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**I PROMISE AND SOLEMNLY DECLARE**

that I will pursue the work of my profession with integrity and accept my responsibilities to the public, my clients, the profession and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and that ABOVE ALL my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care.
Background

1. On the facing page is the promise you have just made on becoming a member of the RCVS (MRCVS). Registration and membership gives you the right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK. In making the promise, you acknowledged your obligation as a veterinary surgeon to promote the welfare of your patients and to the College, as the profession’s regulatory body.

What is the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)?
2. The RCVS is responsible for regulating the profession in accordance with the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, to ensure that animal owners can obtain veterinary treatment for their animals from properly qualified and competent veterinary surgeons who conduct themselves in a professional manner. The RCVS is the means by which the profession sets and enforces standards of education, professionalism and ethics in the public interest, rather than just for its own advantage.

What is the role of the RCVS?
3. Our purpose is to set, uphold and advance veterinary standards. We do this to enhance society through improved animal health and welfare. For more information, please see our Strategic Plan, which can be downloaded from www.rcvs.org.uk/strategy.

What does membership mean?
4. Registration as a member of the RCVS is essentially a licence to practise as a veterinary surgeon – providing you are in one of the practising categories of the Register. The practise of veterinary surgery is protected by law (Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966) and, with only a few exceptions, can only be carried out by veterinary surgeons registered with the RCVS.

5. The RCVS, under the terms of its Royal Charter, is a corporate body made up of its members (registrants). As a member you are entitled to:
   - Stand for election to Council (nominations usually close in January)
   - Vote in elections of Council (usually held in spring)
   - Attend the Annual General Meeting (usually held in July)
   - Receive documentation for the Annual General Meeting
   - Have access to the Annual Report, including a copy of the full RCVS accounts

6. Decisions are taken by fellow members of your profession about:
   - Registration
   - The educational requirements for qualification and postgraduate qualifications
   - The standards to which veterinary surgeons should practise
   - The validity of complaints made against veterinary surgeons
   - Removal and suspension from the Register for professional misconduct

7. The alternative to this type of regulation might be control by Government or a body of people outside the profession without the same understanding of its standards. The RCVS is a public body, independent of Government, which works within a framework laid down by its Royal Charter and Parliament. The involvement of the profession in its own regulation is valuable but, like all privileges, carries responsibilities. It is up to the RCVS, through its members, to ensure that its legal responsibilities are exercised effectively. As with other professions, ‘lay’ people are increasingly involved.
What are the functions of the RCVS?

8. **To maintain and publish annually a Register** of all members (UK, overseas, non-practising and those granted temporary registration). Anybody who practises veterinary surgery in the UK and is not on the Register may be prosecuted for committing a criminal offence.

9. **To remove names from the Register** when appropriate (voluntarily, for non-payment of fees, or following the direction of the Disciplinary Committee).

10. **To permit temporary registration** for those not eligible for full registration, in approved circumstances with specified restrictions.

11. **To regulate veterinary education** by regular checks on the content of courses and facilities at UK veterinary schools and overseas, to ensure that graduates will have the knowledge and skill to practise veterinary surgery in the UK.

12. **To provide an examination** to enable overseas veterinarians whose qualifications are not currently recognised to obtain registration.

13. **To regulate professional conduct** by providing general ethical guidance in the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct, or in response to individual enquiries. Please do contact us for advice as often as you need to on 020 7202 0789 or profcon@rcvs.org.uk

14. **To respond to all complaints** against veterinary surgeons (and registered veterinary nurses) and take action against those whose activities are shown to endanger animals and their owners or cause people to lose confidence in the profession, the penalty for which may be suspension or the removal of their name from the Register. See the Professional conduct and discipline section.

15. **To regulate the training and registration (listing) of veterinary nurses** – we maintain a List of veterinary nurses who are legally entitled to practise certain elements of veterinary surgery under Schedule 3 to the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. Since 1 September 2007, the List also incorporates a non-statutory Register of Veterinary Nurses. All registered veterinary nurses (RVNs) are bound by a Code of Professional Conduct, continuing professional development requirements and disciplinary rules prescribed by the RCVS.

16. **To regulate all qualifications that lead to the VN Register**, including both undergraduate and further education awards, in a similar way to its oversight of veterinary schools.

17. **Additionally**, among its other activities, the RCVS:
   - Carries out functions equivalent to the UK medical royal colleges
   - Awards postgraduate qualifications in a range of different subject areas
   - Awards Fellowships
   - Accredits Specialists and Advanced Practitioners
   - Maintains a Register of Veterinary Practice Premises on behalf of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate
   - Inspects veterinary practices on a voluntary basis within the Practice Standards Scheme
The Register

18. The RCVS is required by law to produce and publish a Register of all members. The information in the Register is available to the profession and the public, and certain details are also published on the RCVS website (www.rcvs.org.uk/registration/check-the-register-list/).

Required information that is published

19. The following information has to be legally held and made available in the Register:
   - Full name and any change of name since registration
   - The address specified for the Register (this should normally be your work address, from where you provide veterinary services)
   - Primary veterinary qualification permitting registration in the UK, name of college or university, date of graduation and date of admission to Register
   - The registration number
   - Practising status – ie category of membership

20. Members who have exceptional reasons for not providing a work address or not having their Register address published should seek advice from the Registration Department.

