

# **Self-Assessment Report of The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons**

External Review of  
Compliance With The ESG  
(2015) for Confirmation Of Full  
Membership Of ENQA

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# 1. Introduction

1. The following self-assessment report (SAR) is intended to demonstrate the ways in which the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) carries out its accreditation activities in compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015.
2. The RCVS is the statutory regulator of the veterinary professions. Duties of the RCVS include regulation of the professional conduct of both veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, professional conduct hearings and associated disciplinary actions, maintaining the registers of members and associates of the College and operation of the voluntary veterinary Practice Standards Scheme. The RCVS is the sole veterinary regulator in the UK governed by primary legislation in the form of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966<sup>1</sup>. Its authority to regulate the veterinary nursing profession is conferred through its Royal Charter<sup>2</sup>, a revised version of which was granted to the College in 2015. A significant component of RCVS activity is the setting and monitoring of standards in veterinary education, for both veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses and RCVS is seeking ENQA membership in order to demonstrate that its quality assurance processes are fit for purpose and in line with best European practice.
3. Historically, the two professions have developed separately and have different legal foundations. This has led to differences in procedures for standard setting and monitoring. Since the new 2015 Royal Charter<sup>3</sup> came into effect, giving greater legal recognition to veterinary nurses, efforts have been made to bring processes and requirements for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses closer together, where possible and appropriate. This process is still ongoing.
4. Thus, the accreditation processes operated by RCVS for the accreditation of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing degrees are similar, but not identical. RCVS feels that both are fit for purpose and hopes that this SAR will show how each process meets the requirements of the ESG. It is also important to say that the process of producing the SAR has necessitated a critical look at the processes that RCVS operates.
5. This valuable process has resulted in the introduction of some new procedures to meet the ESG requirements and also some changes to existing processes and both will be highlighted at appropriate points within the SAR. Some of these changes are subject to ratification by RCVS Council in January 2018. These aspects of our systems will need to be monitored closely over the next few years to ensure that they are operating as intended.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/veterinary-surgeons-act-1966/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/how-we-work/royal-charter-and-legislation/royal-charter-and-by-laws/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/supplemental-royal-charter-2015/>

## 2. Development of the self-assessment report

6. Production of the SAR has involved various departments and committees within the RCVS, as well as external professionals with appropriate experience in the area of veterinary education to provide a more independent view. Once the committee decision had been taken to approve an application for ENQA membership, two members of staff were appointed to develop the SAR: one representative from the Veterinary Nurse department and one representative from the Education department. In addition, a group of “critical friends” was established to give advice on drafts of the document. This group comprised two veterinary nurse education experts and two experts in veterinary surgeon education, along with the former Director of Education at the RCVS, who assisted with a review of the draft. The current Director of Education and Director of Veterinary Nursing also supervised the writing of the SAR.
7. A timeline was produced, outlining the dates of completion of first drafts ready for the “critical friends” to provide formative feedback. Prior to commencement of drafting, every effort was made to identify areas where policies would need to be revised or introduced such that these changes or additions could be approved by committees within the proposed time schedule. As mentioned above, this process of critical review has been extremely valuable and has helped the organisation to further develop and enhance its current procedures.
8. Once the SAR had been completed, it was reviewed by the RCVS President who had the opportunity to make comments and amendments prior to it being taken through the RCVS committee process for final scrutiny and ratification, before being submitted to ENQA.

### 3. Higher Education and QA of Higher Education in the context of the Agency

9. In the UK, all universities are subject to overall quality assurance monitoring by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The QAA is responsible for advising government (through the Privy Council) on the granting of degree awarding powers to institutions of higher education, as well as overseeing universities' quality assurance systems for the award of degrees. QAA also provides guidance on the minimum threshold academic standards a student must achieve to be eligible for the award of a degree, in accordance with the national qualification frameworks. In the UK, higher qualification levels are set out in QAA's "UK Quality Code for Higher Education – The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies"<sup>4</sup>.
10. RCVS is recognised as a Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) by the QAA, and takes part in a collaborative forum of Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies with the QAA in order to share best practice on accreditation, and facilitate the mutual exchange of relevant information relating to quality, making regulation more efficient and reducing duplication. A pre-condition for approval of their veterinary degrees is that veterinary schools must be part of an institution of higher learning accredited by an organisation recognised for that purpose by its country's government. RCVS only considers veterinary schools for approval which are part of a university with government awarded authority to award degrees.
11. RCVS routinely shares its accreditation information with QAA, as well as taking into account QAA's reports on institutions during its own accreditation activities. RCVS expects all universities offering veterinary and veterinary nursing programmes to meet all of QAA's quality assurance requirements, including complying with the national qualifications frameworks and the Bologna declaration, which sets out a series of guiding principles designed to ensure comparability in standards and quality of higher education qualifications. RCVS also expects the universities it monitors to comply with the QAA subject Benchmark Statements and QAA codes of practice.
12. RCVS, in collaboration with the QAA, the UK veterinary schools and the UK veterinary nursing programme providers, produced the "Subject Benchmark Statement for Veterinary Science"<sup>5</sup> and the "Subject Benchmark Statement for Veterinary Nursing"<sup>6</sup> which describes what veterinary and veterinary nurse degrees should cover, listing the knowledge and skills included within the courses. These statements include expressions of the "professional / employment related abilities that graduates would be expected to have developed during their higher education and associated practice based experiences". It should be noted that the 'Day One' skills that are annexed to the "Subject Benchmark Statement for Veterinary Science" have since been superseded by the 'Day-One Competences' (2014)<sup>7</sup>.
13. For overseas veterinary schools accredited by RCVS, the veterinary surgeon degree awarded must be recognised as a professional qualification for veterinary surgeons by the relevant authorities (government and/or veterinary licensing body) in its own region/country.
14. The Royal Charter, in recognising veterinary nurses as a profession, requires the RCVS to hold a register of veterinary nurses who have undertaken an approved qualification. Maintaining the register includes the approval of qualifications that can lead to professional registration; these are known as Licence to Practise Qualifications. Qualifications that lead to registration can be either at Further Education (FE) or Higher Education (HE) level. The requirements for such qualifications are set out in the "RCVS Awarding Organisation and Higher Education Institution Handbook"<sup>8</sup>, and it is the responsibility of the RCVS to accredit, in line with these requirements, all FE and HE qualifications that lead to professional registration.
15. Higher education institutions offering veterinary nurse training fall under the quality assurance remit of QAA and the veterinary nursing programmes offered by these institutions are, in addition, subject to routine monitoring by RCVS.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Subject-benchmark-statement-Veterinary-science-.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-consultation-vet-nursing.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/day-one-competences/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/awarding-organisation-and-higher-education-institution-handbook/>

## 4. History, Profile and Activities of the RCVS

16. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons was established in 1844 by Royal Charter to be the governing body of the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. Its statutory duties operate under primary national legislation and are currently laid out in the Veterinary Surgeons Act (VSA) 1966. RCVS is also designated as the “Competent Authority” for the veterinary profession under European Union legislation (VSA, section 1a).
17. Under the RCVS Supplemental Royal Charter 2015, section 14, powers are granted for the setting of standards for the training and education of persons wishing to be entered in the register of veterinary nurses. It is this Charter that outlines the status of veterinary nurses as Associates of the College, and the Veterinary Nurses Council (VNC) as the body which sets training and education standards for veterinary nurses.
18. As the sole statutory regulator for the profession in the UK, the RCVS is responsible under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 for maintaining the register of veterinary surgeons eligible to practise in the UK, setting standards for veterinary education and regulating the professional conduct of veterinary surgeons.
19. The RCVS also exercises powers under its Royal Charter to award Fellowships and postgraduate specialist Diplomas and Certificates to veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and others.
20. ‘Veterinary surgery’ as an area of work is protected by the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. This means that activities described as veterinary surgery can only be carried out by veterinary surgeons, with some exemptions. Veterinary surgeons must be registered with the RCVS in order to practise in the UK and have the initials ‘MRCVS’ (for Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons) or ‘FRCVS’ (for Fellow) after their names. The title ‘veterinary surgeon’ is protected in law: only those who are registered with the RCVS can use the title. With rights come responsibilities, and the same legislation that protects the veterinary profession also lays down the way in which the profession should be regulated. The title ‘veterinary nurse’, and the letters ‘RVN’, should only be used by those who have completed an approved veterinary nurse training course and are registered with the RCVS. There was a campaign to legally protect the title ‘veterinary nurse’ but this has not yet succeeded due to the current government’s reluctance to introduce further regulation.
21. The veterinary profession is made up of over 26,000 registered veterinary surgeons. Over 19,000 of these are registered as ‘UK-practising’ members, which means they can practise in the UK. The remainder are either classed as non-practising, or practise outside the UK. There are over 14,000 registered veterinary nurses in the UK.
22. Regulation of the professional conduct of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses is one of the primary statutory duties of the RCVS. RCVS publishes a “Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons”<sup>9</sup> and a “Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses”<sup>10</sup>, by which both professions must abide. Failure to comply with the code of conduct can result in disciplinary action, overseen by the RCVS, against the individual veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse. This could lead to the removal of their name from the RCVS register of members or RCVS register of veterinary nurses, thereby removing their right to practise their profession.
23. Approximately half of UK private veterinary practices are accredited by the RCVS under the voluntary ‘Practice Standards Scheme’, which recognises practices, their facilities and procedures against a set of published standards.
24. RCVS awards a range of qualifications for both veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. For veterinary nurses, RCVS awards the Advanced Diploma in Veterinary Nursing qualification. For veterinary surgeons, RCVS awards the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice, which is a postgraduate modular certificate programme, set at Level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.
25. In addition to postgraduate qualifications, RCVS also

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-nurses/>

grants both 'Advanced Practitioner' and 'Specialist' status to veterinary surgeons, which are official recognitions of a veterinary surgeon's particular knowledge and skills in a designated field of veterinary practice. RCVS also awards its Fellowship (FRCVS), to those who have made significant contributions to the veterinary profession. None of the activities outlined in paragraphs 19-25 is in scope to this review.

26. Setting and monitoring the standards for the education of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses is a key responsibility of the RCVS. Section 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act<sup>11</sup> specifies that those who hold a veterinary degree from a UK veterinary school which has received a Privy Council Recognition Order are entitled to be registered as Members of the RCVS (MRCVS). Only Members of RCVS have the legal right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK. Membership of the RCVS therefore constitutes the UK "licence to practise" for veterinary surgeons. Section 5 of the Act gives the RCVS the duty to supervise courses of study followed by students training to be veterinary surgeons in the UK. The Act specifies that the RCVS can appoint visitors to visit universities and to observe examinations (Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, section 5 (2)). In addition to visiting universities, the Act allows the RCVS to request other information from universities "as to the course of study and examinations leading to the degree to which the recognition order relates". Under this provision, RCVS is able to monitor standards at UK universities on a regular basis, not just through the formal process of periodic accreditation visits.
27. Under the Act, the RCVS advises the Queen's Privy Council, which is a formal body of advisers to the Sovereign of the United Kingdom, on whether a UK university should have a Recognition Order. However, this is a historical technicality and, to all intents and purposes, the decision on whether or not to approve a given degree programme is made by the RCVS. The official statutory Recognition Order is issued by the Privy Council and remains in place until the RCVS advises the Privy Council otherwise. RCVS also accredits non-UK veterinary degrees, for example in Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa, under a separate section of the Act (VSA Section 6) and through mutual recognition agreements with the relevant authorities in those countries.
28. The RCVS defines the competences that need to be met by the new graduate, and specifies the requirements for veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing degree courses to be approved for registration purposes. The RCVS undertakes formal visitations to universities to ensure that veterinary degree standards are being maintained and, for UK universities, reporting the recommendations to the Privy Council.
29. The RCVS regulates the veterinary nursing profession through the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 Schedule 3, the Royal Charter 2015, the Veterinary Nursing Registration Rules 2017<sup>12</sup> and the Veterinary Nurse Conduct and Discipline Rules 2014<sup>13</sup> to protect the public interest and to safeguard animal health and welfare.
30. Historically, veterinary nurse training was available only through a Level 3 qualification offered by 'RCVS Awards', the former RCVS awarding body for veterinary nursing qualifications. In 2011, two additional awarding organisations were approved to offer veterinary nursing qualifications within the Further Education sector, and in 2015 the RCVS ceased its functions as an awarding body in veterinary nurse education. Degrees in veterinary nursing were originally piloted in the UK in 1999, and currently the RCVS accredits 17 higher education institutions for veterinary nurse training. In order to be entered onto the register of veterinary nurses a person must hold an approved degree in veterinary nursing or other higher qualification in veterinary nursing and have completed practical training requirements set out by the RCVS.
31. For a veterinary surgeon degree or veterinary nursing degree to be approved for registration purposes by the College, the programme must meet published RCVS criteria, hereafter referred to as RCVS standards. Both the veterinary surgeon degree and veterinary nursing degree programmes have their own set of accreditation standards and procedures.

11 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/veterinary-surgeons-act-1966/>

12 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/veterinary-nurse-registration-rules-2017/>

13 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/veterinary-nurse-conduct-and-discipline-rules-2014/>

## RCVS Council and Committees

32. Our statutory and Charter duties are steered and governed by a Council of 42 members that meets three times a year.

The current breakdown of Council members is as follows:

- 24 members: elected to Council by the profession itself
- 14 members: two nominated to Council by each of the seven UK Veterinary Schools
- 4 members: appointed by Privy Council.

33. The RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council (VNC) has overall responsibility for all matters concerning veterinary nurse training, post-qualification awards and the registration of qualified veterinary nurses.

The current breakdown of VNC is as follows:

- 8 members: elected RVNs to VNC by the profession itself
- 4 members: appointed veterinary surgeon members
- 4 members: four lay members appointed by VNC

34. Both Councils are supported by a system of Committees. RCVS policy issues put forward by working parties or the secretariat go first to Committees for recommendation and, if recommended, on to Council for approval or rejection.

35. The terms of reference are laid out in the Meeting Procedure Rules 2014. Some decisions are delegated to Committees, but Council does receive reports of all Committees.

36. RCVS Council is supported by a system of committees, sub-committees and working parties, on which sit various members of Council and other appointed individuals.

37. To view terms of reference, membership, Committee Secretary details and meeting dates for each committee, please log on to the RCVS website at <https://www.rcvs.org.uk>.

[org.uk/who-we-are/](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/). Papers and minutes of Council and Committees are published on the RCVS website.

