to see change. Some of the most common responses indicated that respondents felt that the format was appropriate, while those who did not feel it was appropriate made suggestions in relation to practice integration, case notes, more support being required and time constraints. Please see **Appendix D** for a word cloud detailing all of the most common responses to this question.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

8.1. This section presents a summary of the key issues identified through the course of the evaluation. Key issues and conclusions relating to individual project objectives are presented which consolidate the main findings and implications presented elsewhere in the report. A series of associated recommendations are then provided.

8.2. Summary of Impact of the PDP

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

8.2.1. The current evaluation of the PDP was generally **welcomed by all stakeholder groups**, with this evident both through response rates to the various data collection methods and through informal comments received during the evaluation. Overall, across all areas of the veterinary profession, **perceptions regarding the PDP and its impact on supporting graduates were similar**. The slight exception to this seen within the stakeholder questionnaire, where those working outside of a veterinary practice tended to have more positive views (however, as noted in the questionnaire section, due to the small number of respondents within this category these results should be interpreted with caution).

8.2.2. Across the profession, it was noted that having a **formal support process for graduates like the PDP is essential**, to provide a support not only to the graduates as they moved from the structured environment of veterinary school into practice, but also as a standardised form of support for employers recruiting new graduates.

8.2.3. The results from the graduate consultations and graduate questionnaire are consistent, noting that whilst the **overall purpose of the PDP is understood**, within the current process, **these purposes are not being achieved**. This is further supported through the views of stakeholders. Additionally, the language 'tick-box' and 'check-list' was consistently used in a negative way, with graduates and stakeholders noting that too much emphasis is currently put in capturing quantity of skills/tasks and that there **should be more focus on progression and confidence** in these areas.

8.2.4. Throughout the consultations, the **imbalance of clinical versus non-clinical skills support is noted**, with comments consistently noting that the current PDP does not provide or guidance regarding non-clinical skills. This finding was also evident within the graduate questionnaire, as whilst the perceptions were generally not positive regarding either clinical or non-clinical skills development, results were slightly more positive for the former. Within the stakeholder questionnaire, negative or neutral perceptions were seen across both areas.

8.2.5. Within the consultations, those that had access to and were aware of the BSAVA PDP Resource Bank were **complimentary in their feedback** and noted **how useful and engaging these resources** are at filling some of the gap within the PDP through supporting non-clinical skills development. However, the large **majority of graduates and stakeholders were unaware of this resource**. This finding if further evident through the questionnaire feedback. Additionally, some comments emerging through the questionnaires and consultations were negative towards the Resource Bank, noting that it is **too field specific** and similar resources would be welcomed across other areas of the profession.

8.2.6. Finally, in relation to the PDP guidance received or available from the RCVS, within the consultations there were mixed views, with some feeling that there was enough guidance, and this was useful and others wanting additional information. Within the questionnaires, the latter was more evident, with stakeholders indicating that they had not received any information and **graduates expressing that more guidance would be useful.**

8.3. Summary of Challenges Faced by New Graduates & Employers

8.3.1. Across the graduate and stakeholder consultations, similar findings emerged regarding the key challenges faced by new graduates as they enter the veterinary profession. In particular, these **centred around the non-clinical skills**, including decision making, independent working and client communication. The results from the stakeholder questionnaire further supported this with similar challenges noted, with the addition of practical skills and commercial awareness.

8.3.2. Within the consultations it was noted by some, that these challenges were further exacerbated by a **lack of communication between the veterinary schools and employers**, with it recognised that more could be done to bring the various elements of the profession together. Further, at times it was felt that how new

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

graduates had been taught sometimes did not translate into practice (e.g. where client budget had to be considered) and therefore this meant additional challenges faced by new graduates.

8.3.3. Finally, it was noted that **resilience was another challenge facing new graduates**, with this evident due to high drop of rate of newly qualified vets. It was noted, that this was seen even more so by equine vets than in other areas of the profession. This is support by an open-ended question within the graduate questionnaire that noted that time**, pressure and amount of support were amongst the greatest challenges experienced** by new graduates. Whilst, **the role of social media** in supporting new vets through these challenges was discussed, the potential negative effect that social media is having on this issue was also mentioned.

8.4. Summary of Support Needed by Employers & New Graduates

8.4.1. Across both stakeholder and graduate consultations, the importance of graduates undertaking the PDP to have an **assigned mentor** was noted. However, within the employer sample, challenges in relation to this were raised, with it mentioned that it is **vital that mentors are given the time and support** to be able to provide this support. Findings from within the graduate questionnaire also indicate that graduates would like more employer support, in particular to help them **make time for the PDP** whilst they are working. Although graduates did recognise the support they were receiving through employer feedback, with this particularly evident within farm animal graduates.

8.4.2. Additional support networks were discussed, with it noted that **veterinary graduates utilise a number of different resources** to support them during the transition into practice. These included friends and family and peer networks.

8.4.3. Finally, the **role of the PGD was discussed** as a source of support during the PDP. Whilst all graduates were aware of this role, within the consultations there was a perception that due to the volume of graduates that each dean was responsible for, the support that they would be able to give is limited. For some, this view meant that **graduates would not contact their dean and would seek support elsewhere**. However, in contrast to this, in the graduate questionnaire when asked how frequently they contact their PGD, the majority noted that they did this on a monthly basis. The **stakeholder view of the PGD role differed slightly**, with some being unaware of this role and others feeling that as a source of support, the role was not valuable.

8.5. Summary of Perception & Impact of Reflection

8.5.1. The **importance of engaging in reflective practice was evident across all stakeholders and graduates**, both within the consultations and questionnaires, with it noted as integral for learning from situations and improving and developing your own practice. Employers noted that within their practices a culture of reflection is promoted, however, commented that for new graduates, there is a tendency to reflect on the negative only. This is further supported within the graduate questionnaire, with graduates noting that reflection helps to identify areas that they need to improve in.

8.5.2. Within the consultations across all groups, a number of **different informal reflective activities were discussed**, including practice meetings, informal discussions with colleagues or peers and individual reflection to think about a situation. Similar activities were noted within the graduate questionnaire. However, **many employers commented on how they had not received formal training on reflection**, with many noting that they were unsure how to support the reflective element within the PDP.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

8.5.3. In line with the above, whilst graduates spoke of many situations of informal reflective practice, many commented on how **written reflective was more challenging** and the need for **more structure or guidance** to be able to do this appropriate and get the same learning out of it as informal reflection was noted.

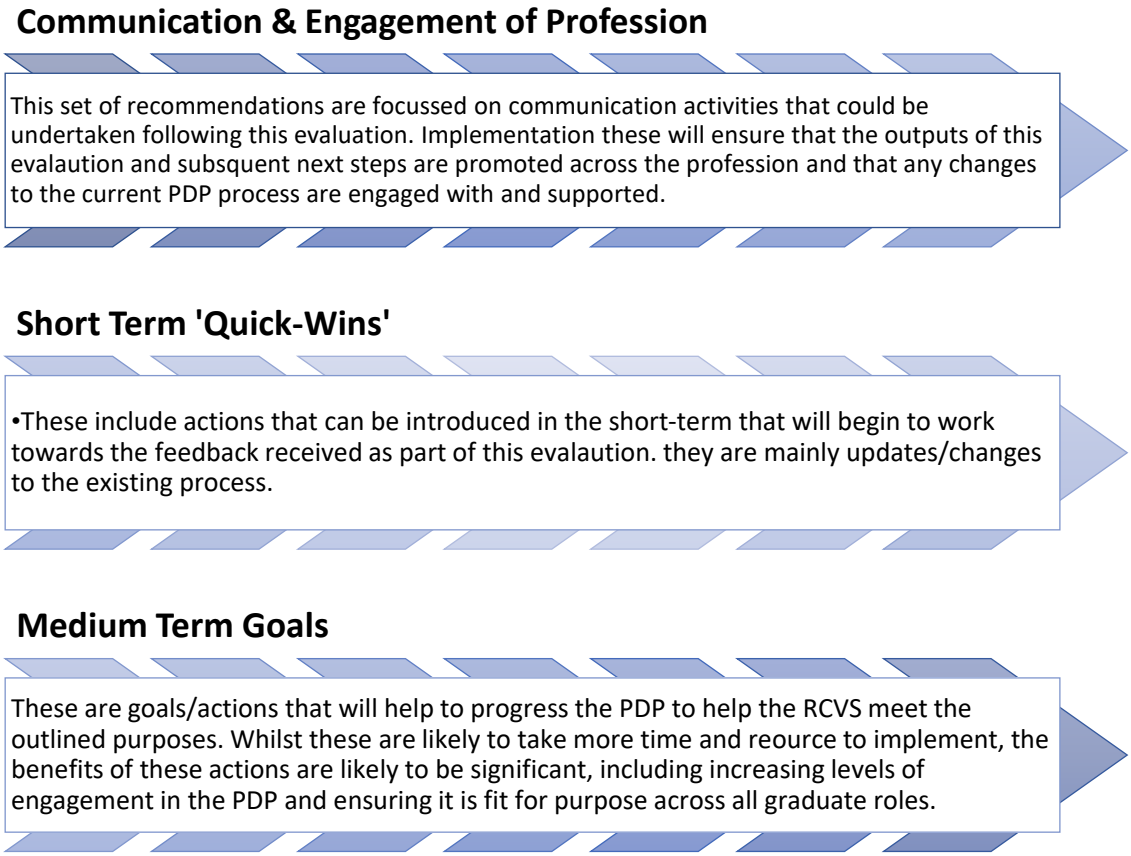
Recommendations

8.6. Based on the outputs of this evaluation, including the consultations and questionnaires, a number of recommendations are presented below. The recommendations are split across four main areas; (1) Design & Content, (2) Engagement, (3) Modality and (4) Standardisation of Assessment.

8.7. It is acknowledged that depending on resources (including both time and monetary), it may be that not all of the recommendations outlined within this report will be feasible, in particular, undertaking these immediately, therefore, the recommendations are structured based on whether they short-term 'quick wins', medium-term goals or communication processes. For an overview of the three areas, see Figure 16. Whilst they have been separated out into these three areas, it should be noted that all recommendations within this report are complementary. Whilst they have not been prioritised, WPG would be happy to support the RCVS ad BSAVA with this if required.

Figure 16: Overview of Recommendation Areas

© 2017 Work Psychology Group



8.8. **Tables 16-18** below, summarise the key recommendations in relation to each of these three areas, alongside practical implications and where appropriate, supportive research evidence.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Table 16: 'Communication Processes': Key Findings, Recommendations & Practical Implications

Recommendation Area	Key Findings	Recommendation	Practical Implication/Link to Research Evidence
Professional Development Phase Design & Content	Across each of the elements of the evaluation, high levels of stakeholder engagement were seen, with stakeholders noting that this evaluation was welcomed and valued across the profession. Additionally, whilst changes to the PDP have been suggested, it was evident from the evaluation findings that a structured process to support graduates was welcomed.	1. It is important that the Veterinary Profession continues to have a process for supporting graduates during the transition between veterinary school and practice.	• *Findings from across this evaluation have shown that across the profession a form of support is needed for new graduates as they enter the profession. Whilst suggestions have been raised regarding how to improve the PDP, it must be noted that in some veterinary professions in other countries, this level of support does not exist at all.* • *This finding is not unique to the veterinary profession, with the research literature, noting that other professions (e.g. medicine, dentistry and teaching) have seen a number of benefits due to having a structured support programme. These include, the support being valued by trainees, feeling able to consider career aspirations (Beard et al, 2005), supporting mental health (Gilmour et al, 2012) and ultimately increasing retention (Macblain et al, 2009).*
Engagement in the Professional Development Phase across the Veterinary Profession	The evaluation has been widely spoken about within the veterinary profession, therefore it is to be expected that stakeholders will be keen to hear the outcomes of the evaluation and proposed next steps.	2. The RCVS and BSAVA should develop a communication strategy based on the outputs of this evaluation, ensuring that all relevant parties (e.g. employers, graduates, veterinary schools) will have sight of this. Within this it should acknowledge the evaluation findings and begin to communicate how feedback will be taken on board and the PDP improved	• *Through doing this, it will help to promote the PDP and PDP Resource Bank across the profession.* • *Additionally, as the evaluation has been widely promoted across the profession and a number of stakeholders have taken part, it is important to ensure that the profession knows that their feedback has been listened to and for them to hear about any potential next steps.*

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	The majority of individuals that took part in the evaluation (across both consultations and questionnaires) indicated that they had not previously been aware of the PDP Resource Bank. However, based on the consultation feedback, those that were aware of it had complimentary feedback.	3. The BSAVA should consider how to promote their PDP resource bank to its members (including both graduates and employers) to increase knowledge and understanding of the bank.	• *Promotion of the PDP Resource Bank will ensure that they are being used as intended to support graduates during completion of the PDP.* • *This may also be a great opportunity to tell the profession that new resources are currently being developed, so that they know to expect them.*

Table 17: Short Term 'Quick-Wins': Key Findings, Recommendations & Practical Implications