Required information not made available to the public

21. Additional information required includes date of birth, correspondence address (if not the Register address) and other contact information, for example, email, and phone and mobile numbers. Where additional information is requested or supplied, this information will not be disclosed without your permission, although it will be used to communicate with you.

Updating the Register

22. You have a duty to inform the RCVS of any changes in your registration details, including change of name, address, phone number or practising status. This can be done by email, fax, letter or phone and, if the changes are to contact details, you must state whether this is to your correspondence or Register (work) address. This must be done within 28 days of the change occurring. Data checks are made on Register details through the Annual Renewal Notice.

23. Information on making changes to registration details is also available on the website and any required forms may be accessed there.

24. If you do not reply to an enquiry asking you to confirm your Register address or practising status within six months of the initial request, you risk being removed from the Register (Veterinary Surgeons Act, Section 13 (3)).

25. If you have not received an Annual Renewal Notice by 1 April in any year, please contact the Registration Department to check that they have the correct address for you. If your payment is not made on time, you may have to pay an increased fee. If the College is not able to contact you, you may be removed from the Register for non-payment. This means that continuing to practise could result in prosecution and could invalidate your professional indemnity insurance.
26. If your membership is in the ‘UK Practising’ or ‘Practising outside the UK’ category, as part of your annual renewal you will also need to confirm that you are compliant with the requirements for continuing professional development (CPD) of 105 hours over three years, and declare any cautions, convictions or adverse findings against you dating from 1 January 2006 onwards. For further details on these declarations, please visit www.rcvs.org.uk/convictions.

Electronic use of information
27. Some of the public information from the Register is available on the RCVS website in electronic format. This includes the name, location (but at present not the full Register address), primary veterinary qualification, practising status, date of registration and registration number of each member (www.rcvs.org.uk/registration/check-the-register-list/).

28. Members may record their objection to their data being passed onto third parties (within and outside the EU) by contacting the Registration Department.

29. The RCVS will never pass on personal data not required to be held as part of the Register without your permission; although this is subject to disclosures in accordance with the Data Protection Act, for example, information provided to the police. Individuals may make a request for any personal information held about them under the Data Protection Act.

Fees
30. Registration and annual renewal fees are set out in the Veterinary Surgeons and Veterinary Practitioners Registration Regulations, which are amended annually to set the fees for the following annual renewal fee paying year (1 April to 31 March). The fee for each renewal year is based on the status as at 1 April, and changes to practising status cannot be backdated.

31. The registration fee that you have just paid covers the period until the 31 March. Your first annual renewal fee is due for payment by 1 April and you will be sent an Annual Renewal Notice in February. Late payment incurs an increased fee, and non-payment by 31 May in any year would result in removal from the Register.

Current annual renewal fees
32. Current annual renewal fees are listed at www.rcvs.org.uk/about-us/fees, or can be obtained from the Registration Department. Members are encouraged to pay by direct debit, as this is the most efficient way for you to pay and for the College to process payments, provided that you have a UK bank account. Direct debit mandates can be obtained from the RCVS Finance Department and must be set up by the middle of January.

33. Please note: if you pay your fees by direct debit, please notify the Finance Department if you change your bank, so that you can be sent a new direct debit mandate.

34. The annual renewal fee can also be paid online by credit card, or by cheque, bank draft or credit card via the Annual Renewal Notice. The Annual Renewal Notice also has details of how to pay by bank transfer.

Fees for associated services
35. Certificate of Good Professional Standing £3.60 including VAT
   Provision of Services Certificate £3.60 including VAT
   Replacement membership certificates £40.00
What happens if I change my name?
36. If you change your name on marriage, or for any other reason, you must notify the Registration Department by email, fax or post, enclosing a photocopy of the relevant legal document.

What happens if I stop practising in the UK?
37. You have two options: changing your category status or removing yourself from the Register.

38. To change your category status, please complete a Change of Category Form, which is available from the RCVS website or by contacting the Registration Department. You have the option to change your membership category to ‘Practising outside of the UK’ or ‘Non-practising’. Please note ‘Non-practising’ status means that you will not be practising anywhere in the world. If you change your category before 30 September in any fee year and you have paid the UK-practising renewal fee, you will be entitled to a partial credit of the difference between the two renewal fees.

39. Please note that your change of category cannot be applied, or a credit given, unless the form is completed and returned to the Registration Department. Any change would take effect from the date of receipt of the form by the RCVS unless a future date is specified.

40. Alternatively, if you are going to stop practising as a veterinary surgeon in the UK and no longer wish to hold the postnominal MRCVS, you may choose to remove your name from the Register by completing a Voluntary Removal Form, which is also available on the RCVS website or by contacting the Registration Department. If you remove your name from the Register before 30 September, you will be entitled to a partial refund.