38. The four statutory committees of RCVS are:

- the Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC),
- the Veterinary Nurse Preliminary Investigation Committee (VN PIC),
- the Disciplinary Committee (DC),
- the Veterinary Nurse Disciplinary Committee (VN DC)

The three main standing committees are:

- the Audit and Risk committee,
- the Education Committee,
- the Standards Committee (formerly known as Advisory Committee)

39. RCVS accreditation activities are reported through the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee (PQSC) which reports to the Education Committee and the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee (VNEC) which reports to the Veterinary Nurses Council.

40. **RCVS Council** – this is the most senior committee, which governs all the activities of the RCVS.

There are currently 42 members on RCVS Council. Following changes to legislation, the size is gradually being reduced and by 2021 will comprise 24 members in total.

Every year, six elected Members of Council terms of office end/begin at the Annual General Meeting.

The election process is started in early October of the preceding year when the retiring members eligible for re-election, as well as the veterinary press, are notified of the details.

Only veterinary surgeons on the RCVS Register can stand



for election, and in the future, there will be two Registered Veterinary Nurses potentially the Chair and Vice Chair of VNC

41. **Audit and Risk Committee** - Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) will have oversight of the quality assurance processes as they relate to accreditation of Vet Nursing and Veterinary degrees. The role of the ARC is one of assurance. This will involve receipt of reports and evidence demonstrating that RCVS is following its internal quality assurance procedures. It will not involve carrying out quality assurance activities, which will be carried out at committee level.
42. **Veterinary Nurses Council** - the RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council was established in 2002 and replaced the Veterinary Nurses Committee. It comprises veterinary nurses, veterinary surgeons and lay people. Veterinary Nursing education decisions and monitoring have been devolved to the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee.
43. **Education Committee** – this committee approves/accredits veterinary surgeon degrees and oversees the accreditation processes. The terms of reference for the Education Committee are to set the policy for undergraduate and postgraduate education and training of veterinary surgeons and determine the requirements for those seeking registration, for the award of qualifications under the Charter, for continuing professional development and for recognition as RCVS Advanced Practitioner and RCVS Specialist.
44. **Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee**  
This sub-committee of Education Committee was created to manage the accreditation process of approving veterinary degrees, and consider reports of visitors

(including follow-up reports) to veterinary schools, making recommendations to Education Committee on recognition of undergraduate veterinary degrees. They consider the annual monitoring reports from the veterinary schools and make recommendations to Education Committee on the appointment of RCVS visitors and observers. The Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee is charged with keeping RCVS visitation/accreditation criteria under review and in line with any relevant international standards and with considering annual statistical returns from universities relating to their veterinary programmes. The Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee also oversees the work of the Statutory Membership Examination Board (which runs the membership examination for veterinary surgeons with non-recognised degrees), and ensures that the standards for entry onto the register by this route are consistent with recognised degrees.

#### 45. **Veterinary Nurse Education Committee**

This committee is tasked with setting standards for veterinary nurse education and training, accrediting higher education institutions to award veterinary nursing professional qualifications, and monitoring the quality and delivery and assessment of veterinary nursing degrees. In addition, the committee also sets the competence standards for veterinary nursing, oversees the provision of the electronic student experience log and professional development record, and monitoring of CPD compliance against the requirements stipulated for CPD by the Veterinary Nurses Council. It also oversees the provision of information and training events in connection with veterinary nurse education.

## 5. Higher education quality assurance activities of the RCVS

46. RCVS accreditation of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing programmes both involve the completion of a self-evaluation report by the institution before the visit, site visits to the institutions, completion of a report by visitors recording the institution's degree of compliance with RCVS published standards, the opportunity for the institution to provide comment on the report, and review and decisions on accreditation made by RCVS committees. Accredited institutions submit an annual monitoring report which are considered by the appropriate committee and in addition for veterinary nursing degrees there are annual quality assurance activities which can include site visits, telephone interviews and desk based research. The RCVS Audit and Risk Committee has oversight of the whole quality assurance process. Due to the differences in the education and training models, there are some differences in detail between veterinary and veterinary nurse quality assurance activities, however, accreditation of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse programmes broadly follow the same principles.
47. Professional veterinary degrees are five or six years in length and are delivered in universities which are also monitored by the QAA. 4-year graduate entry routes are also available for students holding a relevant undergraduate degree. The programmes are accredited and quality assured by the RCVS against published criteria, which are in line with other international standards, during a site visit at least every seven years and are monitored in between these visits through annual reporting. Veterinary surgeon degree programmes are set at Level 7 of both the Higher Education Qualifications Framework, and the European Qualifications Framework. There are currently eight universities offering veterinary degrees in the UK, seven of which are RCVS accredited and one new school which is not yet accredited.
48. Veterinary nursing degrees are usually three to four years in length for foundation degrees (FdSc) and Bachelor of Science Degrees (BSc) respectively. These are delivered in Higher Education Institutions which are also subject to QAA monitoring. As per degrees for veterinary surgeons, veterinary nursing programmes are quality assured against published RCVS criteria during a site visit undertaken at least every five years. Veterinary nursing degrees are set at Levels 5 and 6 in both the Higher Education Qualifications Framework, and the European Qualifications Framework. The differences between accreditation periods and processes for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nursing degrees are appropriate, given that veterinary nursing degrees are shorter. Furthermore, the narrower focus of veterinary nursing training allows for a smaller visit team to attend validation events, as opposed to the large teams of visitors needed to cover the wider scope and in depth subjects taught within veterinary surgeon degrees. Veterinary nursing programmes are also routinely monitored through annual reporting to the RCVS.
49. Internationally, RCVS also regularly takes part in visitations to overseas veterinary schools, as part of its collaborative work with international accrediting agencies. These activities are mentioned in chapter 6 and explained further in Chapter 8.

## 6. Processes and their methodologies

### a) Veterinary surgeon accreditation standards

50. The standards against which veterinary surgeon courses are judged by the RCVS are set out in the “RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees”<sup>14</sup> document. These broadly cover the following areas:

- the organisation of the institution and the availability of adequate finances, physical facilities, equipment, academic staff and other technical & support staff to support the veterinary degree programme
- the procedures and policies for student admissions and student support including health and safety
- the curriculum – to ensure that it complies with RCVS requirements, and that the methods of instruction and content of the course are directed towards producing a competent professional at graduation
- the internal quality assurance systems of the institution for the degree programme under consideration
- the provision, organisation and evaluation of Extramural Studies (EMS) in order that students gain experience of a range of practice and working environments
- library and learning resources
- RCVS essential Day One Competences for the newly qualified veterinary surgeon
- assessment methodology and the professional veterinary degree examinations

### The accreditation process

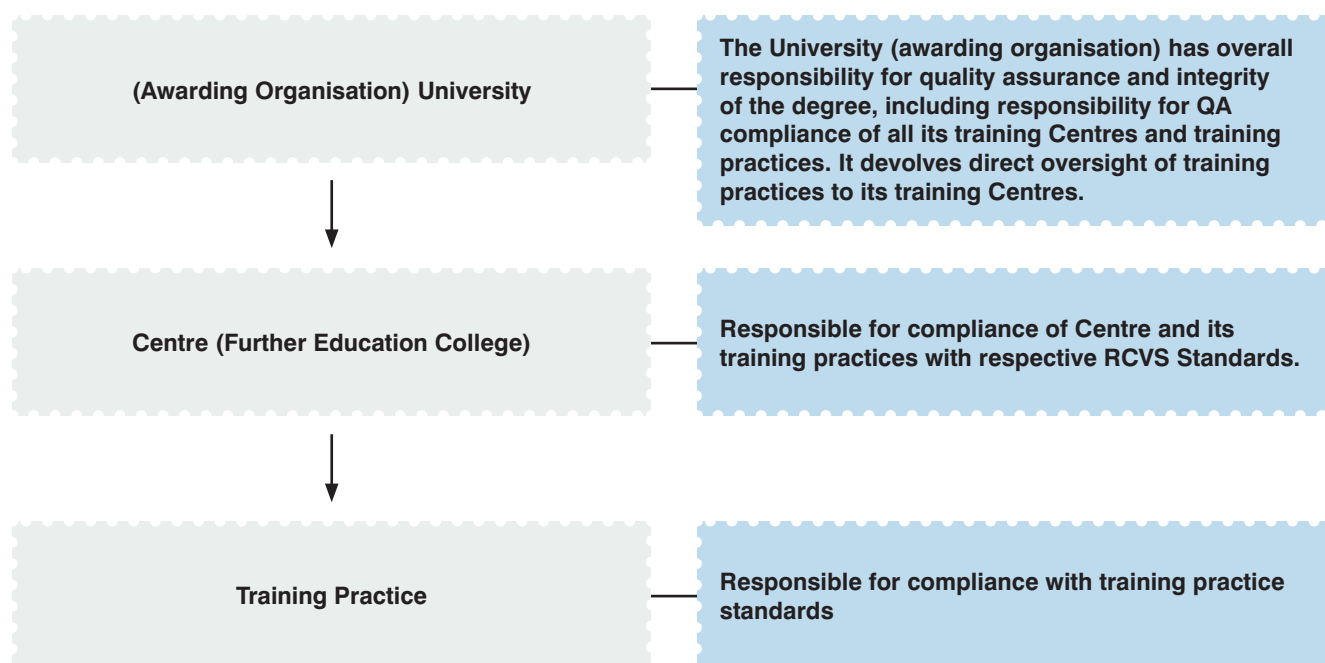
51 RCVS undertakes site visits to each veterinary school with a team of experts (between six to twelve people depending on the type of visit being conducted). A full site visit lasts five days and examines all of the areas outlined in paragraph 50. The visit centres around the self-evaluation report (SER) which is prepared by the institution being visited, and is provided to the expert team two months before the visit. Preparation of the SER should enable the university to evaluate the extent to which it meets the standards, identify weaknesses that need addressing, and put in place measures to address them. The SER also provides factual information on the programme, facilities and staffing which the visitors will

seek to validate during the visit. The aim of a site visit is to verify and supplement information presented in the SER.

52. A full site visit against the RCVS standards takes place approximately every seven years. RCVS may elect to undertake a full visit on a shorter timescale if significant changes are identified by annual monitoring reports, or if any new risks come to light during the normal cycle.
53. Visitors are responsible for making an assessment and preparing an unambiguous statement on the adequacy of the school against the standard(s). The team of visitors jointly agree a draft report. Within a month of completion of the visit, the draft report is sent to the University.
54. The veterinary school is invited to comment on factual accuracy, before the report is considered by RCVS committees. The report is then sent to the Vice Chancellor of the university for formal comment. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 specifies that, for UK schools, the university may, within the period of two months from the receipt of the report, “make observations on, or objections to, the report” to RCVS. The university is also invited to comment to RCVS on its response to any recommendations in the report.
55. On receipt of the university’s formal comments, the report and the university’s response are considered again by RCVS committees, which then make a decision on accreditation status, having taken the university’s response into account. RCVS veterinary school visitation reports are currently published on the RCVS website<sup>15</sup> and veterinary nursing reports will be published from January 2018.
56. For overseas accreditation activities organised by the RCVS, the processes are exactly the same as those used for UK visitations. Where RCVS sends visitors on international visitations that are organised and run by international accrediting agencies, the processes used are those of the host accreditor. Work undertaken

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/rcvs-accreditation-standards/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/accrediting-primary-qualifications/accrediting-veterinary-degrees/visitations/>



through the International Accreditors Working Group has resulted in alignment of both standards and accreditation processes. Following the visit, the report is considered by RCVS committees independently from the international agencies and RCVS makes its own accreditation decision based on the findings from this report, using the procedures and accreditation categories described in chapter 10.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes. RCVS does not publish the reports from overseas visitations, as these reports are confidential in their home countries.

#### b) Veterinary Nursing accreditation standards

57. The veterinary nursing standards are similar in many respects to the veterinary surgeon standards, however there are added elements of Centre (or college) and training practice management and quality assurance activities. In order to register as a veterinary nurse with

the RCVS, the candidate must have completed an accredited veterinary nurse programme, 1,800 hours of clinical placement within a training practice, and 2,990 hours of training overall. It is common, due to veterinary nurse training originating in the further education sector, for colleges to use partner universities for creation of veterinary nurse degrees. This led to a requirement for the development of separate standards for Centres. In addition, due to the extensive number of hours required in a training practice, together with the requirements to qualify as and maintain training practice status, separate training practice standards were also created. It is ultimately the university's responsibility to ensure all its centres and training practices comply with the accreditation standards. A diagram of the relationships and responsibilities of each organisation can be seen above.

58. Due to the devolved nature of veterinary nurse training and the multiple layers of management of a single qualification, RCVS conducts regular interim quality monitoring for all programmes within the five year accreditation period. These activities include a site visit to where the qualification is delivered and to at least two associated training practices, moderated work audit, student telephone interviews and practical and theory exam audits. The university is required to undertake an annual self-evaluation review, which feeds into the quality monitoring of these institutions. All these activities feed into the risk assessment the RCVS undertakes for the institution (see Annex 1). This risk assessment is updated after each audit activity, and reported to the Veterinary Nurses Education Committee. Depending on the level of risk identified, the audit activity may become more or less frequent.
59. The "Veterinary Nursing Awarding Organisation/Higher Education Institute Standards"<sup>16</sup> broadly cover
- financial health of the organisation and the provision
  - programme design and delivery
  - quality measures for the course
  - assessment methodology for the type of course and within the context of RCVS standards (ie. An element of unseen examination must be used for every licence to practise module)
  - centre approval (ie. Adherence to the RCVS Centre and Training Practice Standards)
  - self-evaluation by the institution
60. The centre standards are in line with the higher education institute standards and broadly cover:
- financial integrity and market
  - resources (human, physical, animal and library)
  - centre management and communication
  - management and support of students
  - programme design
  - practical placement arrangements
  - assessment and quality assurance
  - programme review
61. The training practice standards cover :
- the organisation
  - resources (human, case load, facilities and health and safety)
  - delivery of training
  - the management, monitoring and review of training (student support and tutorials)
62. A written report is prepared covering each of these standards, and sent to the named representative at the university for agreement of the factual content. The report comments on areas of strength and for improvement, together with any actions that will be required in order for accreditation to be granted. Once any deficiencies have been rectified, the recommendation is put to Veterinary Nurse Education Committee (which feeds into Veterinary Nurses Council, and by association into the RCVS Council) regarding the suitability for accreditation or re-accreditation of the programme and institution. Once awarded, the accreditation usually lasts five years, but can extend to six, in order to synchronise with the University's normal validation processes. Where there are high risk programmes, the RCVS will:
- record that the institution is a higher risk
  - increase audit activity
  - restrict full approval until issues have been rectified
  - require students to sit and pass a pre- registration exam prior to graduates being entered on to the RCVS register
63. In extreme cases, enrolment of student veterinary nurses with the RCVS can be suspended until such time as the programme is deemed fit for purpose and the institution is viewed as compliant with regulatory requirements.
64. RCVS does not currently accredit veterinary nursing programmes offered by international universities.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/awarding-organisation-and-higher-education-institution-handbook/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/centre-handbook/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/tp-handbook/>

## 7. RCVS internal quality assurance

65. All accreditation reports and changes to the RCVS standards are ratified through a committee process which feeds into RCVS Council, the highest governing board of the RCVS. There are separate committees for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. Veterinary surgeon committees consist of the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee, which is responsible for managing accreditation activities of veterinary surgeon degrees, and Education Committee which oversees all activities of the RCVS Education Department and has delegated authority to make the final decision on the accreditation of veterinary surgery degrees. Education Committee reports, in turn, to RCVS Council. Veterinary nursing committees are the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee, which oversees the review and management of the RCVS Veterinary Nurse Standards, and the Veterinary Nurses Council, which has oversight of all aspects of the veterinary nursing profession.