Recommendation Area	Key Findings	Recommendation	Practical Implication/Link to Research Evidence
Professional Development Phase Design & Content	Feedback from graduates outside of Small Animal Practice noted that graduates and employers would appreciate having access to resources similar to those available through the BSAVA.	4. Consider what learning can be shared between the BSAVA and RCVS regarding the PDP resources, to develop resources that are available across all areas of practice.	• *Important that all graduates going through the PDP are given similar resources/support.* • *This is likely to increase engagement in the PDP and change views that it is a 'tick-box' exercise if more ongoing development opportunities are made available.* • *Non-clinical skills were noted as the areas that graduates have most difficultly with and that employers find most challenging to support with, therefore this will be seen as a welcomed support for both groups.*
	Whilst across the profession the importance and benefits of reflection were discussed, feedback was that to get the most out of the reflective process it would be helpful for more guidance and structure to be provided to support with this.	5. Develop guidance to support graduates and employers through the reflective process, whilst acknowledging individuals' difference preferences for how they "do" reflection; examples could include key questions to work through to structure reflection, and examples of written reflective notes.	• *This will help to ensure that the PDP Resource and subsequently the PDP overall is viewed as supporting new graduates' development through reflection, rather than a "tick-box" exercise. It will help graduates get the most out of their reflection and support them to develop their skills based on the outcomes of this.* • *Given that there is evidence that healthcare professionals are not good at assessing their own skills (for example, Kustritz et al 2011), increased emphasis on reflective, purposeful discussions with colleagues sharing an understanding of the PDP and reflective process, is likely to enhance graduates' ability to self-assess as well as support their skill development*.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	Many stakeholders spoke about informal reflection that they undertook. For example, employers spoke about opening up reflection opportunities during practice meetings and graduates noted conversations with friends and family, however, many found it challenging to write their reflections down.	6. Consider how to build other opportunities to capture/record reflection into the PDP.	• *This is also likely to help the PDP be viewed as supporting a reflective process and will help to link informal activity (that is already being undertaken in the graduates' role) to the PDP. This may also encourage graduates to engage more fully with reflective practice.*
Engagement in the Professional Development Phase across the Veterinary Profession	The evaluation findings showed that the PDP is viewed as a 'tick-box' exercise rather than a support phase to help graduates as they move from veterinary school to practice. There was variable support that graduates perceived they were being given by their employer. Engagement in the PDP was variable across employers, although many felt that they could be doing more to support new graduates.	7. Make it a requirement of the PDP that every graduate signed onto the process has a named mentor recorded.	• *Providing a point of contact for graduates that they see on a daily basis will help with feelings of support and also encourage questions to be asked on a more regular basis.* • *By making it compulsory for mentors to be named on a graduate's PDP record, this should help engagement in the PDP from the employer population.* • *Research from within other healthcare professions notes that by assigning a mentor to newly qualified graduates, this helps to increase retention (Wright et al, 2012).*
		8. Ask assigned mentors to sign-off their graduate's PDP progress on a regular basis (i.e. bi-monthly) and write a short commentary on progress (on a six monthly or annual basis).	• *In addition to the implications outlined for 2.6, introducing this recommendation will help to ensuring that ownership for completion of the PDP is felt not only by the graduate but from the mentor as well.* • *Asking a mentor to review the PDP and write a short update on a regular basis will help the PDP move towards more of an ongoing development process for graduates as there will be a requirement for it to be regularly updated.*
Professional Development Phase Modality	Feedback from across the profession was that the platform for recording evidence in relation to the PDP was challenging to use, basic and not engaging.	9. Gain feedback from other professions / veterinary schools regarding platforms that have been used for similar purposes and have been successful. Consider the key requirements of the PDP platform and ensure that	• *This will ensure that any new platform introduced is fit for purpose and has been tested in other situations/professions.*

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

		questions are asked to gain feedback in these areas.	

Table 18: 'Medium-Term Goals': Key Findings, Recommendations & Practical Implications

Recommendation Area	Key Findings	Recommendation	Practical Implication/Link to Research Evidence
Professional Development Phase Design & Content	The evaluation findings showed that the PDP is viewed as a 'tick-box' exercise rather than a support phase to help graduates as they move from veterinary school to practice. Additionally, due to the 'checklist' process, graduates outside of more popular new graduate roles (e.g. small animal) were either unable to complete the PDP at all (due to not being able to apply to their role) or found it difficult to understand what skills they were supposed to achieve and what was outside of the scope of their role.	10. Re-design the PDP and move it towards an outcomes-based approach (i.e. the focus is on the outcomes that the RCVS expect the graduate to achieve by the end of their PDP, rather than focussing on the specific skills to meet these outcomes)	• *Within the literature, a benefit of moving towards this approach is that the focus is on what you expect a veterinary graduate who has complete the PDP to look like, rather than on the process of getting to this point[10].* • *In recent years (and after the launch of the PDP), there has been significant developments in post graduate e-portfolios to support Dental and Medical graduates[11]. While it is recognised that these follow a formalised curriculum training pathway, the modalities for engaging trainees and supervisors in reflective practice to support development is something that can be of use to RCVS in the next phase of the PDP. Similarly, examples in medical specialties such as surgery, GP and emergency medicine[12] have recently successfully revised e-portfolios to support the development process. They log the experience, with an emphasis on reflection and the impact on learning outcomes. We would recommend exploring these and talking to the Education and College officers involved in this process.* • *Finally, moving towards an outcomes-based approach will help to change the perceptions towards the PDP by removing any 'tick-box' element and encouraging the profession to view it as a phase of professional development.*
	Feedback indicated that the current PDP has a strong focus on clinical skills,	11. Ensure that there is more of an emphasis on the professional	• *This will ensure graduates are experiencing a more well-rounded development process and will also support in*

[10] Shumway, J. M., & Harden, R. M. (2003). AMEE Guide No. 25: The assessment of learning outcomes for the competent and reflective physician. *Medical teacher*, *25*(6), 569-584.
[11] https://heeoe.hee.nhs.uk/Foundation_Training_e-Portfolio
[12] https://www.rcem.ac.uk/docs/Training/1.16.3%20ePortfolio%20Guidance%20for%20Trainees%20-%20Final%20-%20July%202015.pdf

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	however, there is a need for greater professional skill development. Particularly, as these are the areas that graduates tend to find most challenging.	skills as well as clinical skills in the PDP	*ensuring that professional skills are viewed as important to develop and focus on as clinical skills.* • *As these are the areas that emerged as being most challenging, providing more support and increasing understanding amongst graduates regarding how they can develop in these skill areas is likely to increase confidence levels. Additionally, resilience research suggests that support is a key resilience resource and through building these resources and making graduates more aware of resources available to them, this in turn may help to increase retention [13].*
	Across stakeholder groups, it was recognised that a graduate's confidence in applying skills or completing a task was integral and that rather than quantity of tasks completed, level of confidence should be considered and captured within the PDP.	12. Introduce a measure of confidence in relation to the various outcomes within the PDP that graduates will have to rate themselves on.	• *Ensure that as well as achieving the outcomes necessary at the end of the PDP, a graduate's confidence in their ability in each of the areas is also viewed as important.*
Engagement in the Professional Development Phase across the Veterinary Profession	Employers that were engaged in the PDP process noted that they were unsure how they could support their graduate in completing the process, noting that they had received little of no guidance regarding the PDP.	13. Develop a CPD approved training course (this could be online or face to face) that PDP mentors are required to attend and allow subsequent mentoring within the practice to count towards CPD hours.	• *This will help to drive employer engagement by providing an incentive for becoming an improved PDP mentor.* • *If mentors are required to complete this training before they can be the assigned mentor on a graduate's PDP, practices that regularly recruit new graduates are likely to ensure that a member of staff undertakes the training.* • *By ensuring that each mentor goes through the same training, this will ensure that mentors are being given the information that they need to provide appropriate support and that all mentors have received a consistent message regarding the PDP.*

[13] Schetter, C. D., & Dolbier, C. (2011). Resilience in the context of chronic stress and health in adults. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *5*(9), 634-652.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	Feedback from the graduate sample was mixed in terms of their awareness of the PDP process/requirements. Additionally, whilst some commented on having heard about the PDP through university presentations or an email from the PGD, others noted that they had not received this communication.	14. Develop online training module/introduction to PDP module for recently qualified graduates to complete at the beginning of their PDP.	• *Making it compulsory for new graduates to complete a short training module prior to beginning the PDP will help to ensure that a consistent message regarding the purpose of the PDP is communicated.* • *This may also help the RCVS communicate any changes that are implemented to the PDP.* • *By considering how to introduce the PDP to a new graduate, this will help the profession move away from the idea that it is a 'tick-box' exercise.*
	Within the evaluation findings it was noted that for many, the PDP did not fit alongside the role of a new graduate within a practice and therefore was often viewed as very separate from their day to day role. Further, frustrations were raised that the PDP could not be applied outside of a practice role.	15. When re-designing the PDP, set-up a working group consisting of stakeholders from across the veterinary profession (i.e. employers and graduates and students)	• *This will help to ensure that across the profession there is engagement with the new PDP before it is implemented.* • *By involving stakeholders from across all areas of the profession, this will help to ensure that the PDP is designed in a way that it will fit alongside other aspects of the graduate's role and that it can be applied across all new graduate roles.*
Professional Development Phase Modality	Feedback from across the profession was that the platform for recording evidence in relation to the PDP was challenging to use, basic and unengaging.	16. Introduce a new platform for the PDP recording system that is engaging and easy to use	• *By making updates to the recording system and making it easier to use, this will help encourage graduates to log on more often and therefore making more regular updates.*
	It was noted that it the PDP record could be made easier to access. In particular, it was suggested that it would be helpful it could be completed on mobile devices	17. Ensure that any new PDP system, resource or training that is introduced is mobile and tablet compatible. In particular, it would be viewed as a benefit if it could be accessed through a mobile app	• *By making the system more accessible, this should also help with more continuous logging of evidence by graduates (e.g. graduates may log-on whilst travelling)* • *Research now suggests that most millennials only own mobile devices rather than computers and that this trend will only increase in the future[14]. Therefore, making it mobile friendly will help to future-proof the PDP system.*

[14] Zickuhr, K. (2011). Generations and their gadgets. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, *20*.

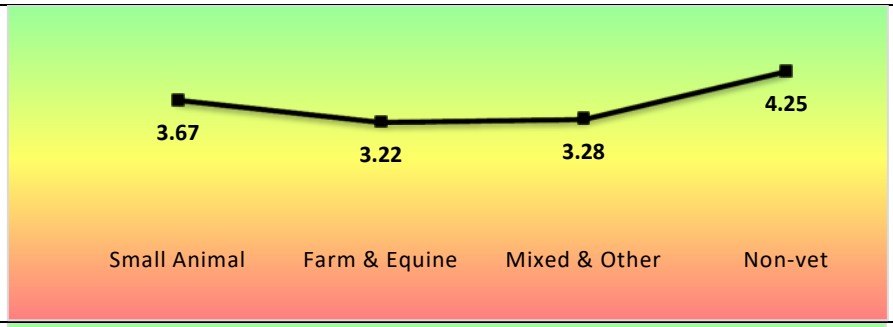
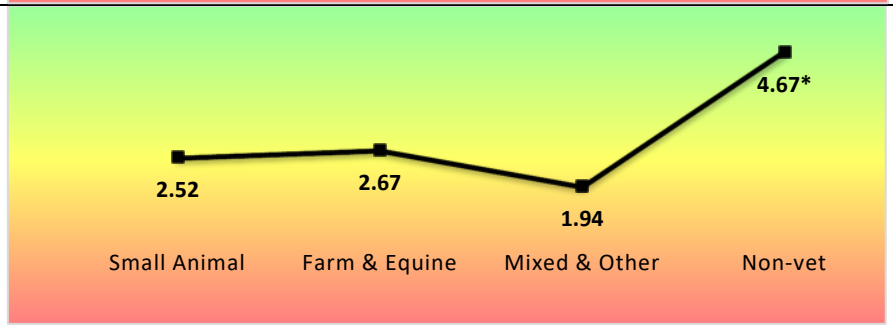
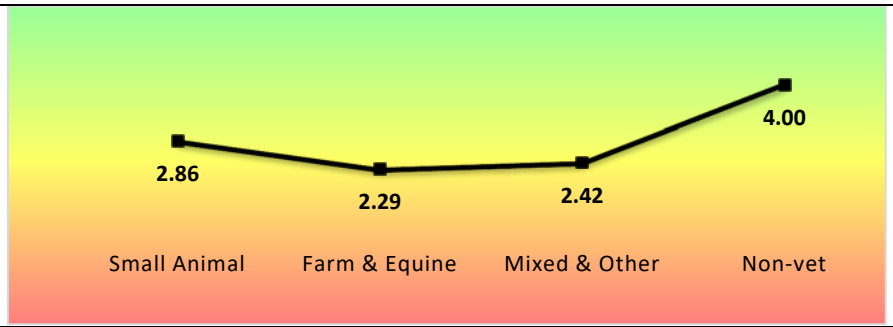
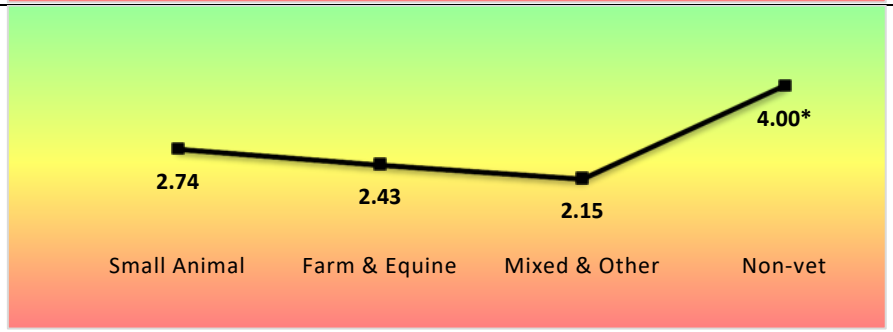
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