41. Please note, should you ever wish to restore your name to the Register, there is a charge.

What happens if I start practising in the UK again?
42. You have two options. If you hold a ‘Non-practising’ or ‘Practising outside the UK’ membership category, you will need to complete a Change of Category Form, which is available from on the RCVS website or by contacting the Registration Department. If you return to the UK before 30 September in any fee year, you are required to pay an additional fee. You should contact the Registration Department to arrange payment of this. You may also be required to provide evidence of Good Professional Standing from the country where you have been most recently registered.

43. Please note that your change of category cannot be applied unless the form is completed and returned to the Registration Department with the appropriate payment and, if requested, a Certificate of Good Professional Standing. Any change would take effect from the date of receipt of the form by the RCVS, unless a future date is specified.

44. Alternatively, if you removed yourself from the Register, you would need to complete the Restoration Form, which is also available on the RCVS website or by contacting the Registration Department. Please note that additional information may be required, for example, individuals who have been practising overseas will be required to provide a Certificate of Good Professional Standing from their current registration authority, and a copy of the identifying pages of their passport. There is a charge for restoring your name to the Register.

45. Please note that your name cannot be restored to the Register unless the form is completed and returned to the Registration Department with the appropriate payment and, if requested, a Certificate of Good Professional Standing. Any change would take effect from the date of receipt of the form by the RCVS.
What do I receive for my renewal fee?

46. UK-practising membership of the RCVS allows you the right to practise as a veterinary surgeon anywhere in the UK. Registration and renewal fees are designed to cover the costs incurred by the College in carrying out its statutory functions in relation to registration, veterinary education and supervision of the professional conduct of veterinary surgeons.

47. As a UK-practising member of the RCVS, you will receive the following:
   - The legal entitlement to practise veterinary surgery in the UK and to use the letters MRCVS
   - Voting papers for RCVS Council Elections
   - AGM papers (online)
   - RCVS publications, including the *RCVS Code of Professional Conduct*, *RCVS Facts*, *RCVS e-News* and *RCVS News* (which is published three times a year)
   - Use of the online Professional Development Record
   - Eligibility to attend various meetings and events throughout the year, for example, Regional Question Time, Meet the RCVS Days, RCVS Day (incorporating the AGM) etc
   - Conduct advice: this is always available from the Professional Conduct Department
   - Eligibility to apply or enrol for Certificates, Fellowships and RCVS Specialist or Advanced Practitioner status: information about how to enrol for the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice, the Fellowship, or how to apply to join the list of Specialists or Advanced Practitioners is available from the Education Department ([education@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:education@rcvs.org.uk)) or from the website
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

48. As a member of the RCVS, you must maintain and develop the knowledge and skills relevant to your professional practice and competence, and comply with RCVS requirements on the Professional Development Phase (PDP) and continuing professional development (CPD). This is one of the key requirements in the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct. It is therefore essential that you keep up to date not only in all of the aspects of veterinary science and medicine that are relevant to your area of work, but also in other skills needed in veterinary practice (management and business skills, for example). You must undertake a minimum of **105 hours’ continuing professional development over three years, which works out at an average of 35 hours each year**. Guidance on what might constitute CPD is available at [www.rcvs.org.uk/cpd](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/cpd).

49. You must keep a record of the CPD that you undertake and make this available to the RCVS if requested to do so. You can do this in one of two ways: either by keeping an online record of your CPD activities and development plans on the RCVS Professional Development Record (PDR), or by keeping a paper record on the RCVS CPD Record Card, which you can download from the RCVS website. Go to [www.rcvs.org.uk/cpd](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/cpd) and [www.rcvs.org.uk/vetpdr](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/vetpdr) for more information.

50. If you are a new graduate, or if you have less than one year’s experience in practice when you first register as a member of the RCVS, you must undertake the Professional Development Phase (PDP) programme (see paragraphs 58-67) as your initial CPD. This can be supplemented by other CPD activities, if appropriate.

The Professional Development Record – PDR

51. All members of the RCVS have access to the online PDR to record their CPD. The PDR is a secure password-protected website with a number of features to help you to record and reflect on your CPD, and also to plan your development objectives for the future.

52. If you are a new graduate, you should start with the Professional Development Phase (PDP) section of the PDR. See below for information about how to sign up.

53. If you are not a new graduate, or you are not going to register for PDP, you can register to use the PDR to record your CPD. Go to [www.rcvs.org.uk/cpd](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/cpd) and follow the links to the online Professional Development Record. You can register to use the PDR from the beginning of the next month after you first register as a member of the RCVS (e.g. if you become a member on 1 July, you will need to wait until the first week of August to register for the PDR).

54. You must keep your CPD record up to date, as you may be called upon at any time to produce your Record Card, or give access to the RCVS to view your detailed online CPD record in the PDR. (The RCVS will have access to a summary of your CPD records on the PDR, but not the development plans or any uploaded documents, unless you grant access.) Completed CPD records are needed if you wish to apply to take any of the RCVS postgraduate awards, or apply for Specialist or Advanced Practitioner status. Your Record Card or PDR will also be inspected if the practice you work in applies to become approved under the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme (see [www.rcvs.org.uk/practicestandards](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/practicestandards)).