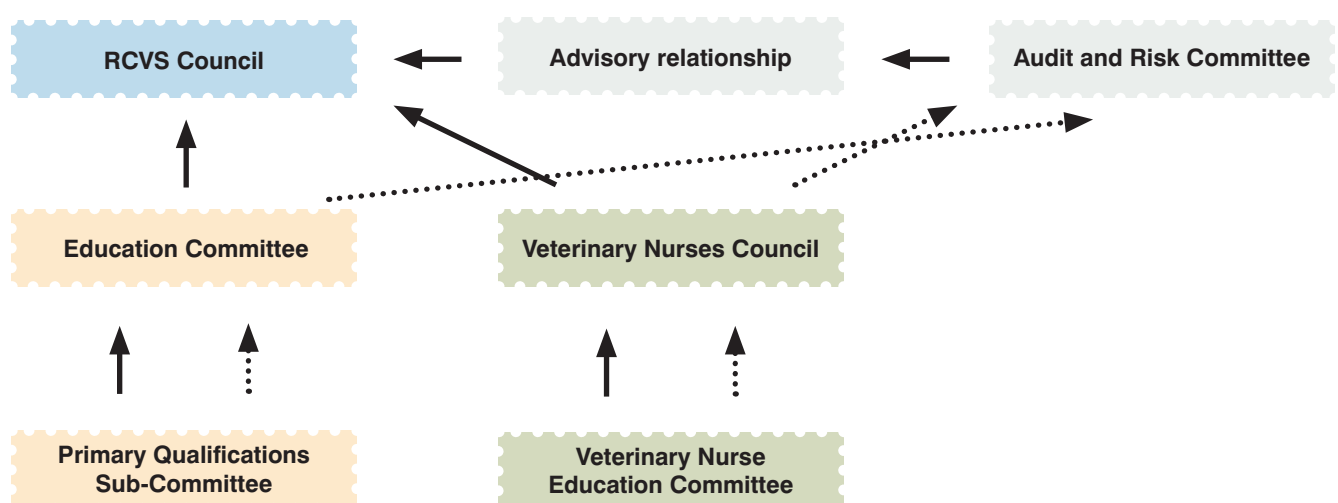
66. The committee process demonstrates objectivity in the RCVS quality assurance activities, as accreditation decisions are reviewed by multiple parties. Further detail is provided in the section on meeting Standard 3.6.

67. The RCVS Audit and Risk Committee will receive assurances from Education Committee and Veterinary Nurses Council that the quality assurance work undertaken by the College in relation to the accreditation of Veterinary and Veterinary Nursing educational institutions is operating in accordance with published procedures. Findings of the Committee arising from assurances received on the quality assurance activities of the College in relation to Veterinary and Veterinary Nursing educational institutions shall also be circulated to the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee, Education Committee and the Veterinary Nursing Education Committee.

**Please see diagram below for the relationships between RCVS committees:**

**Dotted lines represent the flow of information provided to the Audit and Risk Committee, as part of the RCVS internal quality assurance process.**

**Further information about RCVS committees and their membership/activities can be found in Annex 2.**



## 8. RCVS international activities

### a) Veterinary Surgeon international activities

68. The veterinary surgeon profession is one of eight 'sectoral' professions recognised under the EU Directive on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, Directive 2013/55/EU and 2005/36/EC. This requires compliance by UK professional veterinary degrees to minimum EU standards, and mutual recognition of other EU professional veterinary degrees by RCVS for registration purposes in the UK. Consequently, RCVS has a strong interest in ensuring the maintenance of EU veterinary education standards, as well as an interest in collaborating with its European counterparts on accreditation matters. Despite the UK's referendum decision to exit the EU, this interest is likely to continue for some years as the EU requirements are written into UK primary legislation. Even after the UK leaves the EU, the RCVS will still have a strong interest in maintaining comparability across Europe, due to the international nature of veterinary work with the need to monitor animal and public health and diseases across international borders.
69. In the context of training to become a veterinary surgeon, RCVS works collaboratively with several international agencies: in Europe (The European Association of Establishments of Veterinary Education – EAEVE), Australia and New Zealand (The Australasian Veterinary Boards Council – AVBC), U.S.A and Canada (The American Veterinary Medical Association – AVMA) and South Africa (The South African Veterinary Council – SAVC). RCVS invites visitors and observers from these other international agencies to join its visitation teams and in some circumstances, undertakes joint visitations with these agencies.

### International accreditors working group

70. There has been extensive work undertaken in recent years to harmonise accreditation standards and procedures for veterinary surgeon degrees across USA, Australasia, Europe including the UK, and South Africa, in which RCVS has played a key role. This has enabled common standards to be applied and joint visitations to

be undertaken internationally, reducing the burden on veterinary schools.

71. RCVS has an agreement with AVMA to facilitate the registration in the UK of North American graduates from AVMA accredited institutions (based in mainland USA and Canada). The RCVS also has mutual recognition agreements with the both the AVBC and the SAVC, through which we recognise each other's accreditation systems, send visitors on each other's visits, and receive each other's accreditation reports. When considering reports prepared by other international agencies, RCVS has the final decision making power in relation to accreditation of the overseas degree for registration purposes in the UK. RCVS will only consider such reports where it is assured that the agency undertaking the visit has operated in accordance with RCVS accreditation standards, and where there is a formal mutual recognition agreement in place.
72. At present there is no mutual recognition agreement with EAEVE, as RCVS is bound by EU legislation which stipulates that any EU national graduating from an EU veterinary school with a veterinary degree is eligible for registration in the UK, however this is something that may be explored in light of the UK leaving the European Union. EAEVE representatives, however, often take part in joint visitations with the RCVS to UK veterinary schools, and RCVS visitors also take part in EAEVE visitations as RCVS visitors are encouraged to join the EAEVE visitor list.

### b) Veterinary Nursing international activities

73. The Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education (ACOVENE<sup>19</sup>) is a voluntary organisation that was founded in 2007 to accredit veterinary nurse education programmes in the EU. It currently has over 70 accredited programmes from five European countries, six of these programmes are outside the UK. The Director of Veterinary Nursing at the RCVS is the Chair of the ACOVENE, and the RCVS currently provides the secretariat.

<sup>19</sup> <http://acovene.org/>

74. Accreditation by ACOVENE ensures that a minimum standard of veterinary nurse education has been met, allowing reciprocal recognition arrangements to exist between associated countries. This therefore means students from accredited European veterinary nursing schools may join the RCVS Register of Veterinary Nurses without being subject to the veterinary nurse pre-registration examination. RCVS ACOVENE accreditation has raised the profile of the RCVS within the veterinary nurse profession in Europe, and resulted in the RCVS being invited to a Portuguese school to discuss the possibility of being accredited by the RCVS directly, for greater mobility of the school's successful students.
75. The Veterinary Nurse department at the RCVS has regular involvement with the Veterinary European Transnational Network for Nursing Education and Training (VETNNET) conferences, where best practice on topics such as regulatory methods and evidence based practical examination is shared. There has also been collaboration on projects, such as a European wide recognised practical assessment system. The current ongoing project is the development of a clinical training and assessment record, with the hope that it is recognised internationally as part of veterinary nurse training. It is with input to these projects that the RCVS aims to develop the quality standards of veterinary nurse education across Europe.



## 9. Compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (Part 3)

### 9.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

#### Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

#### Guidelines:

To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance, it is important that institutions and the public trust agencies. Therefore, the goals and objectives of the quality assurance activities are described and published along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies' work. The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency committees.

A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently. When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.

#### How we meet this standard

76. RCVS has a clear mission statement that is published on the website<sup>20</sup>, that includes reference to the goals and objectives of the accreditation functions of the College, as follows: "The role of the RCVS is to safeguard the health and welfare of animals committed to veterinary care through the regulation of the educational, ethical and clinical standards of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, thereby protecting the interests of those dependant on animals, and assuring public health. It also acts as an impartial source of informed opinion on relevant veterinary matters." Furthermore, it has an ambitious three-year strategic plan.<sup>21</sup>
77. As explained above, the RCVS' role as a regulator is to set, uphold and advance the educational, ethical and clinical standards of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. One of the primary roles under the College's Royal Charter and the Veterinary Surgeons Act is to set and monitor standards for veterinary education, and in order to achieve this the RCVS undertakes visitations to universities offering the veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse degrees to quality assure whether these courses meet the required standards set out by the RCVS.
78. As a quality assurance agency, RCVS undertakes on average 1-2 visitations a year to UK universities offering the veterinary surgeon degree, and about the same number of overseas visitations depending on the schedules of those international accrediting agencies that RCVS collaborates with. This cycle of accreditation is repeated every three to seven years, depending on the outcome of the previous visitation, and could be yearly should the situation warrant it.
79. For the veterinary nurse higher education institution accreditation, RCVS conducts approximately three to four visitations a year to UK institutions. This cycle is repeated every five years.

20 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/how-we-work/the-role-of-the-rcvs/>

21 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/how-we-work/the-role-of-the-rcvs/strategic-plan/>

80. The RCVS defines the competences required by the new veterinary graduate and registered veterinary nurse, and specifies the requirements for veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse degree courses to be approved for registration purposes. The “Day-One Competences” (see Annex 2 of “RCVS Standards and Procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees”<sup>22</sup> and Annex 6 of the “Awarding Organisation and Higher Education Institution Handbook”<sup>23</sup>) set out in detail how schools should prepare students to qualify so that they are able to provide quality veterinary care from their first day in practice. The accreditation standards also set out the required curriculum, facilities, physical and staff resources, access to animal material/cases, and assessment standards. The Day-One Competences, Day-One Skills and accreditation standards for veterinary nursing can be found in the “RCVS Awarding Organisation/Higher Education Institute Handbook”.
81. Accreditation standards and procedures are available publicly through the RCVS website<sup>24</sup>. These standards ensure that accreditation procedures are applied consistently so that each accreditation visit follows the pattern of:
- self-evaluation report prepared by the institution
  - self-evaluation report review and pre-visit meeting of the site team
  - external evaluation through an on-site visit
  - visitation report based on the findings of professional experts
  - period of consultation with the university being accredited, in which it is given the opportunity to respond to the visitors’ findings
  - accreditation decision by RCVS committee
  - final veterinary surgeon visit report published on the RCVS website, and veterinary nursing accreditation reports will be published from 2018.
82. Competences, standards and changes to the requirements of students or schools are governed ultimately by RCVS Council for veterinary surgeons and Veterinary Nurse Council for veterinary nurses. Significant changes to accreditation standards or processes are made through consultation and working parties derived from the professions, to allow legitimate endorsement from key stakeholders. Minutes of committee meetings where such changes are discussed or approved are published on the RCVS website. Because of this multi-level consultation process, all parties can be assured that no decision is taken without proper consideration.
83. RCVS Council and Veterinary Nurses Council comprise a mixture of elected and appointed stakeholders. Any registered veterinary nurse and practicing veterinary surgeon can stand for election and will be elected by their peers through an independent annual election process. Appointed members are selected following set protocols.
84. Stakeholders are involved in the governance and work of the RCVS through their membership of RCVS committees such as RCVS Council and RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council, through working parties, through collaboration with the Veterinary Schools Council (a separate organisation whose board includes the Heads of each UK veterinary school), and through direct contact with each individual veterinary nursing school. Other representative bodies within the professions would also be consulted, for example, British Veterinary Nursing Association, British Veterinary Association and its species divisions.
85. RCVS regularly conducts profession-wide consultations on significant issues, involving multiple stakeholders.<sup>26</sup> Recent examples include the “Vet Futures”<sup>27</sup> and “Vet Nursing Futures”<sup>28</sup> consultations and a major consultation phase is planned for the graduate outcomes project, which is currently ongoing.
86. Through working with the International Accreditors Working Group and ACOVENE to harmonise standards of accreditation around the world, the work of the RCVS is strengthened and its mission of advancing the educational standards of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses is achieved.
87. For a more detailed analysis of how RCVS translates its goals and objectives into its daily work of accrediting veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse degrees, please see chapter 6 – Processes and their methodologies.

22 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/rcvs-accreditation-standards/>

23 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/awarding-organisation-and-higher-education-institution-handbook/>

24 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/accrediting-primary-qualifications/>

25 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/rcvs-council/council-meetings/> & <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/vn-council/vn-council-meetings/>

26 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/our-consultations/>

27 <https://www.vetfutures.org.uk/download/reports/Vet%20Futures%20report.pdf>

28 [https://www.vetfutures.org.uk/download/publications/VN%20%20futures%20report\(3\).pdf](https://www.vetfutures.org.uk/download/publications/VN%20%20futures%20report(3).pdf)

## 9.2 ESG Standard 3.2. Official status

### Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

### Guidelines:

In particular when external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions need to have the security that the outcomes of this process are accepted within their higher education system, by the state, the stakeholders and the public.