	When discussing sources of support and engagement with reflection, graduates often noted that they engaged in conversations with peers on a regular basis to discuss particular cases that they had been involved in.	18. Within the PDP recording system, building in functionality for graduates to share experiences with each other / ask questions / informally reflect about situations together	• *This will provide another opportunity to seek peer support from those also completing the PDP, and builds on a lot of what graduates are currently engaging in regarding informal reflective activity[15].*
Standardisation of Professional Development Phase Assessment	Graduates felt that it was unclear exactly what they needed to do to complete their PDP and that there were inconsistencies across the PGDs.	19. If the PDP moves towards being an outcomes-based assessment, consider how it will be assessed/signed off whilst ensuring it is a reliable and standardised process. Opportunity for RCVS and PGDs to set a standard that is consistent across all areas of practice.	• *It is important to consider how standards will be met if the PDP is re-developed to ensure that this is clearly communicated both to graduates and the wider profession.* • *Setting new standards that everyone is agreed on will help with ensuring consistency in when the PDP can be signed off as complete which in turn will help to drive improvements in graduate competence across the profession.*
		20. Provide training/guidance to all current and any new PGDs regarding the assessment/sign-off of the PDP process.	• *Providing additional guidance/training will help to ensure that consistent messages are being given to all graduates completing the PDP, in addition to ensuring that the same standard is being met within the PDP across the profession.*
		21. Update the process to have the assigned mentor as the day-to-day support for graduates going through the PDP, and have the RCVS and PGDs as overseeing the process ensuring that it is assessed and signed off in a standardised way.	• *By assigning a mentor as the day-to-day PDP support for the graduate, by assigning this role to the mentor it will help to promote the value of their role and thus increase engagement. Additionally, having a PDP support within the practice setting is likely to increase the perception of support within graduates as there will be greater opportunity for discussions regarding the PDP.* • *It is important to ensure the RCVS and PGDs remaining involved in the PDP to oversee the process and ensure that standards are being maintained that that it is being assessed and signed off in a standardised way.* • *The PGD can also act as a 'go to person' for the graduate if they experience any issues with their mentor, thus providing support outside of the graduates place of work.*

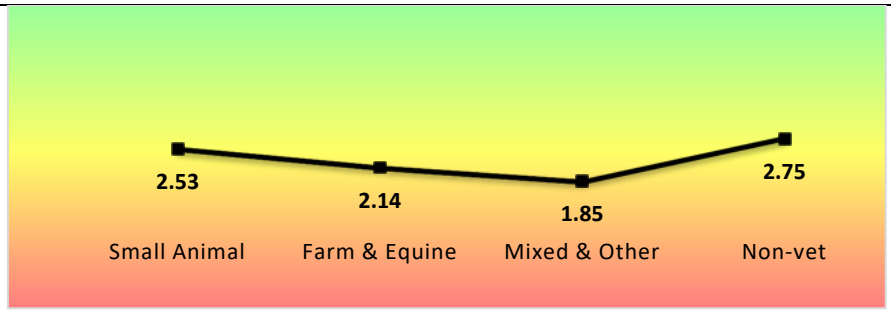
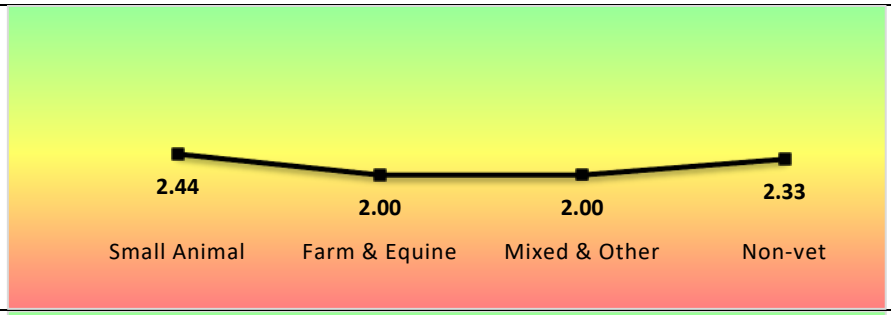
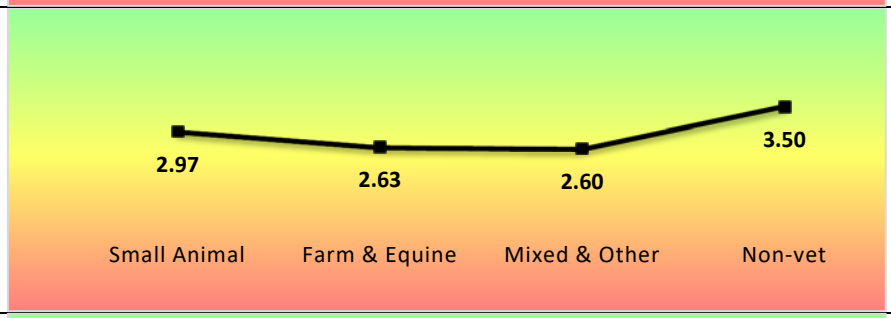
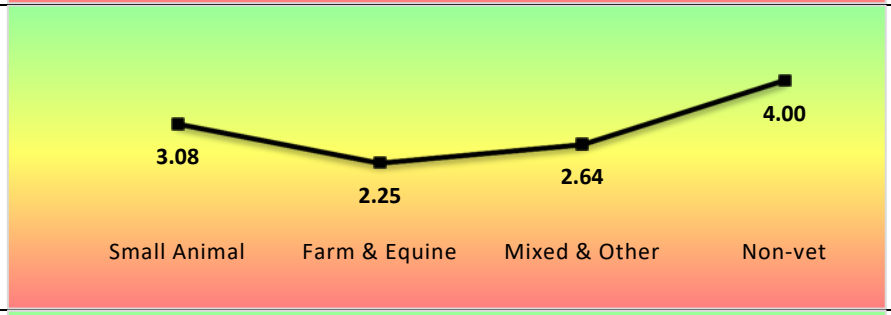
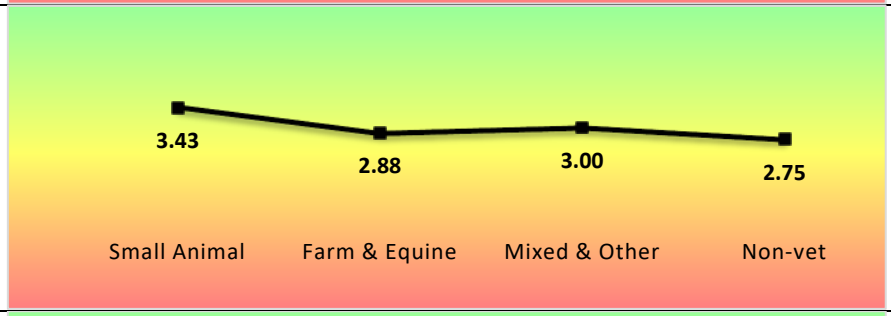
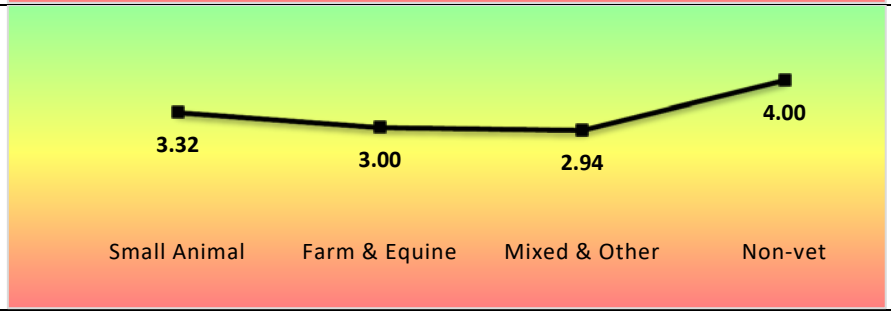
[15] Dabbagh, N., & Kitsantas, A. (2012). Personal Learning Environments, social media, and self-regulated learning: A natural formula for connecting formal and informal learning. *The Internet and higher education*, *15*(1), 3-8.

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

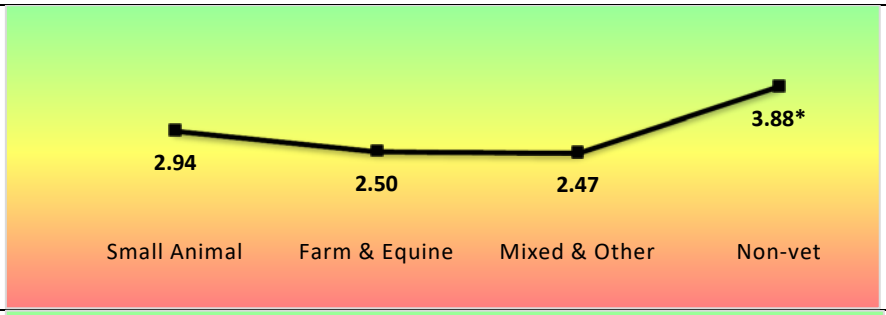
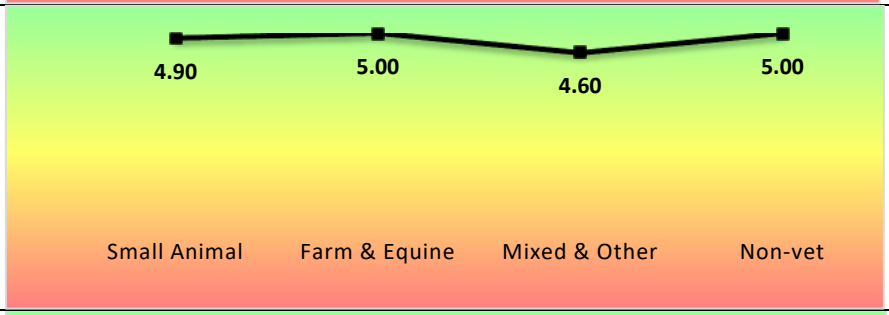
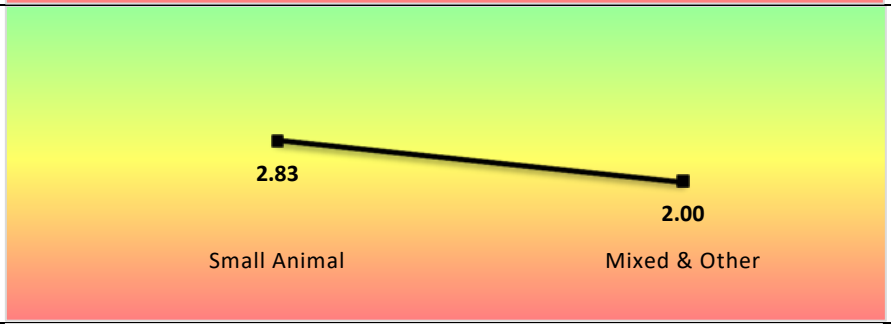
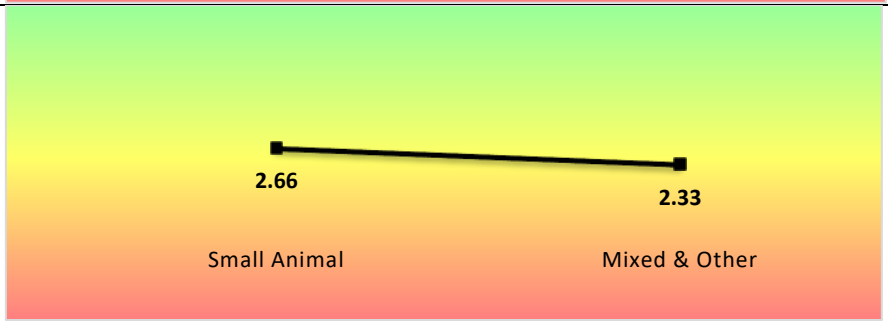
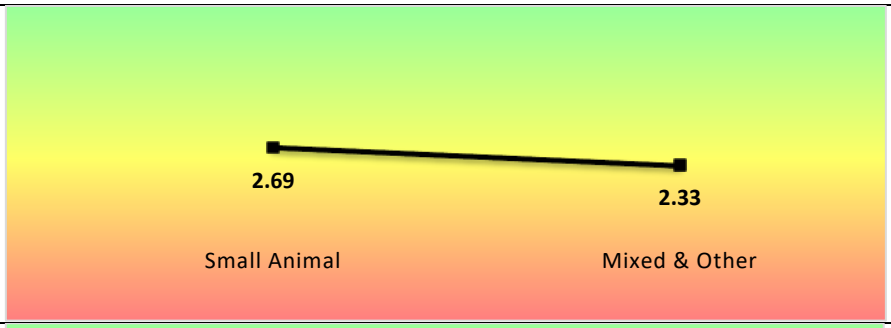
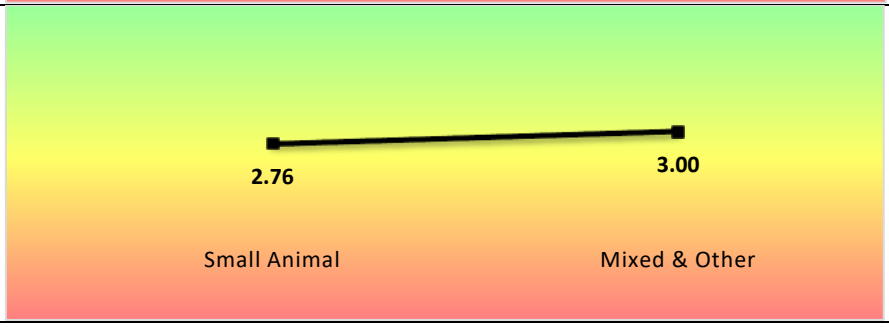
Appendix A: Stakeholder Questionnaire Feedback Graphs