55. If a complaint is made against you and it becomes necessary to undertake an investigation before possible disciplinary proceedings, you may be asked for evidence of the CPD you have undertaken, or, if you are using the PDR, you will be asked to grant access to the RCVS to view your complete CPD records and development plans. (See below, ‘What
happens if someone complains about me?) The RCVS may also sometimes undertake random sampling of Cards or records on the PDR, so it is important that you keep a full record of how you are keeping your competence up to date. If you are using the paper Record Card, remember to keep more detailed notes and other evidence of your CPD activities in a readily-accessible folder, as the Card only allows space for a summary list. If you are using the PDR, then you can keep all your notes and other evidence together in the online system.

56. The RCVS does not accredit or validate any particular CPD courses or programmes, but many seminars and courses are advertised in the veterinary press, such as the In Practice CPD events diary published online by the British Veterinary Association (BVA).

57. You can download a copy of the RCVS CPD Record Card, read about and register for the PDR, and find further guidance about CPD, at www.rcvs.org.uk/cpd and www.rcvs.org.uk/vetpdr.

Professional Development Phase (PDP)

58. The RCVS Professional Development Phase (PDP) is a web-based database of clinical competences designed to provide a structure and benchmark for new veterinary surgeons to develop their skills and experience in their first year or so in practice. It may also be used by those returning to the profession or moving to the UK from overseas. The PDP database is one of the components of the new online Professional Development Record. Once you are signed up for PDP, then you will automatically also have access to the CPD section of the PDR, if you wish to record additional CPD.

59. All new graduates working in clinical practice, and new members who do not have at least one year’s experience in clinical practice, must go through the PDP.

60. The PDP sets out the ‘Year One Competences’ – the professional and clinical skills expected of someone with about a year’s experience in practice. As you work towards building up your clinical experience and confidence, you should use the PDP database to keep a tally of your clinical cases, and make notes to show how your performance is improving, and to document your progress towards meeting the required professional competences. It should help to provide a focus for a continuing dialogue with your employer concerning your clinical and professional performance and your plans for future professional development. Reflecting on your performance and assessing yourself critically against a set of competences is an important part of your continuing professional development, and will help to prepare you for future study towards the RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice and becoming an Advanced Practitioner in the years to come.

61. The PDP is self-assessed via the Professional Development Record password-protected website. You can log your experience, notes and case reports for small animal, equine or farm animal practice, or a combination of the three. Filled out on a daily or weekly basis, and discussed as you go along with a more senior colleague in the practice, it will provide a valuable record of how your experience and performance is developing, and will count as your CPD if undertaken conscientiously during your first year in practice.

62. When you sign up for the PDP, the RCVS will allocate you to one of the RCVS Postgraduate Deans whose job is to sign off your PDP record when you think you have completed the process. You can email your Postgraduate Dean from the PDR system at any time with any queries about the process, and they will monitor your progress from time to time online.

63. When you enrol for the PDP you will be sent two copies of a guidance booklet and should pass one of these to your employer.

64. The PDP is a professional requirement for all new graduates working in clinical practice, regardless of where you
graduated. It also applies to new graduates from other European Members States. It is not time-bound, so you can start it whenever you first take up a post in practice. It may take you more or less than a year to complete, depending on the type of practice in which you are working and the number of cases that you see.

65. If you are working in an area where it is not possible to cover all the clinical skills and procedures, you can still use the PDP to keep a record of your experience then return to it at a later date when you are in a better position to gain the experience required. However, you are strongly advised to start the PDP as soon as you can, and to maintain your records regularly and conscientiously. The RCVS will send you a reminder letter if, after a reasonable period of time, you do not appear to have made progress with your records. If it is not possible for you to undertake the PDP, you should let us know the reason, and continue to undertake other appropriate CPD to compensate (email pdp@rcvs.org.uk).

66. When you think you are ready to complete your PDP, you can ask your RCVS Postgraduate Dean to look at your records and let you know if you need to gain any more experience. To apply for completion, you will need to have your application countersigned by a more senior colleague. Your Postgraduate Dean will check your record and, if satisfied, you will be sent a Certificate of Completion by the RCVS.

67. You will not be able to enrol for the RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice until you have completed your PDP and have at least a year’s experience in practice.

**How to sign up for the PDP**

68. To apply to use the PDP component of the Professional Development Record system, send an email, stating:

- Your full name
- RCVS reference number
- Where and when you graduated
- An address for correspondence about your PDP
- The name and address of your workplace/practice
- The email address that you want to use with the PDP/PDR system – this must be an email address that is personal to you and not, for example, a shared practice email address.

69. Once you have been accepted for the PDP, you will be allocated to a Postgraduate Dean and your PDP account will be activated by the RCVS. You will then receive an email from the system with instructions on how to register and log in.

**RCVS postgraduate qualifications**

70. One way of developing your competence if you already have a few years’ experience in practice is to work towards a further qualification. The RCVS currently offers the postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice, in association with a number of universities that are accredited to assess the various modules.