### How we meet this standard

88. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is the sole statutory regulatory body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (UK). It operates under primary national legislation (Item 1, The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966<sup>29</sup>), and is also designated as the “Competent Authority” for the veterinary profession under European Union legislation (VSA, Section 1a). It is constituted under a Royal Charter, the first of which was granted in 1844, followed by various updated Charters, with the most recent Royal Charter (Item 2, Royal Charter) coming into effect on 17th February 2015<sup>30</sup>, bringing veterinary nurses into full regulation under RCVS.
89. Its role as a Chartered regulator is to set, uphold and advance the educational, ethical and clinical standards of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act, its primary roles are:
- a) to keep the register of veterinary surgeons eligible to practise in the UK,
  - b) set and monitor standards for veterinary education, and
  - c) regulate the professional conduct of veterinary surgeons through its Disciplinary Committee procedures.
90. The RCVS’s authority and statutory obligation to accredit veterinary schools comes under primary national legislation, the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (item 1). Section 3 of the Act specifies that those who hold a degree from a UK veterinary school that has received a recognition order are entitled to be registered as Members of RCVS. Only Members of RCVS have the right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK. Membership of the RCVS therefore constitutes the UK “licence to practise” for veterinarians.
91. Section 5 of the Act gives RCVS the duty to supervise courses of study followed by students training to be veterinary surgeons in the UK. The Act specifies that RCVS can appoint visitors to visit universities and to observe examinations. In addition to visiting universities, the Act allows RCVS to request other information from universities “as to the courses of study and examinations leading to the degree to which the recognition order relates”. Under this provision, RCVS is able to monitor standards at UK universities on a regular basis, not just through the formal process of periodic accreditation visits.
92. Under the Act, RCVS advises the Queen’s Privy Council on whether a UK university should have a recognition order. However, this is a historical technicality and, to all intents and purposes, the decision on whether or not to approve a given degree programme is made by the RCVS. The official statutory Recognition Order is issued

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/veterinary-surgeons-act-1966/>  
<sup>30</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/supplemental-royal-charter-2015/>

by the Privy Council and remains in place until RCVS advises the Privy Council otherwise.

93. The activities of Veterinary Nurses are covered by Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act, 1966. This sets out the professional and clinical jurisdiction of registered and student veterinary nurses, from which relevant veterinary nurse competences have been developed.
94. Under Schedule 3, the privilege of giving any medical treatment or carrying out minor surgery, not involving entry into a body cavity, is given to:
  - a. Registered veterinary nurses under the direction of their veterinary surgeon employer to animals under their employer's care. The directing veterinary surgeon must be satisfied that the veterinary nurse is qualified to carry out the medical treatment or minor surgery (see paragraph 18.5).
  - b. Student veterinary nurses under the direction of their veterinary surgeon employer to animals under their employer's care. In addition, medical treatment or minor surgery must be supervised by a veterinary surgeon or registered veterinary nurse and, in the case of minor surgery, the supervision must be direct, continuous and personal. The medical treatment or minor surgery must

be carried out in the course of the student veterinary nurse's training

95. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons was created by and still exists by virtue of a Royal Charter of 1844. Most of the original charter was superseded by the Supplemental Charter of 1967. A new Supplemental Charter to replace that of 1967 came into operation on 17 February 2015, which reaffirmed the RCVS's role and functions it may undertake in relation to veterinary education. The 2015 Charter also gave authority to the Veterinary Nurses' Council to set standards for veterinary nurse education, training and conduct. Under the RCVS Supplemental Royal Charter 2015, section 14, powers are granted for the setting of standards for the training and education of persons wishing to be entered in the register of veterinary nurses. It is this Charter that outlines the status of veterinary nurses as Associates of the College, and the Veterinary Nurses Council (VNC) as the body which sets training and education standards for veterinary nurses.
96. The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has responsibility for the Veterinary Surgeons Act and as such acts as the 'overseeing' Ministry in relation to the activities of the RCVS.

## 9.3 ESG Standard 3.3 Independence

### Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

### Guidelines:

Autonomous institutions need independent agencies as counterparts.

In considering the independence of an agency the following are important:

- Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency's work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations;
- Operational independence: the definition and operation of the agency's procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;
- Independence of formal outcomes: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise.

### How we meet this standard

97. As detailed in Chapter 4 – History, Profile and Activities of the Agency, RCVS is the sole organisation responsible for the regulation of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the UK and it acts autonomously and independently in its accreditation activities. RCVS accreditation activities are carried out without any third party influence. In advising the Privy Council on UK accreditations, RCVS is independent of the government of the day.
98. RCVS is not reliant on other organisations for its finances, as it derives most of its income from the annual registration (licence to practise) fees of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses.
99. RCVS operates under primary national legislation and its statutory duties are laid out in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. RCVS is also designated as the “Competent Authority” for the veterinary profession under European Union legislation (VSA, section 1a).
100. Under the RCVS Supplemental Royal Charter 2015, section 14, powers are granted for the setting of standards for the training and education of persons wishing to be entered in the register of veterinary nurses. It is this Charter that outlines the status of veterinary nurses as Associates of the College, and the Veterinary Nurses Council (VNC) as the body which sets training and education standards for veterinary nurses.

- 101.RCVS is an autonomous organisation independent of government, universities and any other veterinary organisations. The Veterinary Surgeons Act and Royal Charter determine the functions of the RCVS which ensures independence from the institutions which it evaluates.
- 102.RCVS visitors appointed to university accreditation visit teams act on behalf of the College and remain impartial throughout the process. Their role is to assess whether an institution is meeting the RCVS standards of accreditation and report back their findings to RCVS committees, who use this information to make a judgement on accreditation status. The RCVS visitor panel contains individuals from all spheres of the veterinary professions ranging from university academics to practitioners in corporate or private practice. Whilst on RCVS visitations, individuals represent the RCVS and not their constituent organisations, and personal interests are discouraged to ensure that procedures and decisions are based on visitors' expertise and not interests which may conflict with RCVS values and processes of accreditation.
- 103.Visitors are required to declare that they have no conflicts of interest when joining a visitation team, so that they can operate impartially without any prejudice towards the university being accredited.
- 104.Part of visitor training emphasises that there is not one prescriptive model of education, that there are many possible variations on how an institution can meet the RCVS standards, and visitors are encouraged to be open to these differences.
- 105.The formal outcomes of the accreditation process are a collaborative effort so that no one individual holds sway over an accreditation decision. External expert opinion and student representatives produce the visitation report and this is then considered by a committee process which includes impartial experts who were not involved in the writing of the report or visitation process.
- 106.Where a member of a committee or sub-committee involved in the accreditation process has acted as part of the visitation team or has other links to the university under discussion, they would play no part in the making of recommendations on accreditation status.
- 107.RCVS Council or Veterinary Nurses Council has final approval of a university's accreditation status and this is based on the recommendations from experts at all stages of the process. Because of this multi-level approval process, RCVS is confident that its accreditation decisions are independent and based solely on impartial expert opinion.

## 9.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

### Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

### Guidelines:

In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.

### How we meet this standard

108. Whilst RCVS regularly publishes veterinary surgeon institution reports describing the findings of its accreditation activities and these visit reports are in the public domain and are published on the RCVS website, the College has not hitherto analysed themes and trends across reports to any great extent. In order to comply with the ESG RCVS would propose to introduce the process as described under Standard 3.6.

109. As part of the RCVS annual report "RCVS Facts" student numbers across all veterinary schools are collated. Moving forward this will also include the same information for veterinary nurses. An example of this table can be found on page 10 of "RCVS Facts 2016". From these data it is possible to see trends in the types and numbers of students undertaking the veterinary degree. The figures are split across gender, home/overseas and age. These figures are analysed by the RCVS Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee on an annual basis, for each individual school, however going forward the sub-committee will also receive a digest of these figures collated into one table (as in the RCVS annual report) and presented together with previous years so that a more detailed thematic analysis can be undertaken. The results of this analysis will be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee as part of its annual digest of RCVS accreditation activities for the year.

110. At present, veterinary nurse accreditation reports are reviewed firstly by the visiting panel, and then the Veterinary Nurses Education Committee which makes a decision on accreditation status. Veterinary Nursing Council receives a report through the minutes of Veterinary Nurses Education Committee and ratifies the decision. Changes have been recommended to this process were confirmed by RCVS Council in November 2017. A new veterinary nursing sub-committee "The Licence to Practise Sub-Committee" is being created with a similar remit for accreditation activity to that of the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee. This new sub-committee will report to the Veterinary Nurses Education Committee.

111. Currently, the findings of veterinary nurse accreditation reports are reviewed and a final risk assessment, based on the RCVS veterinary nurse standards is completed by the veterinary nurse department and agreed by Veterinary Nurses Education Committee. The risk analysis of each standard for each University allows for an objective comparison of institutions' performance, and the identification of commonalities, trends and themes between them. A sample risk assessment can be found in Annex 1.

112. As of 2018, the RCVS committee processes will include a consideration of thematic analysis of RCVS accreditation activities and findings.

31 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/rcvs-facts-2016/?destination=%2Fnews-and-views%2Fpublications%2F>

## 9.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

### Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

### Guidelines:

It is in the public interest that agencies are adequately and appropriately funded, given higher education's important impact on the development of societies and individuals. The resources of the agencies enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, the resources enable the agencies to improve, to reflect on their practice and to inform the public about their activities.

### How we meet this standard

#### Human Resources

113. The RCVS supports separate departments for the veterinary and veterinary nursing school accreditation activities.
114. These departments are responsible for implementation of policy agreed by the RCVS Education Committee and RCVS Veterinary Nurse Education Committee. Work load is monitored by the Director of Education and the Director of Veterinary Nursing, and the operation of accreditation activities is managed by two staff members within these departments. Resourcing and staff reviews are regularly carried out through formal (meetings and appraisals) and informal means. Any extra resource needs are identified and communicated to the Director, who will create a resource rationale. This is then presented for approval to the Chief Executive Officer and Director of Human Resources.
115. Once approved, the Human Resources department supports the process by helping to produce job descriptions and personal specifications, dealing with advertising and/or agency liaison, and then short listing and arranging interviews. The Education and Veterinary Nursing teams work with the Human Resources team throughout the recruitment process in order to make appropriate recruitment decisions.
116. Visitors are recruited in line with a person specification. The visitor panel is large and the skill set diverse so that each accreditation visit team can comprise the appropriate number of visitors across the required subject areas. By maintaining such a list, it is possible to ensure that a member of the visitation team is not a graduate of (or affiliated with) the university being accredited. New visitor applications are welcomed all year around and at any one time there are always new visitors waiting for the opportunity to observe and be trained up to full visitor status.
117. RCVS Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee, Education Committee and Veterinary Nurse Education Committee members are appointed and re-appointed annually, following annual Council and Veterinary Nursing Council elections. The Chair of Education Committee is elected by Council and must be re-elected every year. Attention is paid to factors such as maintaining appropriate balance between continuity of membership and bringing in new members, between practitioners and academics, and to the skills required by each committee in line with its remit.



In order to manage potential conflict of interest, members of the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee cannot be members of Education Committee. The Chair of the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee attends Education Committee but is not a member and has no voting rights. The Chairs of both committees cannot serve as Chairs of visitation teams, but may act as visitors.

### Financial Resources

118. The RCVS is a financially stable organisation, operating with a financial surplus and healthy reserves. It has sufficient financial resource to operate its accreditation activities. Since RCVS is not funded by the UK Government, it is not subject to budget cuts by a higher authority, and thus is able to maintain its core functions via its income, the majority of which is derived from annual registration fees from veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses practising in the UK.

119. Total income for 2016 was £10.03m (in 2015, £9.49m).  
Expenditure for 2016 was £9.98m (in 2015, £9.18m).

The increase in costs is largely due to expenditure on the Estate Strategy, the Mind Matters Initiative and the Professional Conduct IT system. Council approved a Strategic Development Budget (SDB) to provide for one-off projects and new initiatives, subject to a detailed approval procedure. The 2016 SDB was £300,000, all of which was approved for expenditure and the unspent balance of £134,230 has been transferred to a designated fund. The full RCVS Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2016 can be found on the RCVS website.

120. Accreditation activities are given priority in budget planning, as the maintenance of education standards is one of the primary responsibilities of the RCVS.

121. Veterinary nursing institutions are charged for accreditation activities. Overseas veterinary schools are charged an accreditation fee.

32 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/rcvs-annual-report-2017/?destination=%2Fnews-and-views%2Fpublications%2F>

## 9.6 ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct.

### Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

### Guidelines:

Agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Therefore, high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable. The review and improvement of their activities are on-going so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal.

### Agencies apply an internal quality assurance policy which is available on its website. This policy:

- ensures that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically;
- includes internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency;
- guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination;
- outlines the appropriate communication with the relevant authorities of those jurisdictions where they operate;
- ensures that any activities carried out and material produced by subcontractors are in line with the ESG, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance activities are subcontracted to other parties;
- allows the agency to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance.

### How we meet this standard

122. The "RCVS Awarding Body/Higher Education Institute Standards" and "RCVS Accreditation Standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees" are published on the RCVS website<sup>33</sup>. These documents contain the details of the quality processes involved with the accreditation of veterinary degrees, and the accreditation of veterinary nurse qualifications.

123. RCVS accreditation standards and procedures set out standards for recruitment and training of visitors which ensure that all those involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically. Visitors are recruited in line with a person specification and applications are approved by the Chairs of Primary

Qualifications Sub-Committee and Education Committee. Visitors accepted onto the list normally attend a visit as an observer before joining a visit team as a full visitor. Visiting teams attend training before each visit and guidance for visitors is included in the "RCVS Standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees" (page 40) and the "Awarding Organisation/Higher Education Institution Handbook" (page 32). Both training, which was introduced in 2016, and guidance include standards of behaviour expected of visitors.

124. RCVS processes include internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to continuous improvement within the agency. This can be demonstrated through the following actions:

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/accrediting-primary-qualifications/>

- feedback on individual visits is collected from the university and from the visiting team and reported to the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee;
- two-stage committee process allows for overview of decisions and feedback loops;
- feedback is reviewed by Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee and Education Committee, which will make decisions on any necessary changes to standards or procedures as a result of the feedback;
- veterinary nurse higher education institutes are visited, and the report written by the panel of visitors, with recommendations of actions. These reports are ratified by the Higher Education Institution for accuracy and reviewed by Veterinary Nurse Education Committee for the decision for accreditation to be considered;
- both the accreditation visitors and the higher education institution undergoing accreditation complete accreditation evaluations which are presented to Veterinary Nurses Education Committee in order to monitor any changes that may need to be made to the process as required.