I understand the purpose of the PDP (N = 135)	
I have received guidance from the RCVS regarding the PDP (N = 132) *Non-vet is significantly higher than both Small Animal and Mixed & Other	
I find the RCVS PDP guidance useful (N = 99)	
The PDP outlined by the RCVS makes it clear what the employer's/mentor's role is in a graduate's transition from Veterinary school to practice (N = 113) *Non-vet is significantly higher than Mixed & Other	

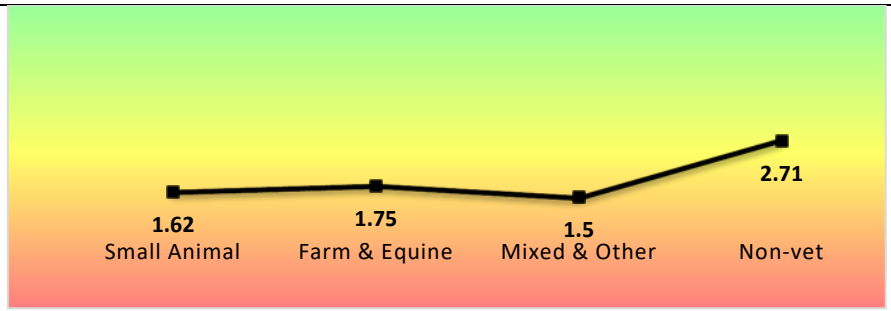
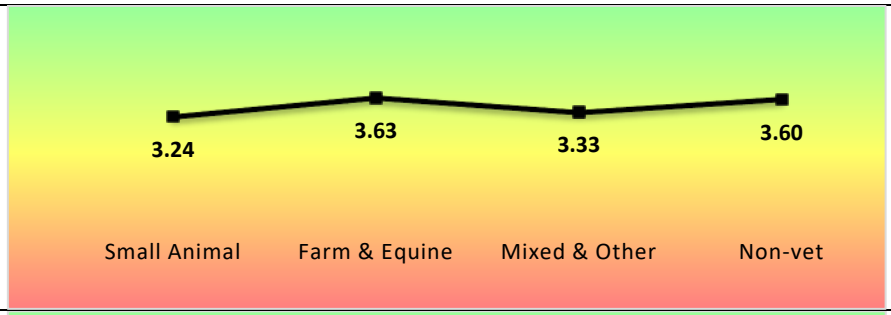
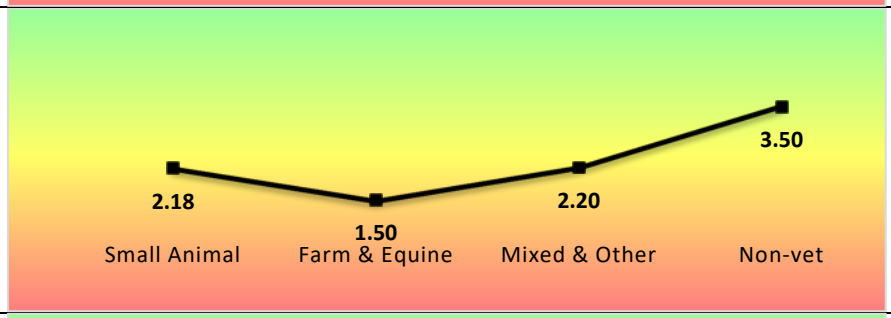
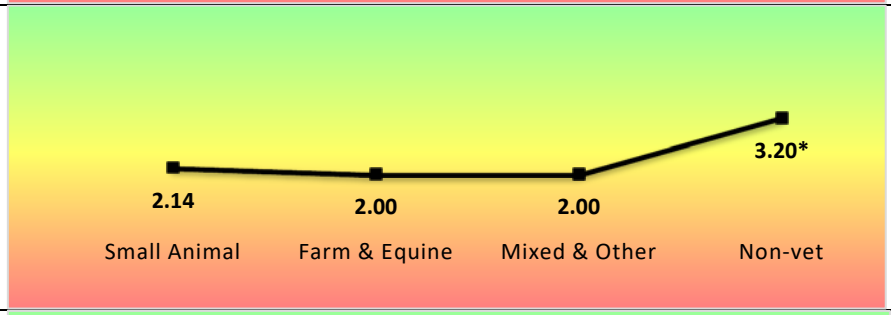
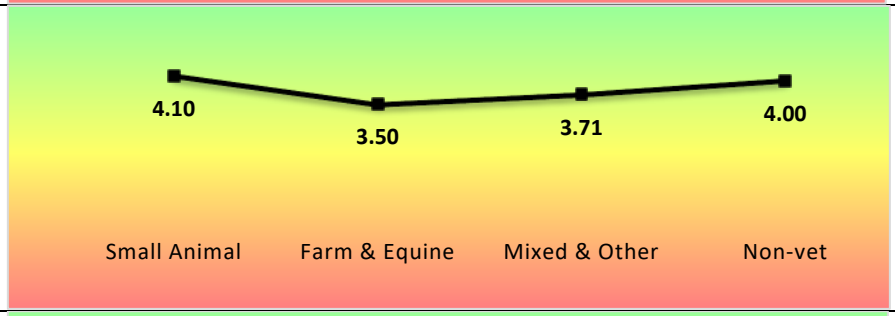
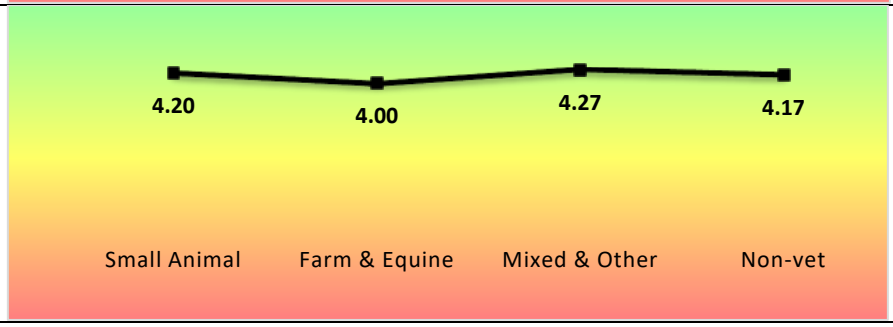
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

The RCVS PDP guidance made available to employers has helped me learn how to focus the training and development of graduates (N = 104)	
Having access to the RCVS PDP guidance has made me feel supported in appraising new graduates (N = 93)	
Time is set aside to discuss reflections from the PDP with graduates (N = 116)	
The PDP is used to help with the monitoring of progression of graduates (N = 119)	
The practice encourages graduates to record their reflections using the PDP regularly (N = 119)	
The PDP supports the development of graduates' clinical skills (N = 125)	

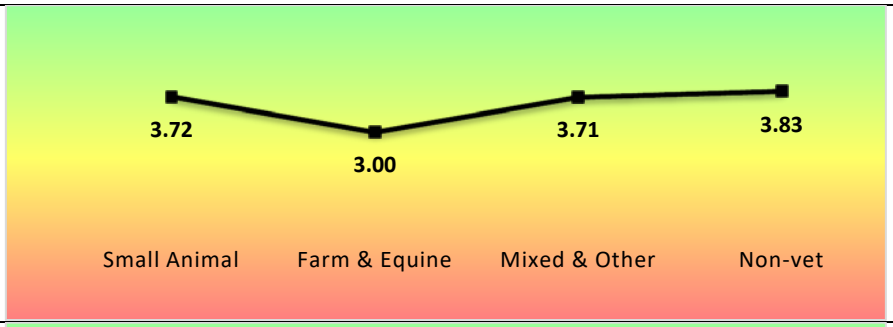
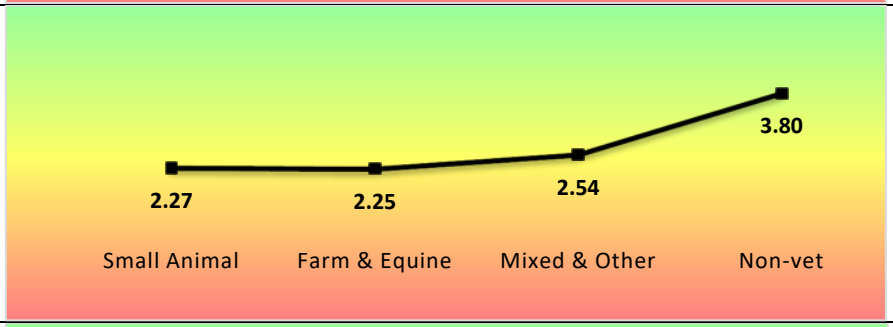
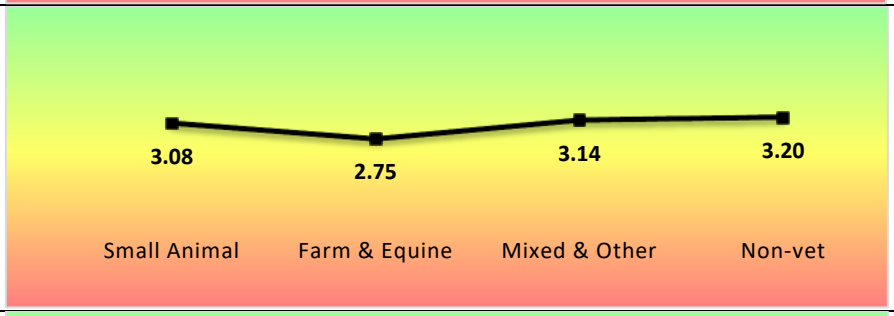
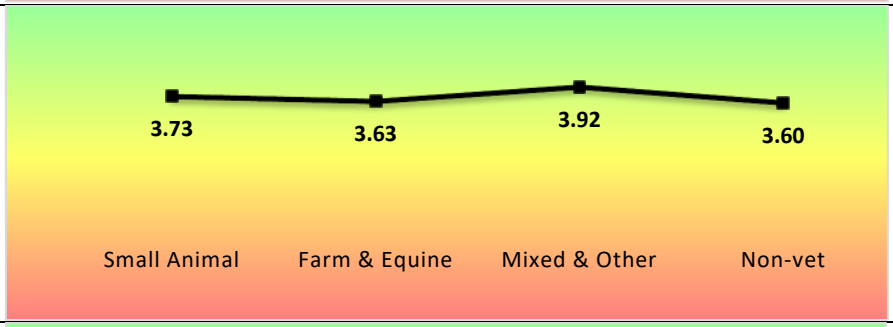
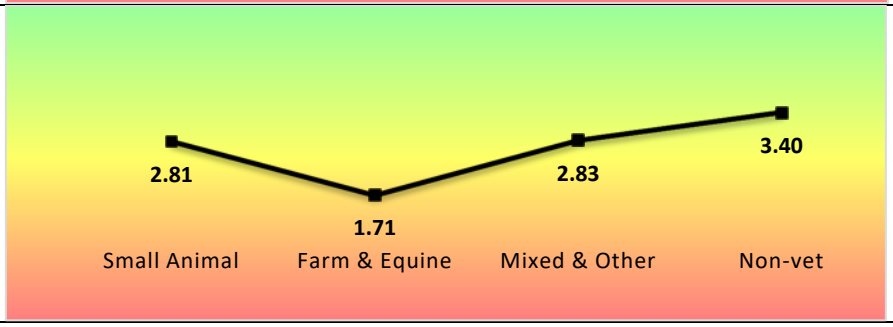
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