71. The RCVS also awards a range of specialist Diplomas, however, enrolment for RCVS Diplomas is no longer available, as these are being phased out in favour of European Diplomas. If you are aiming to become a Specialist, you will need to work towards a European Diploma through one of the many European Colleges (see www.ebvs.org for more information about European Diplomas).

72. The RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice is the first level of postgraduate qualification. You need at least one year’s experience in practice to enrol, and at least three years’ experience before you can achieve the full qualification. The modular structure of the Certificate is designed to make the qualification flexible and accessible for those working in practice. Individual modules can be taken on a free-standing basis if you wish – you don’t need to commit to the full
qualification at the outset. Working towards individual modules is valuable CPD, and the credits will count towards a full qualification, provided you complete all the required modules within 10 years. Assessment of the modules is undertaken by universities accredited by the RCVS, and candidates must enrol with both the RCVS and with the university of their choice. You can enrol with more than one university and mix and match modules to suit your professional needs. If you are a new graduate, you must first complete your PDP before you can enrol for the CertAVP.

73. More information is available on www.rcvs.org.uk/modcerts or you can email modcerts@rcvs.org.uk.

RCVS Advanced Practitioner status
74. From autumn 2014, the RCVS will be accepting applications for the new status of ‘RCVS Advanced Practitioner’, which will signify to clients that the veterinary surgeon is qualified to at least Certificate level and has maintained their currency and competence in the field concerned. Continued inclusion on the list will be subject to re-accreditation every five years. For more information about accreditation as an RCVS Advanced Practitioner, go to www.rcvs.org.uk/advanced.

RCVS Fellowship
75. The RCVS Diploma of Fellowship can be achieved by submission of a thesis which must advance knowledge and show a level of accomplishment comparable with a higher degree awarded by a university. Alternatively, it may be awarded on the basis of ‘meritorious contributions to learning’, provided the applicant has been qualified for at least 15 years. It is the highest qualification awarded by the RCVS and is shown by the letters ‘FRCVS’.

76. The RCVS is currently reviewing its Fellowship award and it is likely that further routes to the Fellowship will become available in the next year or so.

77. For general information about RCVS postgraduate qualifications, and other work of the RCVS Education Department, visit www.rcvs.org.uk/education.

What is the list of RCVS Specialists?
78. In order to call yourself a Specialist, you need to be approved to be on the List of RCVS Specialists. RCVS Specialist status is not easily achieved. To be included on the list, Specialists must have achieved a postgraduate qualification at least at Diploma level, and must also demonstrate that they make an active contribution to the advancement of the specialty. They must have national and international acclaim and have published widely in their field. They must work for at least 50% of their time in the specialty and be available for consultation and referrals by other veterinary colleagues. RCVS Specialist status is valid for five years, after which time, the individual must re-apply for recognition to keep their name on the list.
Professional conduct and discipline

General information

79. In addition to being qualified to practise veterinary surgery, you must also conduct yourself in a professional manner. The RCVS Code of Professional Conduct and its supporting guidance contains advice on professional matters – proper practice. Please read it, and if you have any questions on what is proper practice, seek advice from the RCVS Professional Conduct Department on 020 7202 0789 or profcon@rcvs.org.uk.

80. A copy of the current RCVS Code of Professional Conduct is included on the USB stick with this document. The Code is a principles-based document, supported by 27 chapters of supporting guidance. Updates to the Code are announced through RCVS News, and the online Code – www.rcvs.org.uk/vetcode – is updated as and when changes are made. This is also the place to find the supporting guidance, which covers specific subjects, such as Certification, Whistle-blowing or 24-hour Emergency Cover.

81. The Code and its supporting guidance are also available as a free app for iOS and android phones. Visit www.rcvs.org.uk/codeapp for instructions on how to download it.

82. Any complaint about your conduct made to the College must be investigated.

83. The most common causes of complaints include:

- **Communication problems** – which may lead to a variety of misunderstandings about treatment options, outcomes, fees and other matters (the College advises that a range of treatment options is offered and explained, including prognosis and possible side-effects, and that reasonable fee estimates are given, see Code, 2.3, and supporting guidance chapters 9, ‘Practice information and fees’, and 11, ‘Communication and consent’). Your knowledge of the English language must be sufficient to communicate with animal owners/clients.

- **Consent forms** – the College advises that specific procedures and fee estimates are included on consent forms and provides a specimen consent form (supporting guidance chapter 11, ‘Communication and Consent’).

- **False or misleading certification** – the College provides general advice on certification and specific advice on the 12 principles of certification (Code, 6.2, and supporting guidance chapter 21, ‘Certification’).

- **Errors of clinical judgement** – which may also give rise to legal claims for compensation based on negligence (the College provides advice on this and the complaints procedures generally at www.rcvs.org.uk/complaints).

- The provision of **out-of-hours emergency cover**, in particular home visits (Code, 1.4, and supporting guidance chapter 3, ‘24-hour Emergency first aid and pain relief’).

- The **prescribing and supplying of medicines** and the importance of the ‘Cascade’ (Code, 1.5, and chapter 4 of the supporting guidance, ‘Veterinary medicines’).

- Responses and reactions to **complaints** – the College advises on your responsibilities when things go wrong and advises that all practices should have a written complaints-handling policy (Code, 2.7).