125. The RCVS has organisational policies that guard against intolerance or discrimination of any kind within all its activities (see “The way we work- RCVS culture”<sup>34</sup>). Staff are recruited in line with these policies and have qualifications and experience appropriate to their roles. Staff receive training and are encouraged to undertake further developmental activities to ensure their competence is maintained. RCVS visitors must also abide by the behavioural guidelines and conflict of interest policies in its visitation procedures handbooks.

126. For veterinary schools, accreditation reports are sent to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for information and to the Privy Council, and published on the RCVS website<sup>35</sup>, so the process is transparent.

127. The consideration of accreditation visit reports is undertaken by the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee and Veterinary Nurses Education Committee which

have a stable membership of experienced evaluators. The majority of members of Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee<sup>36</sup> will have had previous experience of visitations and are well briefed on the requirements. Moving forwards for veterinary nursing, the Licence to Practise Sub-Committee has similar requirements written into its terms of reference. Consistency of decision making is overseen by experienced chairpersons, together with RCVS staff. Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee recommendations are ratified by Education Committee. Veterinary Nurses Education Committee's decisions are ratified by Veterinary Nursing Council.

128. The RCVS does not use subcontractors for its accreditation work.

129. Before final decisions are made about accreditation of veterinary surgeon degrees, the Veterinary Surgeons Act provides that the university must have two months after receiving the final visit report in which to submit its comments and response to RCVS. For veterinary nursing there is no statutory period of consultation, however action plans are normally requested within a month of receipt of the final visitation report. Visitation reports and the university response are considered by the Primary Qualifications sub-committee and Education Committee for veterinary degrees and the Veterinary Nurses Education Committee for veterinary nursing degrees. These committees have the authority to make decisions on the appropriate accreditation category for either UK or international institutions, as described in chapter 10.3 ESG standard 2.3 Implementing Processes.

130. RCVS veterinary institution accreditation visit reports are in the public domain and are published on the RCVS website, so that previous decisions and reports are transparent. Accreditation reports for veterinary nursing institutions from January 2018. The minutes of Education Committee meetings<sup>37</sup> and Veterinary Nurse Council meetings<sup>38</sup> are published on the RCVS website, so that decision making is transparent. RCVS is subject to

34 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/the-way-we-work/>

35 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/accrediting-primary-qualifications/accrediting-veterinary-degrees/visitations/>

36 The Licence to Practise Sub-Committee was ratified by Veterinary Nurse Council in November 2017 but will not meet until July 2018. Agreed Terms of Reference for this sub-committee can be found in Annex 3.

37 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/committees/education-committee/>

38 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/vn-council/vn-council-meetings/>

the Freedom of Information Act, and must release any further background documents on request. There is an appeals procedure and the ultimate check is that RCVS's decisions as a public body may be legally challenged through the process of Judicial Review. This system of checks and balances guards against any risk of inconsistency in decision making.

131. One of the areas that emerged from the critical review of processes against the ESG was the area of internal quality assurance and in particular it was felt that there was insufficient oversight of these processes. In other words, internal processes were in place, but did not include any system for identifying themes and trends, or looking at whether the processes were operating as they should and continued to be fit for purpose. Subject to the agreement of RCVS Council in January 2018, the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) will have oversight of the quality assurance processes as they relate to accreditation of Veterinary Nursing and Veterinary degrees. The role of the ARC is one of assurance. This will involve receipt of reports and evidence from committees demonstrating that RCVS is following its internal quality assurance procedures. It will not involve carrying out quality assurance activities, which will be carried out at committee level, as described above.

132. The following process will apply subject to Council approval in January 2018:

- a. At the beginning of each calendar year, the Committee will be provided with a work plan, detailing the

accreditation visitations that are scheduled for the forthcoming year

- b. Brief progress reports against this work plan will be provided as a standing item at each meeting of the Committee. These reports would also highlight any major concerns or issues that had arisen as a result of quality assurance activities conducted in the period covered by the report.
- c. An annual report will be produced at the end of each calendar year. This will be presented to the Committee together with the work plan for the next calendar year. The annual report will be expected to include:
  - i. Confirmation that quality assurance activities have been completed in line with the work plan, or reasons for any variation
  - ii. Actions that have been taken or that are planned as a result of discussion by committees
  - iii. Actions that have been taken or that are planned as a result of feedback from stakeholders (visitors/universities)
  - iv. Trends and themes identified in information presented year on year

133. The Audit and Risk Committee may choose to invite attendance from representatives of Education Committee and Veterinary Nursing Education Committee for the purpose of receiving assurances on quality assurance activities undertaken by those committees.

## 9.7 ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

### Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

### Guidelines:

A periodic external review will help the agency to reflect on its policies and activities. It provides a means for assuring the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.

### How we meet this standard

134. RCVS has recently (2015) undergone voluntary review by the United States Department of Education (USDE). In order for U.S. students to be eligible to participate in U.S. federal student aid programs, the veterinary medical school's accrediting agency must be approved by the USDE. In applying for accreditation, RCVS had to show how its standards and procedures complied with the "Guidelines for Requesting an Acceptability Determination for a Foreign Veterinary Accrediting Agency (Guidelines)"<sup>39</sup>. USDE department staff reviewed the processes and accreditation standards used by the RCVS, and determined that the RCVS had an acceptable quality assurance system for evaluating the quality of education offered at the veterinary schools it accredits. This was the first time that any external review of RCVS policies and procedures has been required. This process is cyclical, with re-accreditation occurring every six years and RCVS's next USDE review will be conducted in 2021.

135. RCVS actions and procedures are fully transparent and are continuously monitored by several international organisations that it works closely with: members of the International Accreditors' Working Group (comprising veterinary accrediting agencies from the United States of America, Australasia, South Africa and Europe)

136. The RCVS is accredited by the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education (ACOVENE). ACOVENE is a voluntary organisation founded in 2007 as a result of a European funded Leonardo Da Vinci project. The RCVS must adhere to the Accreditation Policies and Procedures in order to maintain accreditation. These policies and procedures include a focus on:

- financial integrity
- organisation and communications
- teaching and support staff
- physical facilities and equipment
- resources for clinical instruction
- informational resources
- admissions and management of students
- curriculum and practical teaching
- assessment strategies
- programme evaluation

137. While the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education (ACOVENE) accredits veterinary nurse programmes, it also accredits regulatory bodies such as the RCVS and the Veterinary Council of Ireland. The higher education institutes accredited by these accrediting bodies are then regarded as associates of ACOVENE and are subject to audit. The programmes accredited by ACOVENE must meet the requirements as set out in the "Accreditation Policies and Procedures"<sup>40</sup> and "Dossier of European Competencies for the Veterinary Nurse."<sup>41</sup>

39 <https://opeweb.ed.gov/NCFMEA/docs/foreign%20vet%20agency%20guidelines.pdf>

40 [http://acovene.org/new\\_acovene/wp-content/uploads/APP-third-edition-final-Jan-13.pdf](http://acovene.org/new_acovene/wp-content/uploads/APP-third-edition-final-Jan-13.pdf)

41 [http://acovene.org/new\\_acovene/wp-content/uploads/Dossier-of-Competencies-2nd-edition-Nov-2012-1.pdf](http://acovene.org/new_acovene/wp-content/uploads/Dossier-of-Competencies-2nd-edition-Nov-2012-1.pdf)

138. Quality assurance activities take place in between accreditations. This can include visits to RCVS accredited Higher Education Institutions and spot check visits to the RCVS premises.

139. The Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education re-accredits the RCVS once every five years, via application as set out against the “ACOVENE Regulator Accreditation Criteria”<sup>42</sup>. The RCVS, as the Secretariat

for the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education, is not involved in the quality assurance, visitor selection or accreditation of the RCVS.

140. In addition to external review by the United States Department of Education and the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education, RCVS looks forward to a formal cyclical external review by ENQA, should membership be granted following this initial review.

<sup>42</sup> [http://acovene.org/new\\_acovene/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ACOVENE\\_Criteria.pdf](http://acovene.org/new_acovene/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ACOVENE_Criteria.pdf)

## 10. Compliance with the European Standards & Guidelines (Part 2)

### 10.1 ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

**Standard:**

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

**Guidelines:**

Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1.

These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.

**How we meet this standard**

141. Both the veterinary surgery and veterinary nursing standards for accreditation include a requirement for effective internal quality assurance processes within the institutions being accredited.

142. Figure 10.1.a below provides a mapping matrix of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse standards to Part 1 of the ESG.

143. RCVS veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing Day One Competences set out the minimum essential competences that the RCVS expects all veterinary

surgery and veterinary nursing students to have met when they graduate. These competences frame the basis of an institution's internal quality assurance. All aspects of the curriculum must be designed to achieve the outcomes stipulated by these competences and it is these outcomes which the RCVS monitors through its external quality assurance activities.

144. Veterinary nurse and veterinary surgeon Day One Competences are regularly reviewed and, where necessary, revised by RCVS committees in order to maintain currency and validity.

	VN Standard 1 The organisation	VN Standard 2 Sustainability	VN Standard 3 Qualification design and delivery	VN Standard 4 Qualification quality management	VN Standard 5 Assessment	VN Standard 6 Centre approval and quality assurance	VN Standard 7 Self evaluation and reporting	VS Standard 1 Organisation	VS Standard 2 Finances	VS Standard 3 Facilities and equipment	VS Standard 4 Animal resources	VS Standard 5 Information resources	VS Standard 6 Students	VS Standard 7 Admission and progression	VS Standard 8 Academic and support staff	VS Standard 9 Curriculum	VS Standard 10 Assessment	VS Standard 11 Research programmes, continuing and higher degree education	VS Standard 12 Outcomes assessment	
Part 1 of the ESG																				
1.1 Policy for quality assurance			x	x	x	x		x			x						x	x	x	x
1.2 Design and approval of programmes			x	x	x	x				x							x	x		x
1.3 Student centred learning, teaching and assessment			x		x						x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification			x	x	x										x			x		
1.5 Teaching staff				x	x											x	x		x	
1.6 Learning resources and student support			x		x	x				x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	
1.7 Information management								x												x
1.8 Public information				x											x				x	
1.9 On-going mentoring and periodic review of programmes *								x								x		x	x	x
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance**				x																x

**Figure 10.1.a: Mapping matrix of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse standards to part 1 of the ESG**

\*The RCVS expects an evidence based decision making process in the development and review of every aspect of the qualifications. For instance, changes in the practical examinations for the end point assessment for veterinary nurses must be subject to an agreed validity and reliability model such as Angoff (pass mark setting).

\*\*Veterinary nurse standard 4(a) states that awarding organisations and higher education institutions must be compliant with all criteria stipulated by their accrediting national regulatory authority. This includes cyclical external quality assurance. The veterinary surgeon accreditation process ("RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees", Chapter 3) states that "a full site visit will be undertaken approximately every seven years. RCVS may elect to undertake a full visit on a shorter timescale if significant changes are identified by annual monitoring reports, or if any new risks come to light during the normal cycle.



## 10.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

### Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

### Guidelines:

In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders.

The aims, objectives and implementation of the process will

- bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions;
- take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality;
- allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement;
- result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.

The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.

### How we meet this standard

145. As the sole accreditation agency for veterinary degrees in the UK, RCVS has full statutory authority under the Veterinary Surgeons Act to set standards and operate the accreditation process. RCVS has developed its standards for the accreditation of veterinary education over a number of years and these have been periodically reviewed and revised internally through an established committee process involving elected vets and veterinary nurses who are key stakeholders in the professions. The most recent revision of veterinary surgeon standards was completed in May 2016, and veterinary nursing standards in November 2016. This process ensures that our quality assurance activities remain current and fit for purpose.

146. Revisions of the veterinary surgeon standards are discussed with the Veterinary Schools Council (VSC)<sup>43</sup>, which comprises the heads of all UK veterinary schools. This provides the VSC with the opportunity to contribute to the design and improvement of RCVS standards, and ensures that the aims of RCVS accreditation remain clear and coherent for all parties involved in the process.

147. Moreover, through collaboration with other accrediting agencies around the world (EAEVE, AVBC, AVMA, SAVC<sup>44</sup>), and through participation in the International Accreditors Working Group (IAWG) meetings, RCVS accreditation standards are continually reviewed and improved to ensure comparable international standards for veterinary education.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.vetschoolscouncil.ac.uk/>

<sup>44</sup> European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education, Australasian Veterinary Boards Council, American Veterinary Medical Association, American Veterinary Medical Association, South African Veterinary Council

148. Both veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse educational institutions, as well as the visiting experts attending accreditation visitations, have the opportunity to influence RCVS standards on accreditation and accreditation processes through feedback forms distributed after the visitation process. This feedback is considered internally for any amendments which would strengthen or clarify either the standards of accreditation used by RCVS or the way in which it conducts visitations.
149. UK veterinary schools often seek overseas accreditation, so that their graduates may register and work around the world, which means that they are subject to visitations by multiple accrediting bodies. By working to international standards, and conducting joint visitations with other international accreditors, RCVS minimises the time, cost and burden of these visits on the universities. International visitors and observers are included in visitation teams, and then report back to their own agencies.
150. When taking into account the workload that visitations place upon the universities, RCVS asks that the Self Evaluation Report (SER) from the veterinary surgeon institution be between 50 and 60 pages.
151. For veterinary nursing institution accreditation, the application for accreditation stipulates the required documents, which gives the institution a prescriptive framework within which to work. This ensures that the schools are focussed in the information that they provide, and that construction of the report does not become unduly onerous and unmanageable.
152. The RCVS process of reporting on visitations ensures that institutions are supported to improve quality. As well as commenting on the findings presented in the SER, visitors to veterinary surgeon institutions provide a series of commendations, recommendations and suggestions, all aimed at assisting the schools in meeting the published standards of accreditation.
153. For veterinary nursing institutions, universities are provided with areas of good practice, areas for improvement and actions required.
154. All of the above are clearly set out for the institution and published in the visitation report so that all parties are clear on the outcomes of the visitation, as well as what needs to happen next.