The PDP supports the development of graduates' non-clinical skills (N = 127) *Non-vet is significantly higher than Mixed & Other	
On average, I access the RCVS PDP guidance (N = 47)	
The BSAVA PDP resource bank is useful to me when supporting graduates (N = 43)	
The BSAVA PDP resource bank has made it clear what time I need to set aside to support graduates during their professional development phase (N = 41)	
The BSAVA PDP resource bank developed for employers/mentors has supported me in focusing the training and development of graduates (N = 42)	
Having access to the BSAVA PDP resource bank has made me feel supported in appraising new graduates (N = 40)	

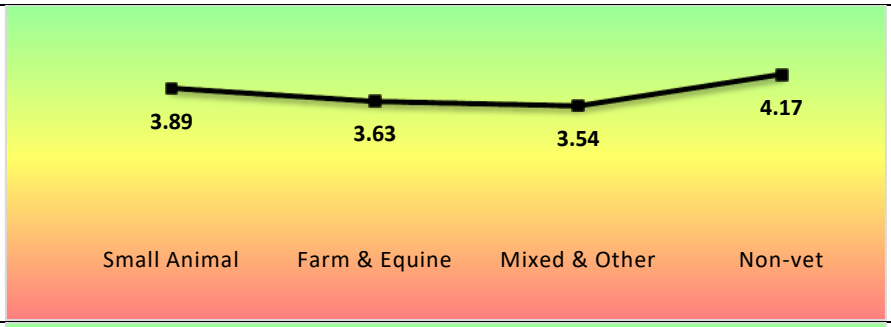
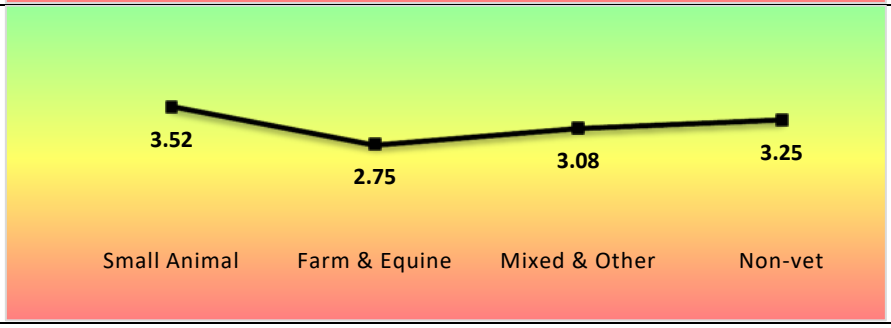
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

There is a sufficient amount of communication between the Veterinary schools and the practice when graduates enter the profession (N = 113)	
The practice is able to regularly set time aside, to discuss graduates' progression with them (N = 111)	
I am aware of the function of the Postgraduate Dean (N = 92)	
The Postgraduate Dean is a useful resource to support graduates' progression (N = 92) *Non-vet is significantly higher than Small Animal and Mixed & Other	
The practice is able to assign graduates a mentor (N = 109)	
I make the time to support graduates in their professional development (N = 112)	

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

I regularly engage in reflection at work (N = 111)	
I have had guidance and/or training on how to reflect (N = 109)	
I would welcome guidance and/or training on how to reflect (N = 111)	
I am confident in my ability to reflect (N = 106)	
Reflective learning is undertaken by all staff across the practice (N = 103)	

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

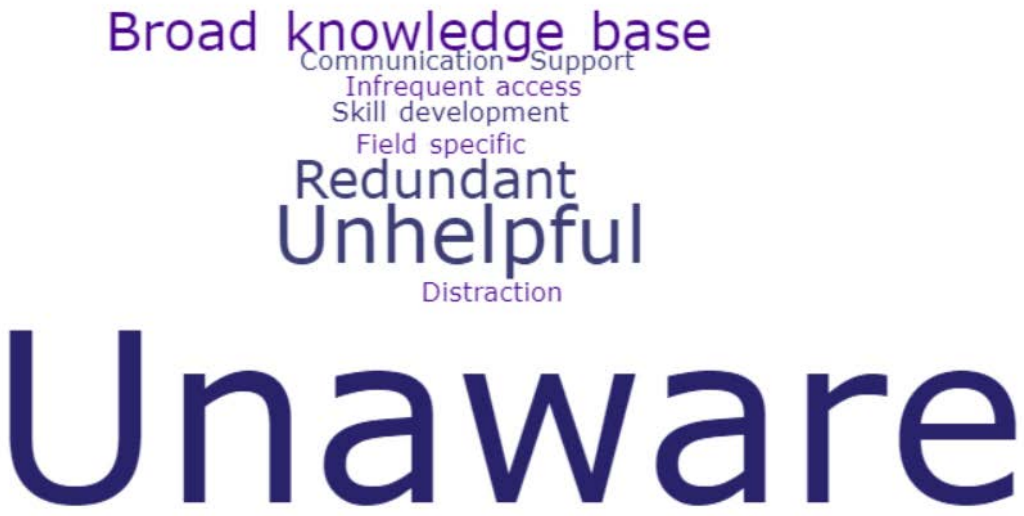
As an employer/mentor, I encourage a culture of feedback and reflection on performance day-to-day (N = 107)	
Graduates are supported in meeting the standard of reflection required within the PDP (N = 96)	

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Appendix B: Stakeholder Questionnaire Qualitative Feedback Word Clouds

THE PDP GUIDANCE PROVIDED BY THE RCVS THAT HAS BEEN MOST USEFUL TO ME (N=34)

THE BSAVA PDP RESOURCE THAT HAS BEEN MOST USEFUL TO ME (N=21)



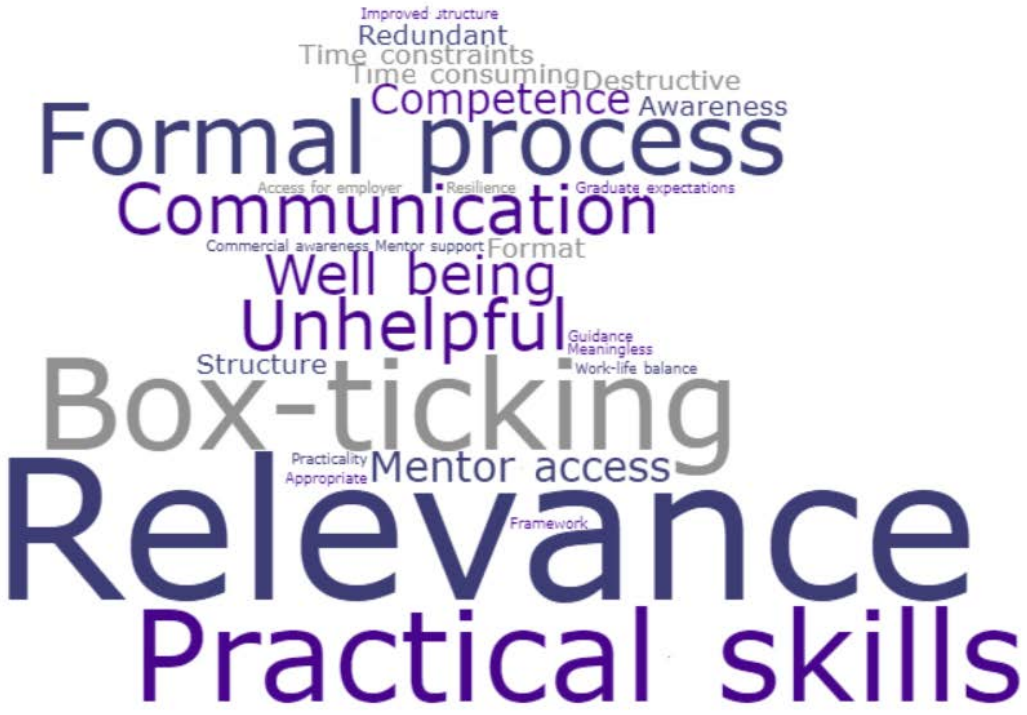
WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD BE A USEFUL ADDITIONAL RESOURCE TO INCLUDE IN THE BSAVA PDP RESOURCE BANK? (N=15)

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND TO BE THE THREE KEY CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN SUPPORT VETERINARY GRADUATES IN THEIR TRANSITION FROM VETERINARY SCHOOL INTO PRACTICE? (N=79)

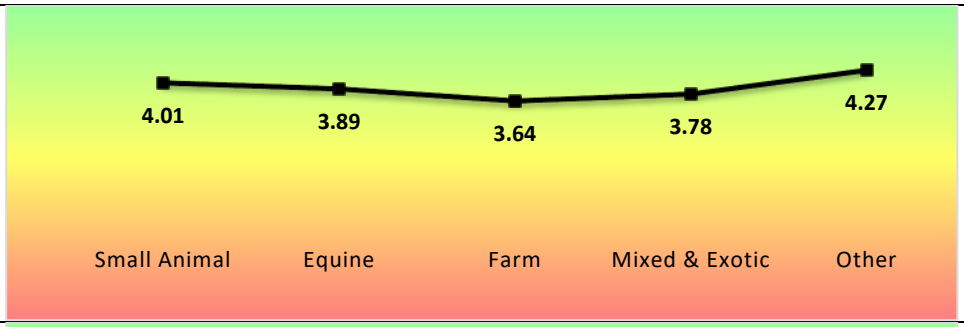
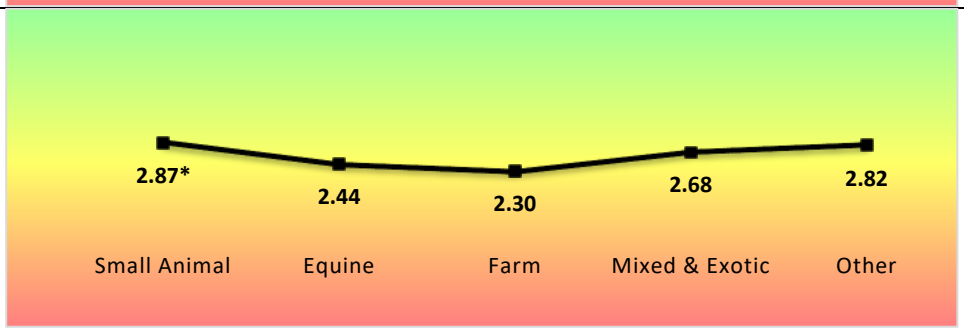
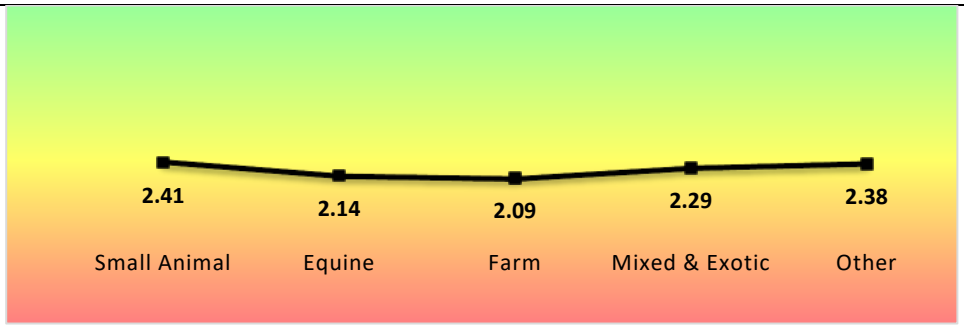
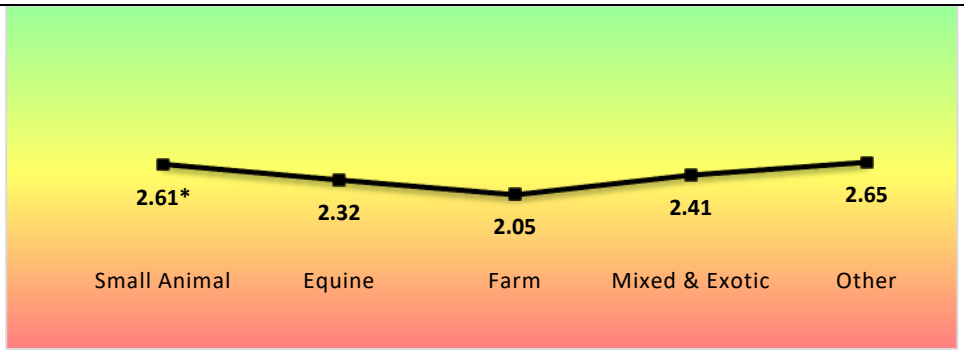
DO YOU FEEL THE CURRENT FORMAT OF THE RCVS PDP IS APPROPRIATE; IF NOT, WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE TO BETTER SUPPORT YOU AND YOUR GRADUATES IN THEIR TRANSITION INTO THE PROFESSION? (N=48)