- **Clients access to their animals’ clinical records** – but not the animal’s records for other clients (Code, 2.6, and supporting guidance, chapter 13, ‘Clinical and client records’).

84. In particular, if you are asked to provide certification in an area with which you are unfamiliar, or you are asked to carry out a procedure of which you have little or no experience, always seek advice or refer to a more experienced colleague (Code, 1.2, and supporting guidance chapter 1, ‘Referrals and second opinions’). **You must have professional indemnity insurance for any veterinary work you carry out** (see paragraphs 118-121), and be competent to carry out the type of work you undertake. If English is not your first language, you must also have sufficient command of the language to carry out your work properly. Remember, the way in which you express yourself is often as important as what you say and what you do.
How many concerns does the College receive?
85. About 750 written concerns are raised with the College annually, along with many more phone enquiries.
86. The College must respond to each concern raised and, through the College, every veterinary surgeon should be able to account for their decisions or actions to their clients and peers. Cases involving disgraceful conduct may be referred to the Disciplinary Committee for a formal Inquiry.

What happens if someone raises a concern about me?
87. If any issues of professional conduct are identified in a concern raised against you, the College will ask you for your account of what happened and you must respond. If relevant, the College may ask you what continuing professional development you have been doing and ask to examine your CPD Record Card. The College may also contact you for further explanation, by telephone or by visiting your practice.

How does the system work?
88. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 gives the College responsibility to investigate and adjudicate on allegations of:
   • Fraudulent entry on to the Register
   • Criminal convictions against veterinary surgeons which make them unfit to practise
   • Disgraceful professional conduct

89. The two main penalties that may be imposed at a Disciplinary Hearing are either a period of suspension or removal of the veterinary surgeon’s name from the Register, though reprimands may also be given. In cases that do not reach a Disciplinary Hearing advice may be given

90. The complaints process is conducted through two Council Committees, as required by the Veterinary Surgeons Act:
   • The Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) investigates complaints to decide whether they are sufficiently serious to be referred to the Disciplinary Committee. This Committee includes three lay members, and meetings are confidential. Most complaints are closed at this stage, or before, and may be closed with advice to the veterinary surgeon on professional conduct. The Chairman of the Committee gives a report to each RCVS Council meeting that gives examples of complaints that have been closed, and the full reports may be viewed on the RCVS website. Some issues that affect fitness to practise, but which may not be appropriate to take to a full public disciplinary hearing, can be dealt with under the recently-introduced Health Protocol or Performance Protocol. The former Protocol considers health issues such as drug-addiction or mental illness, the latter covers performance issues that impair fitness to practise but may not constitute serious professional misconduct.
   • The Disciplinary Committee (DC) decides whether a veterinary surgeon is fit to practise veterinary surgery. This Committee is the equivalent of a court of law, with formal rules of procedure and evidence. Members are advised on points of law by a Legal Assessor. Disciplinary charges must be proved to the extent that the Committee is ‘satisfied so as to be sure’, and thus very strong evidence is necessary. The Disciplinary Committee judgments for the last three years may be read on the RCVS website.

91. Documentation relating to PIC and DC procedures is available online, and appeals against decisions of the Disciplinary Committee go to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

92. A similar complaints and disciplinary procedure for registered veterinary nurses was introduced on 1 April 2011.
Guidance for overseas registrants

93. About 50% of new registrants every year are from outside the UK and English is often not their first language. This can in some instances lead to communication problems, which is a common cause of complaint. You are advised to attend a course in the use of English for veterinary or scientific purposes, because you must be able to communicate effectively with animal owners and colleagues.

94. It is a requirement that you have the knowledge of English language necessary for practising the profession in the UK. (It is mandatory for Statutory Membership Examination candidates to hold an English Language qualification (IELTS at Level 7).)

95. It is important that you are familiar with UK legislation, Government and other veterinary advice on issues relating to animal welfare, the use of veterinary medicines and related matters. It is also advisable that you familiarise yourself with the cultural attitudes to animals and their welfare in the UK, which may differ from what you are used to. A joint course is run by the RCVS, BVA and Veterinary Defence Society (VDS) to help overseas veterinary graduates acclimatise to professional life in the UK – see the events section of the RCVS website for more information.
Governance

Who runs the RCVS?

96. The College is governed by the RCVS Council, comprising 42 members, 24 of whom are elected by members, 14 appointed by the seven UK veterinary schools whose degrees are recognised for registration purposes, and four by the Privy Council. Those appointed by the Privy Council are normally the Chief Veterinary Officer and three lay members. In order to make sure your voice is heard, it is important that you vote in the annual elections (usually held in the spring).

97. Council usually meets as a whole three times a year (March, June and November) to decide major policy issues, approve the budget and set fees. Detailed matters are dealt with by the main Committees: Standards Committee, the Education Committee and the Veterinary Nurses Council – and their sub-committees, working parties and boards. The Preliminary Investigation and Disciplinary Committees deal exclusively with matters of professional conduct (see paragraph 90).