155. There is a formal two month consultation period during the committee process (as laid out in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, Section 5, (4) (b)), during which time the University has an opportunity to comment and reflect on how they intend to meet the recommendations and suggestions and provide a formal response, which is considered by RCVS committees as part of the accreditation process. Veterinary schools are also encouraged to show continued improvement through their annual monitoring reports.
156. Veterinary nursing accreditation activities combine with the University's QAA validation events, to reduce the need for separate meetings and document review.
157. If a university is developing a new veterinary nursing degree or making significant changes to an existing programme, its internal quality assurance processes will require the proposals to be 'validated' internally. For a license to practise qualification, RCVS must be represented at the validation meeting. Prior to attendance at the validation meeting, the RCVS will receive an application form and evidence from the University showing how and where the University and its veterinary nurse programme meet RCVS requirements. It is usual

for universities to make it a condition of their own validation process that any new or amended programme receives RCVS accreditation.

158. In the veterinary nursing accreditation report, a comment is made next to each subsection of every standard as set out in the veterinary nurse accreditation standards, and areas for action are identified at the front of the report based on the findings before and during the accreditation visit. Once this report is finalised, it is sent to the institution to check for factual accuracy and to agree the timeline for compliance with the actions identified (where applicable). The evidence is submitted, and a confirmation letter is sent to the institution to confirm this. The findings are then presented to the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee, which decides whether to grant or withhold provisional or continued accreditation.

## 10.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

### Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

### Guidelines:

External quality assurance carried out professionally, consistently and transparently ensures its acceptance and impact.

Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence. The written documentation is normally complemented by interviews with stakeholders during a site visit. The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report (cf. Standard 2.5) written by a group of external experts (cf. Standard 2.4).

External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.

### How we meet this standard

159. Accreditation standards for both veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse degrees have been developed over a number of years and are available in the public domain on the RCVS website. Both accreditation standards have common themes, however, veterinary nursing degrees are mostly delivered through a devolved system of further education colleges and training practices which necessitates further layers of standard setting in addition to the primary Awarding Organisation and Higher Education Standards. These can be found in the centre and training practice standards section in the "Awarding Organisation and Higher Education Institution Handbook"<sup>45</sup>. "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees" can be found on the website.<sup>46</sup>

### Veterinary surgeon programmes

160. National legal recognition of a professional veterinary degree course from a UK university is officially given by the UK's Privy Council which grants a Recognition Order for the degree. This is done after consultation with the Council of the RCVS, which has delegated authority to its Education Committee, which is in turn advised by the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee and a panel of visitors.

161. Expert visitors to veterinary schools are chosen from the RCVS list of visitors, which is made up of academics and practitioners who have at least seven years' professional experience (not applicable to the student visitor), together with good knowledge and experience of

45 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/awarding-organisation-and-higher-education-institution-handbook/>

46 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/rcvs-accreditation-standards/>

current national veterinary standards in at least one of the following subject areas:

- veterinary basic sciences
- paraclinical and clinical sciences
- public health and food hygiene
- large and small animal clinical studies and professional knowledge

162. The basis on which the veterinary surgeon degree accreditation takes place is the institution's Self Evaluation Report (SER). This report must be submitted to RCVS at least two months before the start of the visit, for review by the RCVS visitors. In addition to providing a concise summary of any major changes since the previous RCVS visit, the report must cover the following subjects:

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Standard 1 – Organisation
- Standard 2 – Finances
- Standard 3 – Facilities and equipment
- Standard 4 – Animal resources
- Standard 5 – Information resources
- Standard 6 – Students
- Standard 7 – Admission and progression
- Standard 8 – Academic and support staff
- Standard 9 – Curriculum
- Standard 10 – Assessment
- Standard 11 – Research programmes, continuing and higher degree education
- Standard 12 – Outcomes assessment

163. A requirement within the veterinary surgeon accreditation standards states that during the RCVS site visit, a meeting room is identified to serve as the base room for the visitors during the site visit. It is a requirement that the room is lockable and that it allows the visitors sufficient privacy to hold confidential meetings if required. A range of background documentation needs to be made available for the visitors to look through during the visitation, and should include:

- student handbooks
- examples of extramural study (EMS) reports (both pre-clinical and clinical)
- any memoranda of understanding and contracts or governance documents relating to external teaching practices/distributed training sites
- school and hospital budgets and profit and loss statements as provided to the university
- strategic and business/operating plans
- reports of relevant internal and any external reviews
- detailed outcomes assessment reports, including data on student achievement of Day One skills and competences as recorded in the student experience log or other portfolio
- external examiner reports
- examination question papers, examination scripts, at different grading levels, course work and examiners reports and assessment summaries
- details of the composition, terms of reference, powers, reporting relationships, representation of relevant groups for all committees and delegated authorities relating to the veterinary programme
- CPD records for all Members/Fellows of the RCVS and all veterinary nursing staff.

164. A sample RCVS visitation timetable is given in Annex 9 of the veterinary surgeon accreditation standards<sup>47</sup>. Veterinary surgeon institutions being visited are free to alter the timetable to suit their staff or students' availability, however a typical visit must include the following:

- meetings with the school's senior team, other members of teaching staff, support staff (administrative, technical and nursing), undergraduate students, postgraduate students, interns, residents, research staff, alumni and extramural studies (EMS) providers
- meetings which address each of the RCVS veterinary surgeon standards, listed above
- tours of all teaching facilities used by students, including lecture theatres, seminar rooms, laboratories, clinical skills labs, hospitals and teaching practices, farms and abattoirs

- time to visit any off-campus facilities used as part of the core curriculum
- meetings with students, usually held informally over lunches without staff present
- confidential one-to-one meetings with any students of staff who want to meet the RCVS visitors privately
- time to consider supporting paperwork provided by the university during the RCVS visitation
- time for the RCVS visitors to re-visit any facilities of their choosing, and/or to speak further to particular members of staff, to follow up on points discussed previously
- free time for the visitors to meet in private and write their visitation report
- a meeting on the final day of the visitation with the Vice Chancellor of the University (or his/her chosen representative) and the head of the veterinary school for the RCVS visitors to provide brief feedback about the visitors' findings.

165. Each visitor is responsible for the detailed scrutiny of their subject area of expertise, and also, working with another team member, will act as primary or secondary rapporteur for one or more of the accreditation standards. All visitors must contribute to scrutiny of all standards, but the allocation of primary and secondary rapporteurs during the visit ensures that all standards are subject to detailed scrutiny and reporting. At the conclusion of the visit, all team members vote on the university's compliance with each standard before the draft report is finalised, ensuring a consensus across the team, and removing the risk that any single team member's special interests might predominate. A detailed rubric is provided for this purpose ensuring consistent and transparent decision making.

166. By the end of the RCVS site visit, all commentary and any proposed commendations, recommendations or suggestions must have been agreed by all visitors. If any non-typographical adjustments are required after the conclusion of the visit, these would be circulated to all team members for agreement by the RCVS education

department.

167. Each veterinary surgeon accreditation standard is evaluated in a section of the report and each section may include a list of recommendations. The report indicates ways in which the school complies, substantially complies or does not comply with the standard's requirements. Recommendations are written to specify clearly the actions that need to be taken by the university, and to include sufficient information to be helpful to visitors and future university personnel on subsequent site visits.

168. The draft report is forwarded to the veterinary school for comment on its factual accuracy before the report and associated recommendations are considered by RCVS's Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee, which will confirm or amend any recommendations contained in the report. Conflicts of interest are minimised during the committee process, as each committee is made up of different members.

169. At this stage, the report is sent to the Vice Chancellor/ Principal of the university for a two month period of consideration where they may "make observations on or objections to the report"<sup>48</sup> to RCVS. The university is invited to comment to RCVS on its response to any recommendations in the report.

170. The report and the university's comments are considered again by RCVS's Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee, which then makes a recommendation on accreditation status to RCVS's Education Committee, having taken the university's response into account. Options for decision on accreditation of veterinary surgeon degrees are as follows:

- a) Accreditation for seven years subject to the usual periodic (annual) reports. If periodic reports are satisfactory, re-accreditation will be subject to a visitation in the seventh year.
- b) Accreditation for a shorter period if significant deficiencies are identified: accreditation will be subject

<sup>48</sup> Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 5.4(b)

- to the deficiencies being addressed within a specified period and subject to satisfactory periodic reports. The RCVS will normally undertake a re-visit before the accreditation period expires to monitor progress in addressing any identified concerns. This may be a full re-visit covering all the standards (normally held over one week) or a more focussed re-visit that concentrates on progress with addressing specific deficiencies (which would normally be held over one or two days). Consideration of a shorter period of accreditation subject to conditions will apply where there are either a) one or more major deficiencies, or b) a series of lesser deficiencies which, taken together, could have a significant impact on students' education, but which are deemed to be rectifiable within a given period of time.
- c) Accreditation may be denied. This category applies exceptionally where the RCVS considers that the deficiencies are so serious that they are unlikely to be rectifiable within a reasonable period of time. It is, in effect, a final warning to a school that if urgent action is not taken RCVS will move to terminal accreditation.
  - d) Terminal accreditation may apply if the school is unable to meet RCVS's standards, and/or if a school voluntarily closes. For previously accredited UK veterinary schools where accreditation is denied by RCVS, the final decision to revoke or suspend their Recognition Order would be made by the Privy Council (see below). The procedures for terminal accreditation must be followed by the veterinary school. For non-UK schools, if accreditation is denied for a programme that was previously accredited, the school may be placed on "terminal accreditation" and it will be the responsibility of the school to present an immediate plan to RCVS for approval showing how the deficiencies will be addressed to allow adequate progress of the existing students to meet RCVS Day One Competences.
  - e) Accreditation is denied. This option would be relevant where neither 'Accreditation may be denied' nor 'Terminal accreditation' would be applicable. It applies when RCVS considers that the deficiencies are sufficiently serious that the school should not receive accreditation. The

veterinary school would be able to request a re-visit once it had addressed the deficiencies identified.

- 171. Unless otherwise stated, recommendations within the visit report must be achieved by the time of the next RCVS visitation, and progress in meeting the stated recommendations must be given in the annual monitoring report, which is considered by the RCVS's Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee.
- 172. RCVS visitation reports, along with the accreditation status for each university, are published on the RCVS website.<sup>49</sup>
- 173. Any UK university that is considering offering a new professional veterinary degree and applying to the Privy Council for a Recognition Order must liaise with RCVS concerning its plans for the course at an early stage. Draft curriculum and assessment plans must be submitted together with a timeline for implementation, plans for facilities, staffing and an indication of the intended student numbers.
- 174. RCVS will provide feedback to the university on the draft programme, in terms of whether it appears to meet the current RCVS standards and policies. Any obvious gaps will be identified, but it will be for the university to determine how such gaps might be rectified. RCVS can provide advice on its standards and accreditation processes, but does not offer any form of provisional approval at this stage, as it is not within its power to do so. Recognition, if granted, comes from the UK's Privy Council, on advice from RCVS following a full accreditation site visit.
- 175. RCVS will make arrangements for one or more full or short visits to evaluate the programme and will discuss options for examinations with the university. Depending on its evaluation of the curriculum and assessment arrangements, RCVS may decide either to set a separate qualifying examination for final year students

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/accrediting-primary-qualifications/accrediting-veterinary-degrees/visitations/>

or, alternatively, may make arrangements for the joint examination of students with the university through the appointment of RCVS External Examiners.

176. If it is agreed to appoint RCVS External Examiners and run a joint qualifying examination, the university will need to agree that the RCVS appointed External Examiners will have the final decision-making power over the eventual pass list, so that the examination may count as the RCVS qualifying examination for profession registration purposes.
177. Having consulted on the draft curriculum and delivery plans before the first student intake has started the programme, RCVS will aim to undertake its first full site visit when the programme has reached its third year in order to make an assessment of how the plans are working, and to evaluate the progress of the new school towards achieving the RCVS standards. A further full site visit will be undertaken during the programme's fifth year of operation, in order to make a recommendation to the Privy Council on recognition. Additional visits may be undertaken in the meantime by one or more RCVS visitors to observe examinations and other assessments. Before each site visit, the school will need to submit a self-evaluation report.
178. Graduates of UK university schools are not automatically entitled to RCVS membership until the degree has received the Recognition Order from the Privy Council, and this may take a number of months even after a positive recommendation from RCVS. In the absence of a Recognition Order, graduates will be able to register and practise in the UK only if they pass the RCVS qualifying examination (or joint examination overseen by RCVS External Examiners as described above). The university must ensure that students applying to join the course understand the status of the degree and that, whilst there is a route to registration for them, there is no automatic entitlement.
179. RCVS has also recently introduced a facility to offer consultative visits. This process is of an advisory nature

and whilst it does not lead to an accreditation decision, it is appropriately linked to the accreditation process to ensure consistency. For the full process, please see page 31 of the "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees"<sup>50</sup>.

### Veterinary nurse programmes

180. RCVS's principal aim in setting accreditation standards and evaluating universities against them is to ensure that the awarding bodies/higher education institutions meet a set of common standards. It also ensures a consistency in the approach visitors and reviewers take when processing accreditations for different institutions.
181. To be accredited by the RCVS, the university and its qualification, must meet all the standards set out below including:
- ensuring that students meet the RCVS Day One Competences for Veterinary Nurses and RCVS Day One Skills for Veterinary Nurses.
  - providing adequate access to placements (or employment) for all students in a veterinary nurse training practice for the purposes of clinical training and assessment.
  - complying with other policies published by the RCVS from time to time relating to veterinary nurse education, and of enrolled student veterinary nurses. Any UK awarding body or higher education institution that is considering offering a veterinary nursing licence to practise qualification must liaise with RCVS concerning its plans for the qualification at an early stage. The RCVS will make arrangements for one or more meetings to discuss the design, development, assessment and quality assurance of the qualification. Accreditation of veterinary nursing qualifications is officially given by Veterinary Nurses Council via the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee.
182. Veterinary nurse accreditation visits are based on an application for accreditation (which is comparable to the self-evaluation report required on veterinary surgeon

50 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/rcvs-accreditation-standards/>



accreditation visits), produced by the institution being visited against RCVS standards which comprise:

- Standard 1 – The organisation
- Standard 2 - Finance and Sustainability
- Standard 3 - Qualification design and delivery
- Standard 4 - Qualification quality management
- Standard 5 – Assessment
- Standard 6 - Centre Approval and Quality Assurance
- Standard 7 - Self-evaluation and reporting

183. Any university that is considering offering a veterinary nursing qualification must liaise with the RCVS at least one year before the first cohort are enrolled for the qualification. Draft plans for the design, delivery, assessment and quality assurance must be submitted together with a timeline for implementation. Plans for facilities, staffing and an indication of the intended student numbers along with evidence of the market research must be provided. RCVS will provide feedback on the draft programme, in terms of whether it appears to meet the current RCVS standards, policies and procedures. Any obvious gaps will be identified, but it will be for the university to determine how such gaps might be rectified. RCVS can provide advice on its standards, policies and procedures, but does not offer any form of accreditation at this stage.