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

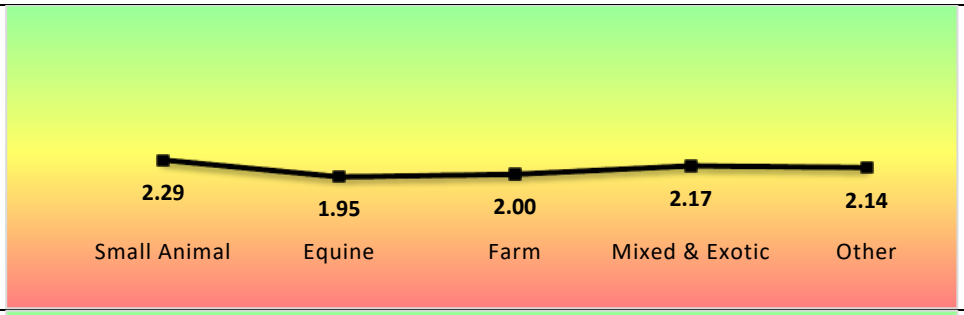
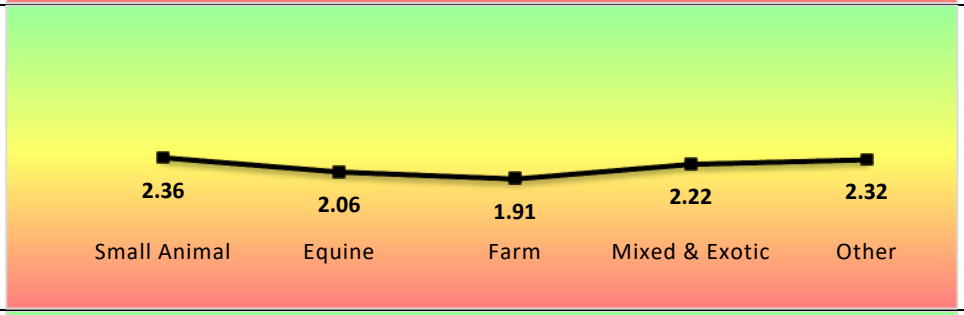
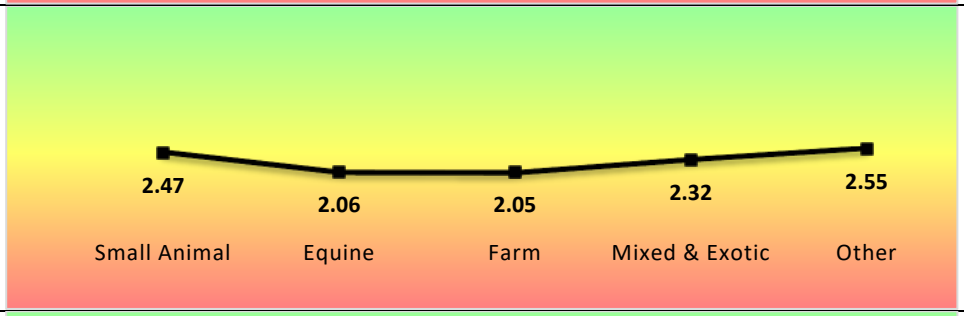
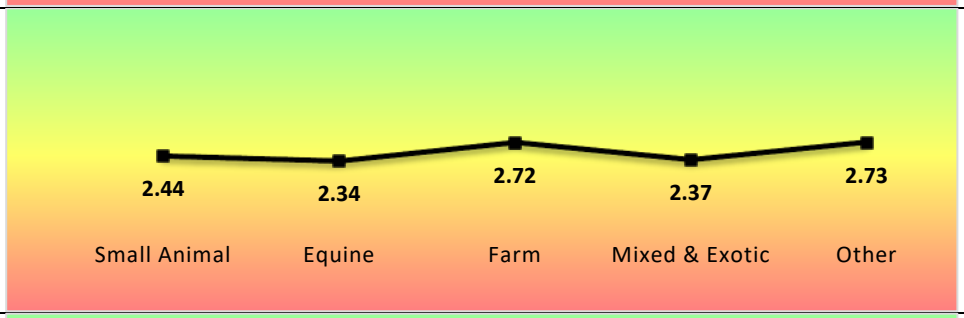
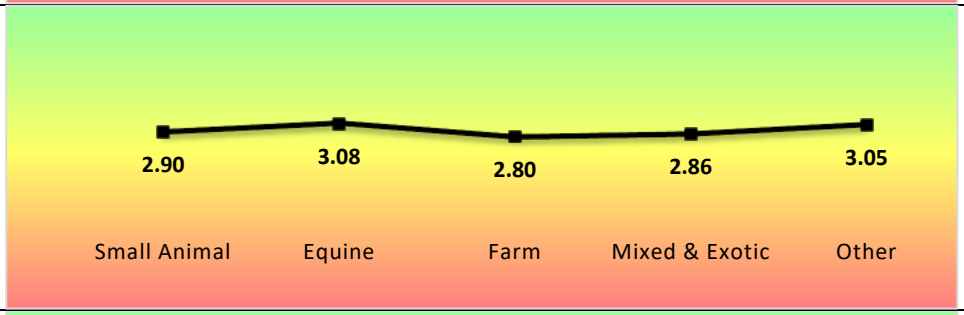
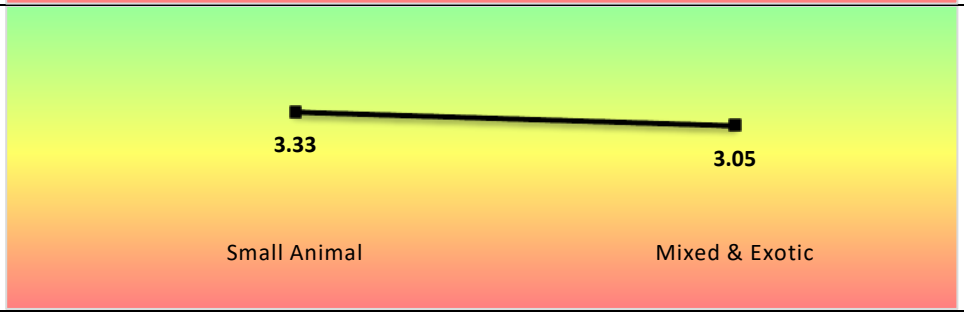


© 2017 Work Psychology Group

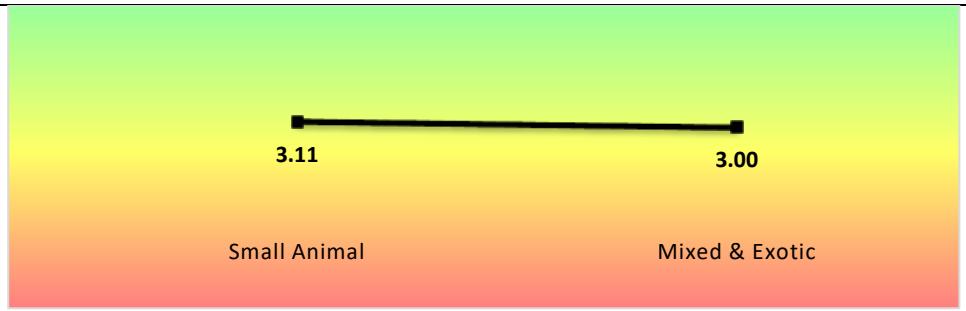
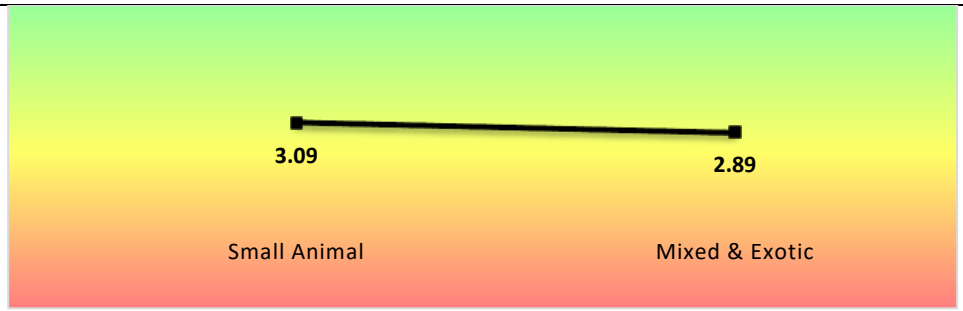
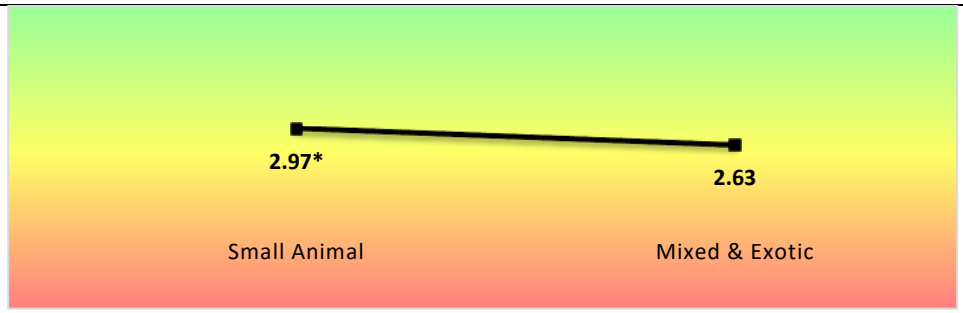
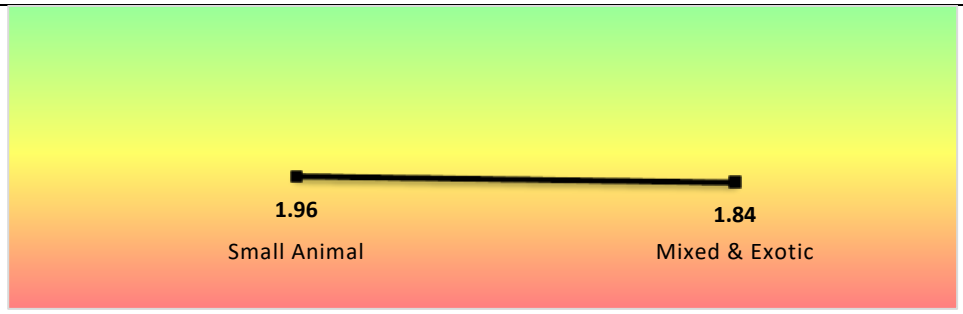
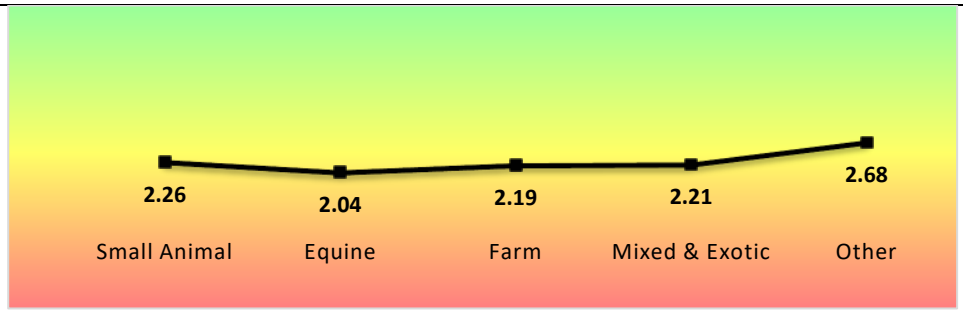
Appendix C: Graduate Questionnaire Feedback Graphs

I understand the purpose of the PDP (N = 663)	
The PDP outlined by the RCVS is useful to me in supporting my professional development (N = 660) *Small Animal is significantly higher than both Farm and Equine	
Engaging with the PDP has supported me in my transition from Veterinary school to practice (N = 651)	
The structure of the PDP supports me with the development of my clinical skills (N = 652) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Farm	