98. Council activities are co-ordinated by the Operational Board, which comprises the President, two Vice-Presidents (traditionally the immediate past-President and the President-elect), the Treasurer, the Chairmen of the three main committees (see above), the Chief Executive (and Secretary) and the Registrar/Head of Legal.

99. The Privy Council, through the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), ensures that the RCVS exercises its powers properly and in the public interest.

General internal administration

100. The College is divided into the following departments:

- Executive Office: p.dean@rcvs.org.uk
- Communications Department: communications@rcvs.org.uk
- Facilities Department: facilities@rcvs.org.uk
- Professional Conduct Department: profcon@rcvs.org.uk
- Corporate Services Department: publications@rcvs.org.uk
- Registration Department: membership@rcvs.org.uk
- Finance Department: finance@rcvs.org.uk
- Education Department: education@rcvs.org.uk
- Veterinary Nursing Department: vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk
- Practice Standards Team: pss@rcvs.org.uk

RCVS Knowledge (independent charity):

- RCVS Knowledge: info@rcvsknowledge.org
- RCVS Knowledge Library: library@rcvsknowledge.org

Phone numbers for each department are available on www.rcvs.org.uk/contact or contact the main reception on 020 7222 2001.
101. The RCVS Trust was established as an independent charity by the College over 50 years ago. It was renamed RCVS Knowledge in 2013 to reflect its new ambition to become a global intermediary for evidence-based veterinary knowledge. It aims to provide access to information that is of immediate value to practising veterinary professionals and directly contributes to evidence-based clinical decision-making. It provides the profession with three core offerings:

- An historical collection
- A specialist Library and Information Service, open to members of the College
- An evidence-based veterinary medicine project (the EBVM Network), underpinned by a grants programme.

102. RCVS Knowledge is an independently run and separately constituted organisation from the College, but nevertheless is closely linked and enjoys generous support from the College, within which it is housed. RCVS Knowledge relies on generous donations and bequests to make a difference to animal health, treatment and welfare. For more information about fundraising opportunities, please contact Marcus Pugh, Head of Fundraising at RCVS Knowledge (Marcus@rcvsknowledge.org or 020 7227 3507). You can also buy RCVS-branded merchandise at RCVS Knowledge’s online shop (www.rcvsknowledge.org/shop), or in person at Belgravia House.

103. To find out more about RCVS Knowledge, please visit www.rcvsknowledge.org or email info@rcvsknowledge.org. To find out more about the EBVM Network, please visit www.rcvsknowledge.org/network or email ebvm@rcvsknowledge.org.

**RCVS Knowledge Library and Information Service**

104. The RCVS Knowledge Library and Information Service is one of the world’s leaders in animal health information provision and provides services to support:

- Clinical practice
- Continuing professional development
- Research

105. The Library holds one of the world’s major historical collections of veterinary literature, which may be consulted by appointment (contact details below).

106. The Library’s tailor-made information services include:

- Access to electronic journals and bibliographic databases
- Document delivery
- Literature searches
- Workshops on how to carry out a literature search
- Book and journal loans
- Circulation of journals
- Enquiry service

107. For an annual subscription, Library membership gives remote access to a range of full text electronic journals and VetMed Resource – a bibliographic database on veterinary medicine. Library membership is available to RCVS members anywhere in the world at competitive rates.

108. For further information on Library membership and details of Library services, please visit www.rcvsknowledge.org, email library@rcvsknowledge.org.uk or contact us on 020 7202 0752. If you wish to visit the Library in person, it is open Mon-Fri 9.15-5pm, and can be found on the Ground Floor of Belgravia House.
109. “Now that I am an MRCVS, can I work anywhere in the world?” Not quite…

- If you are a national of an EU Member State, you have the freedom to work in other EU countries, providing that you hold a qualification recognised in that country and you register with the relevant competent authority and observe whatever formalities they may require.

- If you are not an EU national, even if you are registered as an MRCVS, your veterinary degree may not be recognised by other EU states and you may be unable to work there.

- Mutual recognition arrangements are in place with Australasia and South Africa. Some UK universities have also been accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), thus giving their graduates equivalent status to US graduates for the purposes of practising in the USA. So, if you graduated in the UK, you will need to check your status with the university concerned and the relevant registration authority in the country in which you want to work.

110. **Certificate of Good Professional Standing:** members wishing to work overseas are likely to require a Certificate of Good Professional Standing – issued by the RCVS for a small fee (see paragraph 35). This is to confirm that you are a member of the RCVS and that there are no outstanding disciplinary procedures against you. Always check with the registration body of the country in which you wish to work. Details can be obtained on the RCVS website.

**Employment**

111. You may be offered employment:

- In a permanent position;
- For a fixed short period; or,
- As a locum (usually through an agency) on a self-employed basis.

112. If you are going to practise as a veterinary surgeon and to supply medicines, you should ensure that the veterinary practice premises where you work are registered with the RCVS, otherwise you may commit an offence under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations.