184. Once the application is accepted in principle, RCVS will confirm that the timetable/timeline for accreditation is appropriate and that there is sufficient time for the RCVS Veterinary Nurse Education Committee to consider the final report before the recruitment of the first cohort. Accreditation of new qualifications leading to a license to practise comprises two elements:

- a) approval of the Higher Education Institution
- b) approval of the proposed qualification and the systems for qualification delivery and associated quality assurance.

185. The completed application must be received at least one month before the accreditation meeting or validation event. Visits will normally be conducted

by one or more members of RCVS staff, who will be accompanied by visitors appointed by Veterinary Nurse Education Committee. On receipt of the completed application, arrangements will be made for one or more visits to include inspection of the University and its approved centres. The RCVS must also attend the university validation event(s) in relation to a veterinary nursing qualification. They must be represented on the validation panel, as no qualification may be approved as a veterinary nursing licence to practise qualification otherwise.

186. The RCVS will contact the university beforehand to arrange a visit plan. This will identify areas in the application where additional information is required and will identify the personnel to be available during the visit. Universities should ensure that access is easily available to all documentation and records relating to the delivery, assessment and quality assurance of the qualification. In order to ensure that all aspects of a qualification can be delivered to an acceptable standard, RCVS stipulates a minimum level of required facilities and resources to be provided by centres. Universities must ensure that centres/delivery sites approved by them fully meet the RCVS Centre Approval Standards (Annex 2 of the "Awarding Organisation and Higher Education Institution Handbook"<sup>51</sup>) and are subjected to annual quality monitoring.

187. Within a month of a visit, a draft report is prepared by the RCVS visitors. Each standard will be evaluated in a section of the report. The report indicates ways in which the university complies or does not comply with the accreditation standards. Recommendations are written with enough information to be helpful to visitors on subsequent visits, as well as the university. A timeline for actions to be completed is agreed between the RCVS and the university, and once satisfactorily completed, a formal letter is written to the university to detail acceptance of the evidence supplied. The findings are presented to the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee,

51 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/awarding-organisation-and-higher-education-institution-handbook/>

and an agreement can be made to grant provisional accreditation, or a continuation of full accreditation for the university, depending on its status. The university is informed of the Committee's decision via formal letter.

188. RCVS will undertake regular quality monitoring activities. Accreditation reports will be published on the RCVS website and copies provided to QAA from January 2018. Once the first cohort of students is nearing completion of a new qualification, RCVS will consider an application for full accreditation. If full accreditation is granted, holders of the qualification will be able to apply to enter the RCVS register of veterinary nurses without further assessment. If the programme is deficient and continues to be provisionally approved, or, in serious cases of non-compliance, terminally approved, holders of the qualification must pass the RCVS pre-registration examination before applying to enter the RCVS register of veterinary nurses.

189. Once a certificate is issued confirming accreditation, memoranda of understandings are drawn up between the RCVS and the university and the RCVS and each centre approved by the university to deliver the qualification. Examples of the Memorandum of Understanding are located in Annex 4 of the "Awarding Organisation and Higher Education Institution Handbook".

190. Options for decisions on accreditation of veterinary nursing qualifications (subject to annual quality monitoring) are as follows:

- a) Full accreditation for 5 years is given to qualifications that meet, or exceed, all of the accreditation standards.
- b) Full accreditation for a shorter period if significant deficiencies are identified in an existing programme: accreditation will be subject to the deficiencies being addressed within a specific period. The RCVS will normally undertake a full programme review before the end of the accreditation.
- c) Provisional accreditation new qualifications that have

made substantial progress towards meeting the accreditation standards. Once the first cohort of students completes the qualification, a provisionally accredited University may apply to the RCVS for full accreditation. Students undertaking provisionally accredited qualifications will be required to pass the RCVS pre-registration examination. Provisional accreditation will not normally exceed five years.

- d) Accreditation denied where the RCVS considers that the deficiencies are so serious that they are unlikely to be rectifiable within a reasonable period of time.
- e) Terminal accreditation may apply if the University is unable to meet RCVS's standards, or if they voluntarily close. The procedures for terminal accreditation must be followed.

191. RCVS requires all veterinary nurse higher education institutions to provide an annual self-monitoring report (SER) annually. This must contain the following:

- list of all Centres and delivery sites where the qualification is being delivered;
- details of all non-compliances against the RCVS Standards for the Approval of Centres;
- provide detailed information about the recruitment, retention and outcomes of students both currently and in comparison with the previous three years. This information should be given as an overview and for individual centres/delivery sites.
- a template for the report is available in Annex 4

192. Proposed changes to any aspect of the qualification including changes to units/modules, assessment and key staff must be notified in writing to RCVS. Any changes are approved by the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee. Accreditation is normally for a period of five years. During this time the RCVS will undertake monitoring activity to include:

- visits to centres;<sup>52</sup>
- visits to training practices;
- observation and audit of examinations and assessments;
- audits of the institutions systems;

<sup>52</sup> Centres are delivery sites of veterinary nurse training, usually a further education college or university.

- telephone and face to face interviews with students.

193. Visits may be more frequent during the early establishment of a programme in order to ensure that the professional requirements of veterinary nurse training, including the quality of clinical training, placement and assessment, are adequately addressed. RCVS will inform universities, centres and training practices of an impending visit with a minimum of four weeks' notice. In some instances the RCVS may request centre personnel to be present during a training practice visit. A plan detailing the documents and information required during the visit is sent at least two weeks in advance of the visit date. Verbal feedback is given at the end of the visit and all reports are sent to the university directly.

194. Where RCVS has reason to believe that a centre continually does not meet RCVS centre approval standards and the university is not managing this adequately, RCVS reserves the right to cease enrolling a new cohort<sup>53</sup> until such time that we are satisfied that all non-compliances have been addressed. The quality monitoring activity of the university will increase. The university will be given 21 days to comment on the accuracy of the report. Final reports are presented to the RCVS Veterinary Nurse Education Committee, where actions and risk of the institution are agreed, and subsequent management of it discussed. The results are published online and sent to QAA.

195. Where the RCVS, deems, on the basis of quality monitoring, that there may be cause for concern it will consider:

- a) the revocation of accreditation;
- b) the imposition of new or additional conditions on an existing accreditation; or
- c) a reduction in the current period of accreditation.

196. The following procedures will then apply:

- a) the RCVS informs the higher education institution of its concerns, the grounds on which they are based and if

necessary requests a meeting with the senior team. If it is felt that the conditions on the accreditation are being met or likely to be met in the near future the RCVS may affirm the accreditation for a specific period subject to satisfactory evidence being provided.

- b) in the event that the conditions on the accreditation are not being met and are unlikely to be met in the near future the RCVS may:
  - place further conditions on the accreditation. RCVS could specify actions to be taken or issues to be addressed by the higher education institution and/or further restrict the period of accreditation. An organisation with such conditions on its accreditation may apply for reinstatement of its full accreditation at any time subject to the normal procedures for review of accreditations; or
  - withdraw accreditation from the higher education if it considers that the organisation is unable to meet RCVS standards, policies and procedures in a manner compatible with RCVS's requirements. The RCVS will inform QAA of its decision and students on the course may be required to undertake and pass the RCVS veterinary nurse pre-registration examination before applying to enter the RCVS register for veterinary nurses.

197. Following each quality monitoring activity RCVS will complete a risk assessment. The risk assessment uses a risk management strategy to determine the likelihood that the university will not meet the accreditation standards and the impact this will have. Each accreditation standard is given a score based on the information gathered during quality monitoring activity. The results of the risk assessment are used to determine future quality monitoring activity.

<sup>53</sup> Students are enrolled with the awarding institution and with the RCVS. Enrolment with the RCVS enables students to legally train and student veterinary nurses.

## 10.4 ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

### Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

### Guidelines:

At the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.

In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts, they

- are carefully selected;
- have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing.

The agency ensures the independence of the experts by implementing a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.

The involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.

### How we meet this standard

198. Accreditation visits for both veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing degrees are undertaken by expert teams with clear criteria for appointment, training, and policies for managing conflict of interest. The veterinary degree is a Level 7/Masters level qualification (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications – England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or equivalent in other nations and encompasses a broad range of basic science, para-clinical and clinical subjects and prepares graduates for a wide range of potential post graduate careers. In contrast, the veterinary nursing degree is at level 6 and is more narrowly focussed, hence the veterinary nurse visiting team is smaller.

199. There is a 'no conflict of interest' policy for the appointment of all visitors. Visitors must declare:

- recent collaborative research, teaching or service interests with a key administrator or faculty members of the university

being visited;

- having been employed by, or having recently applied for employment with the university being visited;
- having provided consultancy advice on accreditation matters for the university being visited – either voluntarily or for a fee;
- having published statements or opinion which could be perceived as evidence of bias;
- having a close family relationship with a key member of the university being visited;
- having a financial or other personal interest in the outcome of the visitation.

200. The conflict of interest policy for veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse visitors can be found in Annex 7 of the "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees"<sup>54</sup>, and Annex 6 of the "Awarding Organisation and Higher Education Institution Handbook"<sup>55</sup>.

54 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/rcvs-accreditation-standards/>

201. RCVS offers training days to all members of the site visit team, including new visitors and observers. These one day events usually take place around a month before the site visit and use the institution's self-evaluation report as the basis for teaching about the standards and procedures of a visitation. This day also gives experienced visitors a chance to refresh their knowledge about how the visitation process works, as well as drawing out queries and questions about the self-evaluation report that the team will want to explore during the visitation. No new team member can attend as a visitor unless they have attended a training session or a briefing meeting prior to the visit. New members of a visit team must also normally have attended a visit as an Observer to gain experience before being appointed as a full member.

#### **Veterinary nurse visitor panel**

202. The RCVS implements a selection process for the appointment of a veterinary nurse visitor panel. Each team must include:
- at least one member of the Senior RCVS Veterinary Nursing team
  - a visitor selected from a voluntary pool of experts (CVs and CPD reviewed by the RCVS and Veterinary Nurse Education Committee)
  - a student representative (a volunteer from any of the UK Universities, registered with the RCVS, who must be one year pre or up to two years post-graduation)
203. There may also be observing visitors in attendance for the purpose of training. The appointment of an observer is reviewed by Veterinary Nurses Education Committee prior to commencement of training. New appointments to the RCVS list of visitors are normally expected to have first taken part as an "observer in training" on a site visit before being appointed as a full visitor on a team. Observers are present throughout the entire visitation, meetings and discussions within the team, but do not have any reporting responsibilities.
204. Veterinary Nurse accreditation reports are produced by the

senior RCVS Veterinary Nursing team member. The other members of the visitation team contribute to the drafting of the report, collaborating on their areas of responsibility or expertise.

205. To join the list of veterinary nurse visitors, applicants must submit evidence of current veterinary nurse education experience, together with a skills assessment and records of appropriate CPD activity. Applications are only accepted from fully qualified RCVS registered veterinary nurses and veterinary surgeons (RVNs and MsRCVS) who have experience of five years or more in the higher education sector. Visitors will also need to have good knowledge and experience of current delivery of RCVS Higher Education Standards in the sector.

206. A visitor's role is to work as a member of a team of experts to review and make recommendations to the RCVS on the standard of higher education institute provision, following agreed RCVS Awarding Organisation/Higher Education Institute, Centre and Training Practice Standards.

#### **Veterinary surgeon visitor panel**

207. RCVS maintains a list of veterinary surgeons who have applied and been accepted to act as visitors on accreditation visits. It is from this panel of experts that the visiting teams are chosen. The application process for joining this panel is that the veterinary surgeon submits a covering letter explaining how they meet the criteria (see Annex 6 – RCVS visitors "person specification" page 131 of "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees"<sup>55</sup>) and which subject area they feel they can best contribute to, along with a current curriculum vitae. The Chairs of both the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee and the Education Committee then consider and either approve or decline this application.
208. The requirements and procedures for appointing people to the visiting teams, including a "person specification" for visitors, are set out in Chapter 5 and Annex 6 of the "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of

55 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/awarding-organisation-and-higher-education-institution-handbook/>  
56 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/rcvs-accreditation-standards/>

veterinary degrees", (pages 38 and 131). Appointments are reviewed by the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee and Education Committee.

209. The team of experts must comprise individuals with expertise in veterinary basic sciences, animal production, veterinary public health and food hygiene, and clinical studies. At least one of the clinical visitors must be a veterinary practitioner. Visitors must hold a degree that is registerable with RCVS (except for visitors in basic sciences who must hold a PhD in their subject) or be a currently licensed veterinarian in good standing in another jurisdiction acceptable to RCVS.
210. The visitation team comprises a "chair" of the visitors, who is responsible for leading the team during the visitation, visitors with the mix of expertise defined above, a student representative and where appropriate, one or more observers. Visitors are responsible for writing the report, with each visitor assigned areas of responsibility relating to one or more of the Standards. Visitors act as either primary or secondary reporters on the Standards assigned so that the report is the culmination of more than one individuals findings. The student representative will normally contribute to the reporting on Standard 6 – Students, on matters relating to student welfare. Towards the end of the visitation, all visitors will have the opportunity to input to the full report across all Standards. Observers have no reporting responsibilities, as they are there either for training purposes or to oversee the visitation process. The chair has final authority on the content of the report. RCVS staff act as secretary to the visitation team, coordinating the reporting process and compiling the report as chapters are completed.
211. Visitors must be able to interpret and identify significant issues from a large amount of complex data, have good problem solving abilities and good English writing skills. A number of other interpersonal skills and other desirable characteristics are also set out in the "person specification".
212. Visitation teams will include a student visitor (minimum -1 year & maximum +2 year graduate veterinary student). The student will be nominated through the visitation team or through the Association of Veterinary Students (AVS)<sup>57</sup>. Usual conflict of interest policies will apply and the student must not have a connection with the institution being visited.
213. Newly-appointed visitors are normally expected to have first taken part as an "observer in training" on a site visit before joining a team as a full visitor. Observers are present throughout the entire visitation but do not have any reporting responsibilities or voting rights.
213. If a new visitor on a team has not been able to attend a previous visit as an observer, they will nevertheless have received training/briefing, and RCVS ensures that the composition of any given site team includes a number of experienced visitors so that no team is made up of a majority of "new" visitors.
214. If a new visitor on a team has not been able to attend a previous visit as an observer, they will nevertheless have received training/briefing, and RCVS ensures that the composition of any given site team includes a number of experienced visitors so that no team is made up of a majority of "new" visitors.
215. A briefing meeting is held with the whole visitation team on the day before the site visit begins at the university. Additional briefing is available to all site team members at any stage, on an individual basis, with RCVS staff.
216. Through the collaborative work that RCVS undertakes with other accrediting agencies, experienced international visitors are almost always a part of a typical visitation team. Joint visitations to UK veterinary schools often include representatives from other European countries, a representative from Australia and New Zealand, USA and Canada and South Africa, usually as full visitors. International visitors will have gone through the application and appointment processes of the accrediting body in their own jurisdictions. Site visit teams also include a student visitor (or recent graduate up to two years post-graduation, so that they are still sufficiently close to the student experience).
217. Group teleconference briefing meetings are held a few weeks in advance of joint international visits to give the team an opportunity to meet and discuss initial impressions of the self-evaluation report from the university being visited. International team members of visit teams will have normally benefited from visitor training provided by their country's accrediting agency.