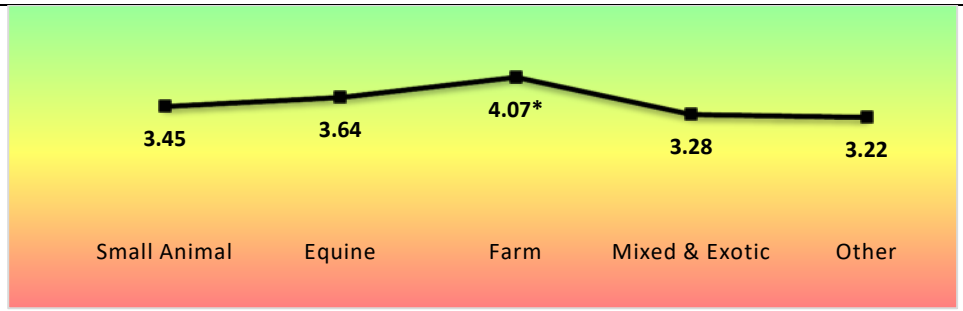
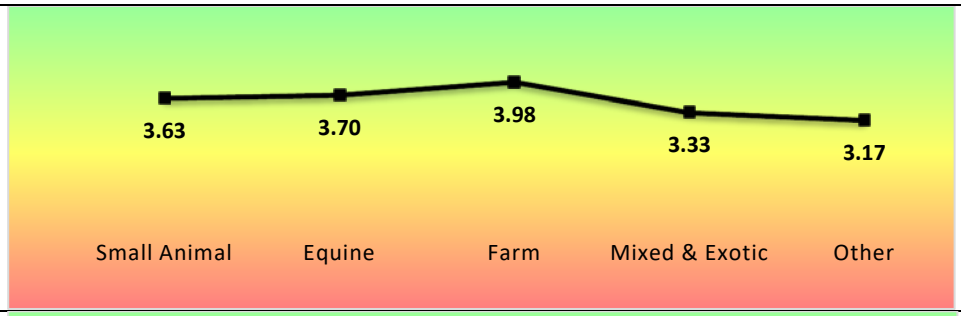
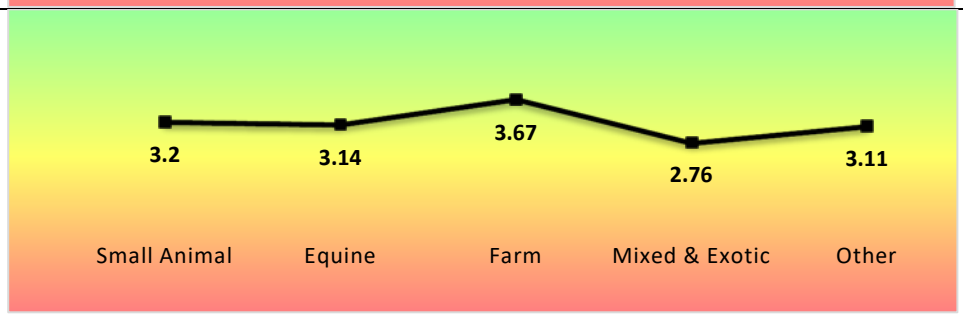
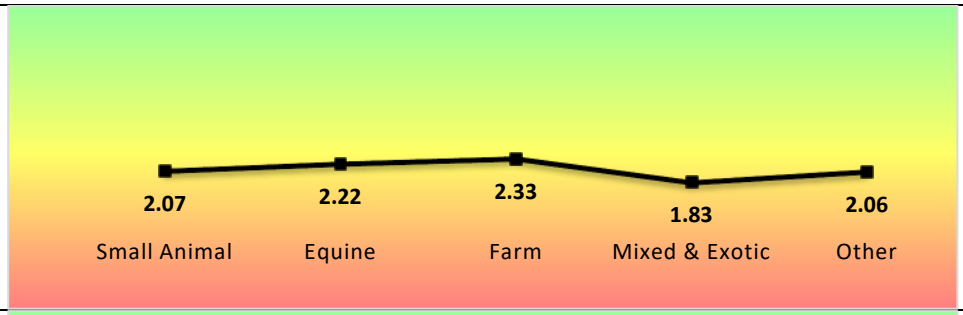
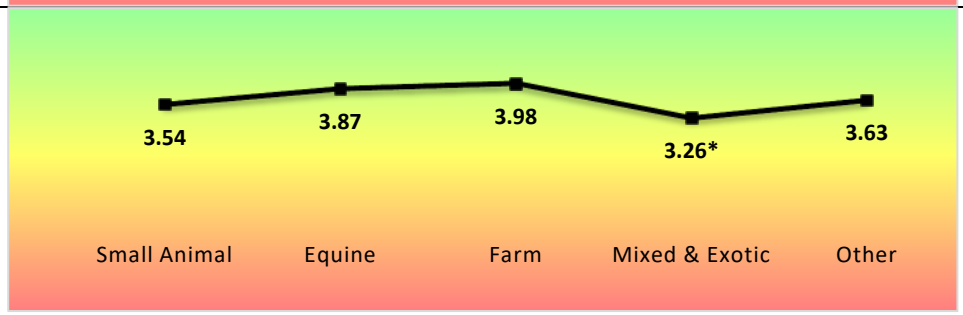
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

The structure of the PDP supports me with the development of my non-clinical skills (N = 652)	
The learning that I have gained by engaging with the PDP has been useful in my day-to-day work (N = 650)	
I feel that the PDP has had a direct positive impact on my development as a veterinary surgeon (N = 646)	
I received sufficient information about the PDP whilst at Veterinary school (N = 608)	
I understand the role of the Postgraduate Dean in relation to the PDP (N = 650)	
The BSAVA resource bank is useful to me in supporting my professional development (N = 275)	

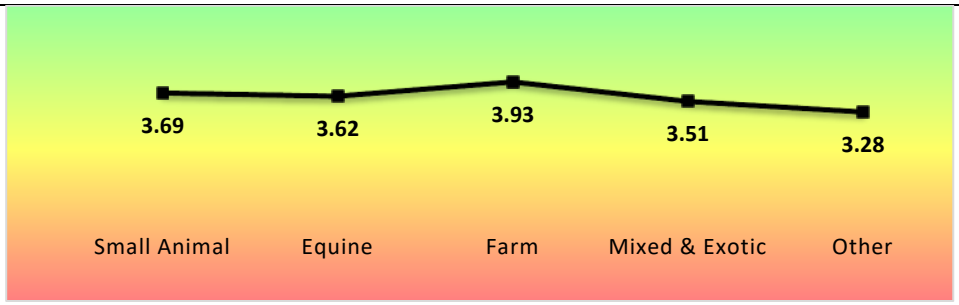
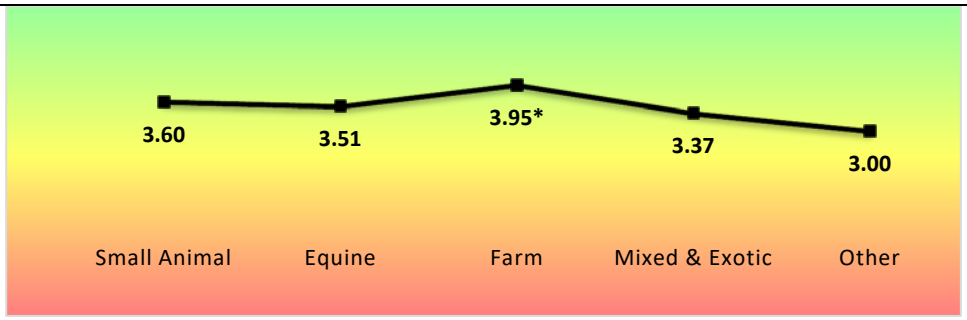
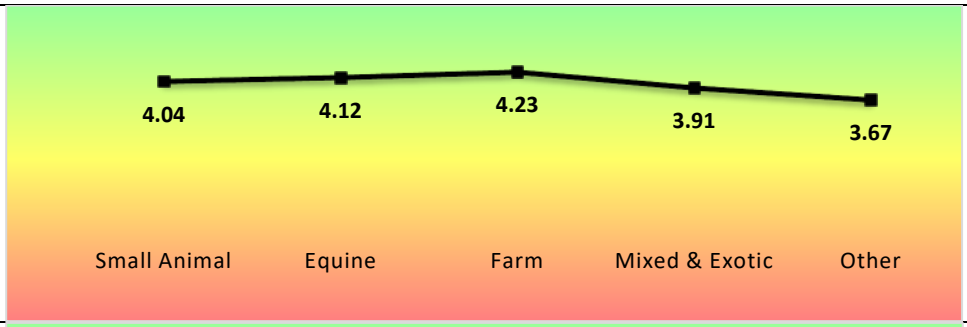
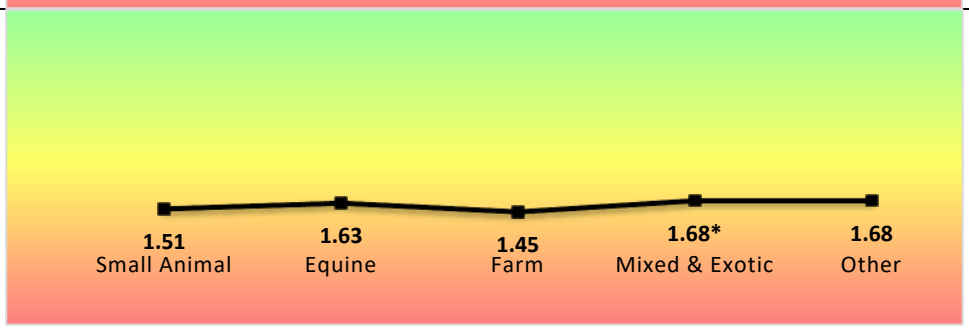
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Having access to the BSAVA resource bank has made me feel supported in my transition from Veterinary school to practice (N = 267)	
I feel that the BSAVA resource bank has had a direct positive impact on my development as a veterinary surgeon (N = 274)	
I think that my employer is aware of my PDP requirements (N = 450) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Mixed & Exotic	
My awareness of the PDP requirements influenced my decision to become a paying BSAVA member (N = 356)	
I find the Postgraduate Dean a useful source of support during my transition between Veterinary school and practice (N = 518)	

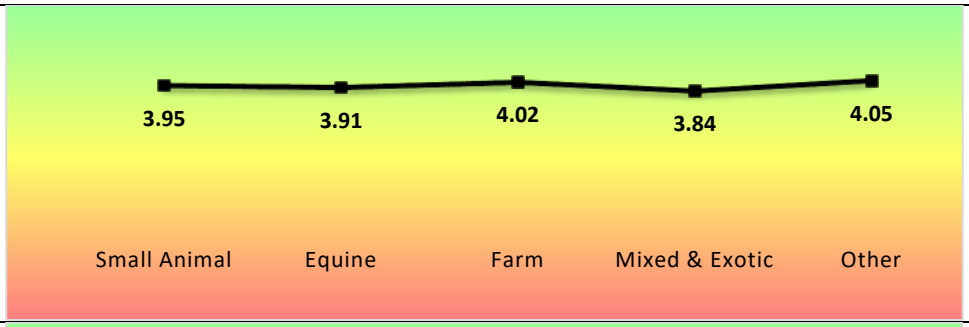
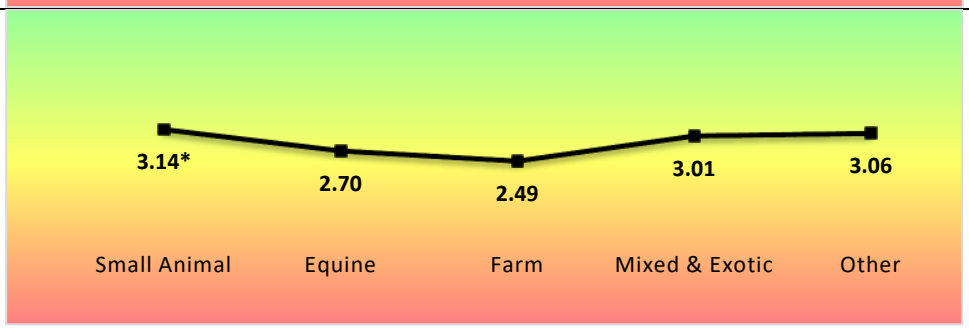
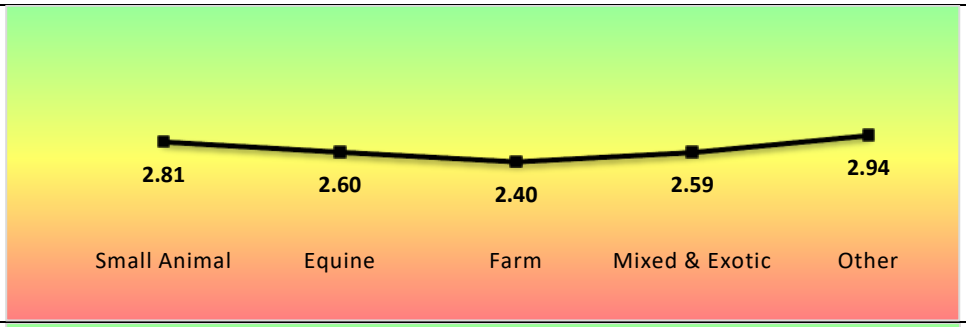
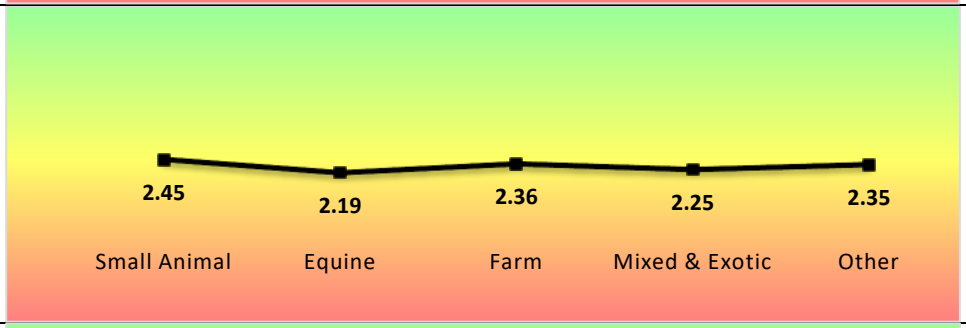
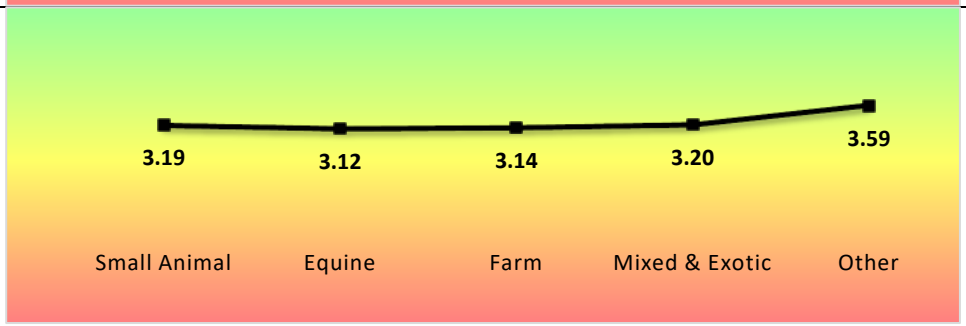
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