If you are employed within a veterinary practice, you may find that the practice is accredited under the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme. About 50% of practice premises are part of the Scheme, under which practices volunteer to undergo a rigorous inspection every four years, and are subject to spot checks in between. The Scheme looks at areas such as health and safety, out-of-hours cover, practice policies, the CPD records of staff and, in some cases, clinical governance. Practices can join at one of three levels: core, general practice (equine, small animal, farm animal or emergency services clinic) or hospital (small animal or equine). The Scheme is published to the public so that they have more information on veterinary practice standards. Further details about the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme are available at [www.rcvs.org.uk/practicestandards](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/practicestandards).

113. Under the **Code of Professional Conduct**, all veterinary surgeons (and registered veterinary nurses) must maintain minimum practice standards equivalent to Core Standards of the Practice Standards Scheme (4.3), whether or not the practice is accredited under the Scheme.
114. Remember:

- To make sure that any offer of employment is made in writing and gives details of salary and any other benefits, including the provision of accommodation or a car
- To accept the offer in writing and keep copies of all correspondence
- If you are being offered accommodation or a car, check the contents and condition of the accommodation against a list provided or make your own list, and note anything which is missing or damaged. Agree the list with your employer at the outset. Also check the condition and mileage of the car and agree your statement with your employer. By doing so you will avoid any suggestion at a later stage that, for example, you have caused damage which was already there. Ensure that the taxable status of such benefits is clear to you.

115. If you take up a permanent position, you should receive a contract of employment within 13 weeks of starting work, which you should read to make sure that it states the conditions of employment to which you believe you agreed.

116. If you are being employed, tax and National Insurance contributions will be deducted from your salary before you receive it. If you are self-employed (which often applies to locum appointments) you will be responsible for paying tax direct.

Professional indemnity insurance

117. The RCVS Code of Professional Conduct (3.4) states: "Veterinary surgeons must ensure that all their professional activities are covered by professional indemnity insurance or equivalent arrangements. Such cover may be held individually or through an employer."

118. In any situation where treatment is unsuccessful, or diagnosis is incorrect, whether or not you have been at fault, the animal owner may take legal action against you and seek compensation. It is therefore very important that you are covered by an insurance policy to ensure that where compensation is justified it can be paid.

119. Before starting any job you should ask whether the practice is insured against claims for professional negligence and third-party claims, and whether their policy will cover you. If you are going to work for a locum agency, you should also check whether the agency has a policy that covers you. If you are not covered, then you should take out your own policy.

120. Your professional indemnity insurer may also help you to defend any professional conduct complaint against you, and may pay for any legal representation.

Keeping in touch with the College

121. Please get in touch at any time if you have a question, using the contact details in paragraph 100. To keep in touch with changes in College policy or guidance, please do read RCVS News, which you will receive three times a year (March, June and November). Back issues are available at www.rcvs.org.uk/publications. You can also sign up to our free e-bulletin, RCVS e-News (www.rcvs.org.uk/enews), follow us on Twitter to receive updates, deadline reminders and news (@RCVS_UK), or link with us on LinkedIn.
Useful contacts

For advice on ethical problems, details about PDP, CPD, Certificates and Diplomas, queries about registration, fees, to obtain Certificates of Good Professional Standing, or to notify changes of address, name or status, contact:
The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)
Belgravia House
62-64 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 2AF
T 020 7222 2001
F 020 7222 2004
E info@rcvs.org.uk
www.rcvs.org.uk

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) has a Young Vet Network specifically for new graduates. Its advice includes help on obtaining a contract and what should go in it (see www.bva.co.uk/contracts). For more general enquiries, or for information about the BVA Legal Advice Helping for its members, contact:
The British Veterinary Association (BVA)
7 Mansfield Street
London
W1G 9NQ
T 020 7636 6541
F 020 7436 2970
www.bva.co.uk

For advice or information on agricultural and public health matters, contact:
The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
T 08459 33 55 77
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs

For information and advice on reporting suspect notifiable disease, animal welfare issues and importing or exporting animals and animal products, contact:
Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency
T 01905 763355
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/animal-health-and-veterinary-laboratories-agency

For advice on issues relating to veterinary medicines, including adverse reactions, contact:
The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
T 01932 336 911
www.vmd.gov.uk

For specific advice on meat hygiene issues, contact:
The Food Standards Agency
T 020 7276 8829
www.food.gov.uk
For advice on professional indemnity insurance, contact:
The Veterinary Defence Society (VDS)
T 01565 652 737
www.veterinarydefencesociety.co.uk
NB Other insurance companies may provide similar cover.

For information on English language tests, contact:
The International English Language Testing System
www.ielts.org

For information on English language courses, contact:
The British Council
www.britishcouncil.org

The Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF) can support you in a range of ways:

Financial support
For confidential support for veterinary surgeons and their families:
T 020 7908 6385
E info@vetlife.org.uk

24/7 helpline
For a free friendly listening service run by trained volunteers with experience of the veterinary profession, phone, or email anonymously via the Vetlife website:
T 07659 811 118
www.vetlife.org.uk

Health Support Programme
For confidential advice and treatment for addiction and mental health issues, from a mental health professional:
T 07946 634 220
E VSHSP@vetlife.org.uk

Support website
For advice and guidance on a range of issues, including mental health, employment and debt:
www.vetlife.org.uk