I am provided with sufficient support from my supervisor/line manager to be successful in my role (N = 564) *Farm is significantly higher than Small Animal and Mixed & Exotic	
My supervisor/line manager is an effective role model (N = 562)	
I have regular opportunities to discuss my performance and development with my supervisor/line manager (N = 566)	
My employer allows me time each week to update my PDP records and case notes (N = 546)	
The CPD training that I receive within my role is targeted towards my professional development needs (N = 566)	

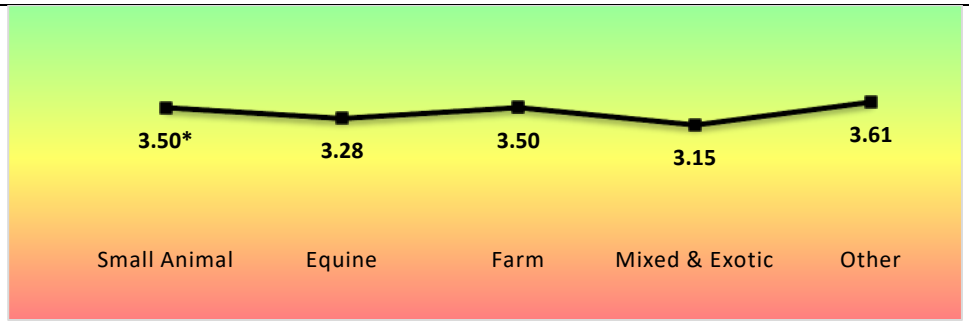
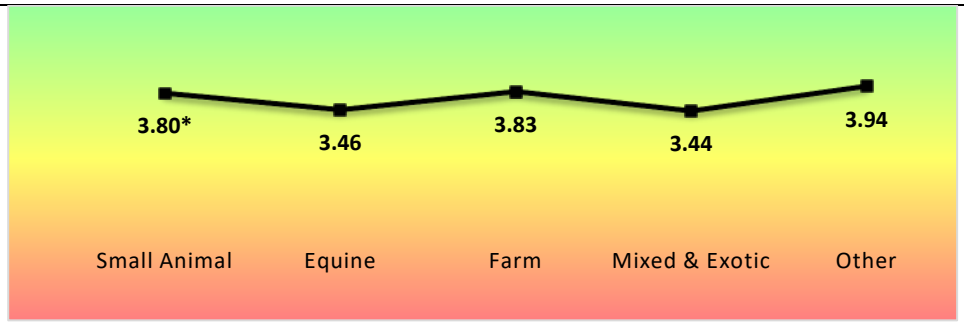
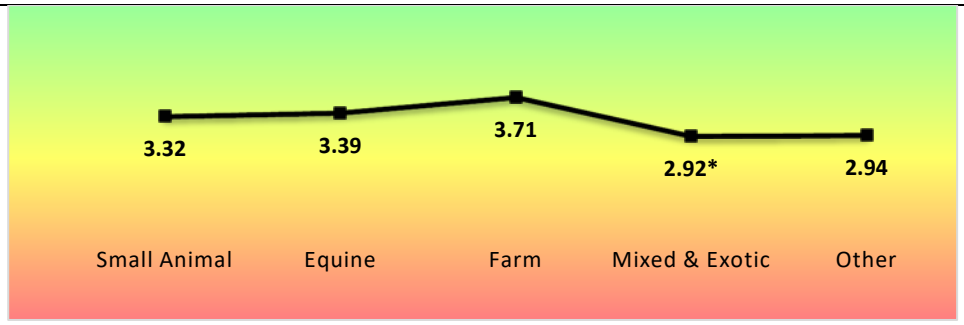
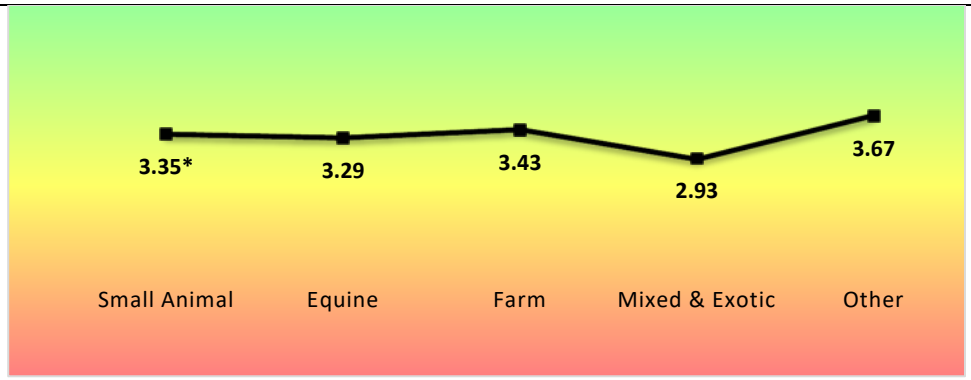
© 2017 Work Psychology Group

*Mixed & Exotic is significantly lower than both Equine and Farm	
I have opportunities to practice and develop skills that I have found challenging, under supervision (N = 580)	
The feedback that I receive from my supervisor/line manager is informed and constructive (N = 553) *Farm is significantly higher than Other	
I am provided with sufficient support from my veterinary colleagues to effectively do my role (N = 584)	
I have received graduate training within my organisation as part of my role (N = 587) *Mixed & Exotic is significantly higher than Small Animal	

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

I understand how to reflect appropriately (N = 557)	
The PDP has supported me in being able to reflect on my experiences as a graduate in veterinary practice (N = 550) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Farm	
Regularly spending time writing up my cases helps me to reflect more effectively (N = 527)	
It is clear what the standard of reflection required is during the PDP (N = 550)	
I gained sufficient experience in reflection at Veterinary school to allow me to engage with the PDP (N = 533)	

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

Reflection helps me to identify my strengths (N = 551) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Mixed & Exotic	
Reflection helps me to identify my development areas and what I need to do to improve in these areas (N = 554) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Mixed & Exotic	
My supervisor/line manager provides me with constructive feedback (N = 532) *Mixed & Exotic is significantly lower than both Small Animal and Farm	
I am encouraged to reflect on things that have gone well, as well as those that did not (N = 536) *Small Animal is significantly higher than Mixed & Exotic	

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

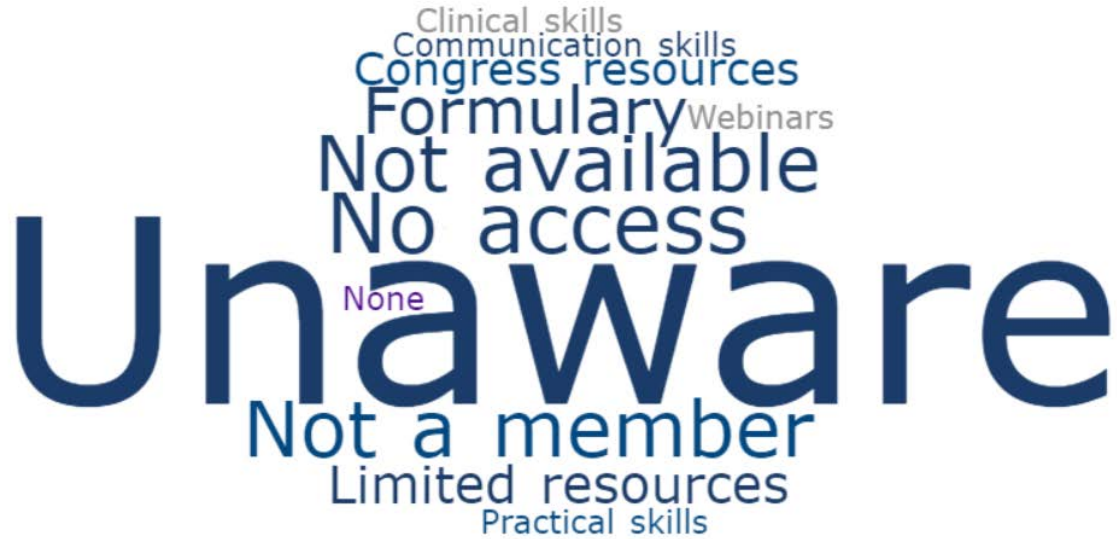
Appendix D: Graduate Questionnaire Qualitative Feedback Word Clouds

THE ASPECT OF THE PDP THAT HAS HAD THE LARGEST IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN… (N=361)

AN ELEMENT OF THE PDP THAT IS NOT CURRENTLY INCLUDED THAT I WOULD FIND USEFUL WOULD BE… (N=252)

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

THE BSAVA RESOURCE THAT HAS HAD THE LARGEST IMPACT ON MY DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN? (N=172)



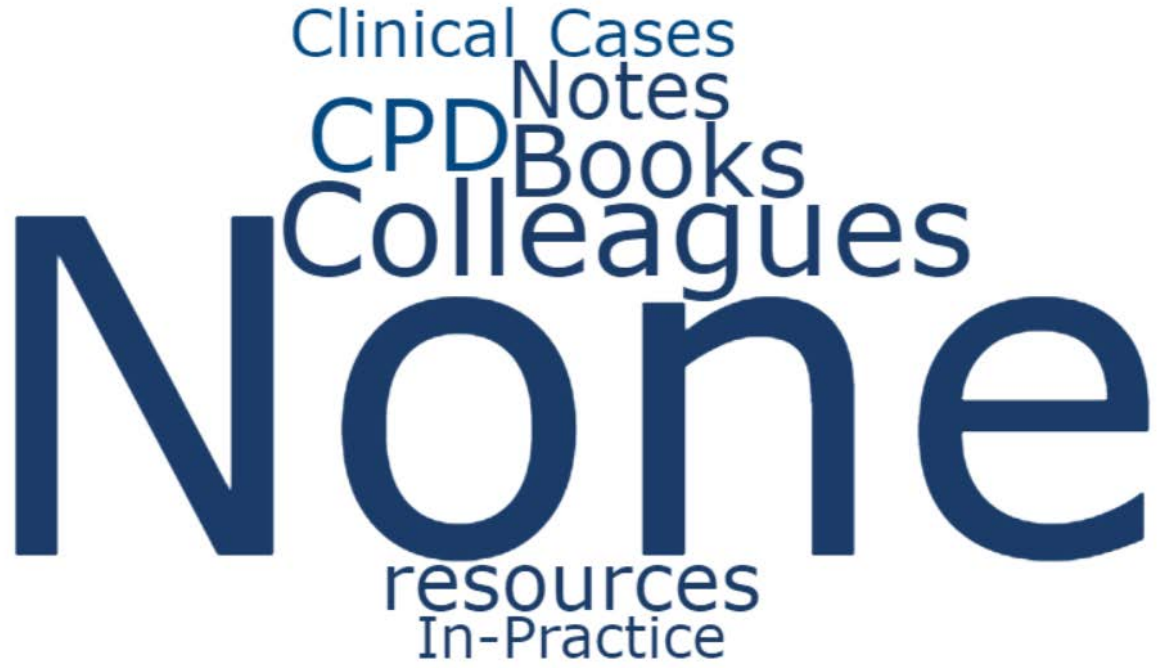
WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MAIN CHALLENGES FACED BY GRADUATES IN THE TRANSITION FROM VETERINARY SCHOOL TO PRACTICE? (N=419)

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

WHAT ACTIVITIES (IF ANY) DO YOU ENGAGE IN TO SUPPORT YOUR REFLECTION? (N=205)

WHAT OTHER RESOURCES, IF ANY HAVE YOU USED TO SUPPORT YOU IN COMPLETING THE PDP (OUTSIDE OF THOSE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE RCVS AND BSAVA)? (N=199)

© 2017 Work Psychology Group



DO YOU FEEL THAT THE FORMAT OF THE RCVS PDP IS APPROPRIATE; IF NOT, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE SUPPORT YOU? (N=330)

© 2017 Work Psychology Group

© 2017 Work Psychology Group