57 <http://www.avsukireland.co.uk/>

## 10.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

### Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

### Guidelines:

External quality assurance and in particular its outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated and judged.

In the interests of equity and reliability, outcomes of external quality assurance are based on pre-defined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based. Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgements or formal decisions

### How we meet this standard

218. Both veterinary surgery and veterinary nursing degrees are accredited against published standards that can be found on the website.<sup>58</sup>

### Veterinary nurse degree criteria for outcomes

219. The veterinary nurse "Awarding Organisation/Higher Education Institution Handbook" contains the standards the university must adhere to, and also includes standards for associated colleges and training practices. These standards are published on the RCVS website. Institutions must supply evidence that it meets these standards upon application for accreditation.

220. The outcomes of veterinary nurse accreditation activities follow published procedures, which ensure that each institution is treated in a consistent manner. RCVS offers visitor training to ensure consistency of judgement whilst on the accreditation visit and whilst compiling the visitation report. Reports are compiled using an evidence based approach.

221. Visitors on the site visit make a judgement based on their

findings, and present those findings to Veterinary Nurses Education Committee, together with a completed risk assessment of the programme under consideration. The committee then makes a decision on the accreditation status of the degree based on all the evidence supplied.

222. For both the accreditation report and accompanying letter, a deadline date is set and installed into the RCVS Veterinary Nursing department's actions calendar, which is monitored by an administrator. Findings are reported to Veterinary Nurse Education Committee, which meets three times a year. The final decision of accreditation status rests with this committee.

223. Details of all RCVS committees are published online as well as the minutes of Veterinary Nurse Education Committee via the Veterinary Nurse Council meetings minutes.

### Veterinary surgeon degree criteria for outcomes

224. Accreditation decisions on veterinary degree courses are based on explicit and published criteria. Within the "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/accrediting-primary-qualifications/>

of veterinary degrees”, which are published on the RCVS website, there are clearly defined categories of accreditation against which institutions are judged. These categories give guidance about the status being awarded and any possible ramifications that arise as a result.

225. Outcomes or judgements made against RCVS’s external quality assurance activities follow established procedures, which ensure that each institution is treated fairly and consistently. RCVS offers visitor training to all members of a visiting team so that there is consistency of judgement whilst on the accreditation visit and whilst compiling the visitation report. Reports are produced from visitor findings and are evidence based.

226. Members of Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee cannot serve on Education Committee at the same

time, in order to minimise conflicts of interest. The committee structure for decision-making ensures that there are layers of checks and balances to the reporting process as each committee reviews the visitation report independently.

227. Each stage of the accreditation process builds on the previous stage. Visitors on the site visit make a judgement based on their findings, the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee makes a recommendation on accreditation status based on the visit report, and the Education Committee makes the decision on accreditation taking all of the above into consideration.

228. All committees will look at accreditation decisions from previous visitations to ensure that procedures and standards are being applied consistently and fairly.



## 10.6 ESG Standard 2.6. Reporting

### Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

### Guidelines:

The report by the experts is the basis for the institution's follow-up action of the external evaluation and it provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution. In order for the reports to be used as the basis for action to be taken, it needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language to cover

- context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context);
- description of the individual procedure, including experts involved;
- evidence, analysis and findings;
- conclusions;
- features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution;
- recommendations for follow-up action.

The preparation of a summary report may be useful.

The factual accuracy of a report is improved if the institution is given the opportunity to point out errors of fact before the report is finalised.

### How we meet this standard

229. Examples of finalised visitation reports for veterinary surgery accreditation visits by RCVS can be found on the RCVS website<sup>59</sup>, with the most recent report being the "Liverpool Visitation Report 2016"<sup>60</sup>. Reports of veterinary nurse accreditation visits will also be published on the website from 2018.

230. For veterinary degree courses, RCVS publishes all of its visitation reports on the RCVS website, along with a summary of the accreditation status for all UK institutions that the RCVS visits<sup>61</sup>. For veterinary nursing degrees, visitation reports and a summary of the accreditation status for UK institutions will be published on the RCVS website

from January 2018. Minutes of Education Committee and Veterinary Nurses Council meetings are published on the RCVS website<sup>62</sup>, so that the decision making is transparent. RCVS is also subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and must release any further background documents on request. The ultimate check is that RCVS's decisions as a public body may be legally challenged through the process of Judicial Review. This system of checks and balances guards against any risk of inconsistency in decision making and ensures that our activities and accreditation decisions are open and transparent.

231. Visitation reports follow the same structure for each institution visited and are presented in a consistent

59 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/accrediting-primary-qualifications/accrediting-veterinary-degrees/visitations/>

60 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/liverpool-report-2016/>

61 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/accreditation-status-of-uk-veterinary-schools/>

62 <http://www.rcvs.org.uk/about-us/committees/education-committee/> & <http://www.rcvs.org.uk/about-us/vn-council/vn-council-meetings/>

manner; however the layout of the reports produced for veterinary surgeon visitations is different from those generated by veterinary nurse accreditation visits. Both reports include a summary of findings and comments, which analyse the information presented in the institution's self-evaluation report, and a list of actions or suggestions/recommendations that need to be fulfilled by the institution. Due to the differences between veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse standards, these are framed slightly differently under different headings; however the end result remains the same.

232. Both visitation reports highlight areas of good practice as it is important to reflect where an institution is doing things well.

233. It is accepted that visitation reports can be long documents, containing a lot of information. In order to be helpful to all parties, a summary of the visitors' commendations, recommendations and suggestions is given at the beginning of each veterinary surgeon visitation report so that the findings of the visitation can be seen at a glance. With veterinary nursing visitation reports, areas of good practice, areas for improvement and actions required are listed.

234. All visitation reports list the experts involved in both visiting the institutions, and in producing the report, along with their qualifications. Reports are edited by RCVS staff to achieve a consistent RCVS house style. Any such editing does not change the content of the report, merely

the style in which it is presented.

235. For both professions, the RCVS reporting process includes a stage of factual checking by the university. Once the report has been finalised by the visiting team, it is forwarded to the institution for a factual check, and once this has been completed and any factual changes made, the report is taken to RCVS committees for consideration.

236. For veterinary degrees, it is at this stage that the RCVS Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee reviews the report from the visitors. Most members of Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee will have had previous experience of visitations and are well briefed on the requirements. Consistency of decision making is overseen by an experienced chairman, together with RCVS staff.

237. The sub-committee will take into account the findings of the visitors, the commendations/suggestions/recommendations, and the completed rubric before deciding whether the report should stand as it is written, or that there should be changes or additions to the report. The latter could exceptionally occur if the sub-committee felt that there were inconsistencies between the findings of the visitation and the "suggestions" or "recommendations"<sup>63</sup> presented. If the sub-committee felt that the visitors had made a suggestion on a fairly serious issue, it could be upgraded to a recommendation and, conversely, if a recommendation had been made to address a very minor matter, it could be changed to a

<sup>63</sup> Recommendations are items that must be addressed whereas suggestions are for consideration.

- suggestion. This helps to ensure consistency of treatment across programmes/universities.
238. Following review by RCVS Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee, the report is then sent back to the University. The Veterinary Surgeons Act provides that the university must have two months after receiving the final visit report in which to submit its comments and response to RCVS (item 1, Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, Section 5, Supervisory functions of the Council). It is at this stage that the University can consider the recommendations and suggestions made by RCVS and respond with their plans to address them.
239. Once the University has submitted its response to RCVS, this is taken, together with the final visitation report, back through the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee for consideration. At this stage the sub-committee makes a recommendation on accreditation status, having taken everything into consideration, including the university's response to the recommendations and suggestions. The options open to the committee on accreditation of veterinary degrees have been explained in paragraph 170.
240. The full visitation report, University response and the recommendation on accreditation status from the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee is then sent to RCVS Education Committee for consideration, where the recommendation is either ratified or rejected. If rejected, Education Committee will agree a new accreditation status.
241. For veterinary nursing programmes the report is compiled and sent to the visiting team for its agreement on the accuracy of the content and the areas of good practice, areas requiring improvement and actions that must be completed in order to adhere to the accreditation standards. These are presented in an executive summary at the beginning of the report.
242. The report is sent to the University for factual checking and agreement of the actions required within four weeks of the accreditation event.
243. Once received, the agreed draft is presented to Veterinary Nurse Education Committee.
244. Where there are significant actions required, the University will be invited to complete an action plan detailing how they will be completed. This must include specific dates, together with the name of the responsible officer involved.
245. The action plan must be received one month following receipt of the report. Actions set will have variable timelines, depending on their nature. Once the institutions have completed the actions required, a risk assessment is compiled for the University. The report and any additional evidence are then presented to the Veterinary Nurses Education Committee for accreditation decision. The range of accreditation decisions (outcomes) for veterinary nursing qualifications are explained in paragraph 190.

## 10.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

### Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

### Guidelines:

In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes.

Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies, need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.

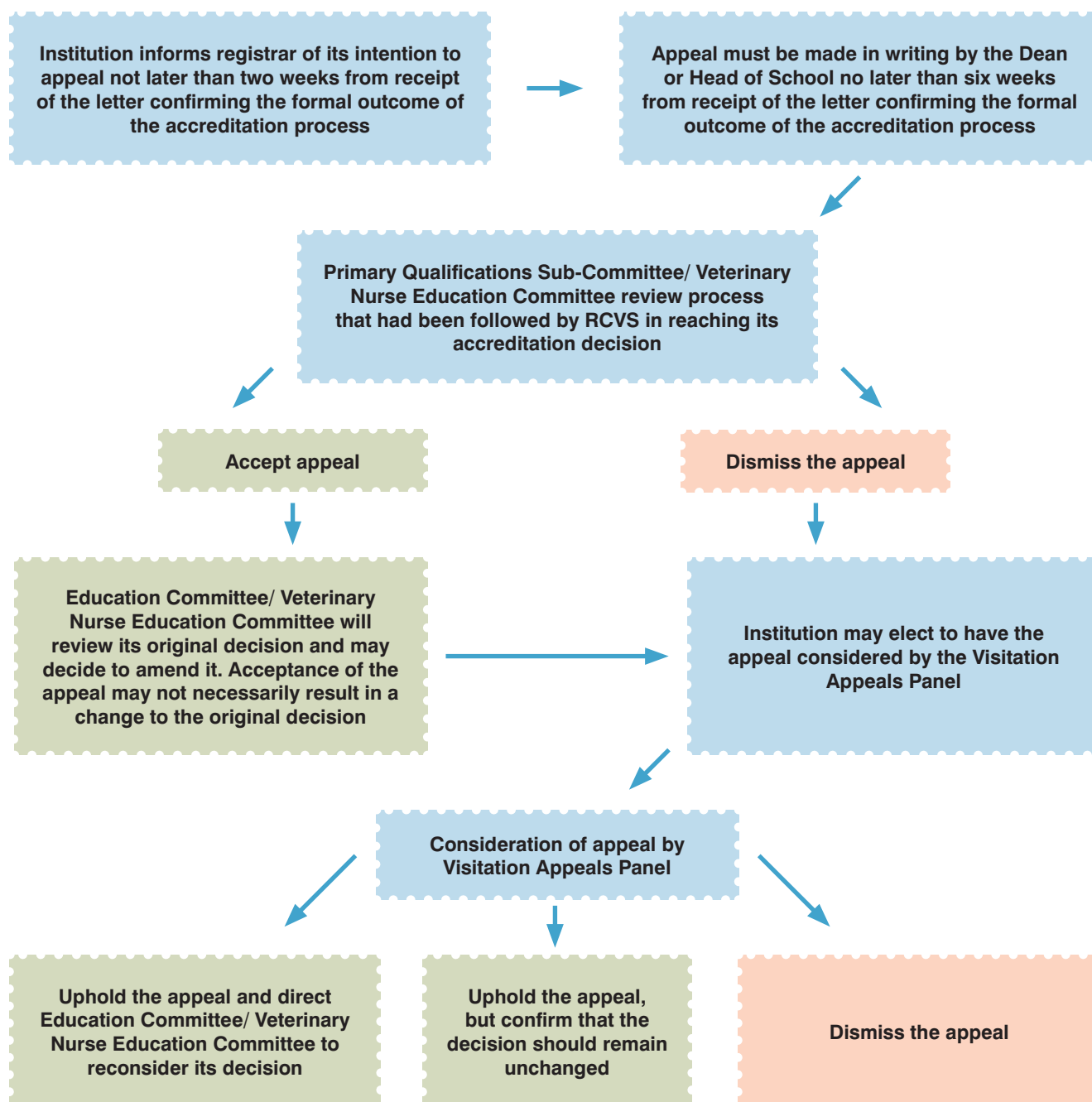
### How we meet this standard

246. Before a visitation takes place, the Head of Veterinary School or Head of Veterinary Nursing Centre being visited has the right to challenge the appointment of any member of the visiting team and ask RCVS to reconsider the appointment if they feel that any of the nominated visitors has a conflict of interest that cannot be managed during the visitation process.

247. Complaints can be received and dealt with at any stage of the process. They must be made in writing and will be dealt with in liaison with the Chairs of the relevant sub-committees or committees, whichever is appropriate depending on the nature of the complaint.

248. Both professions follow the same visitation appeal procedure, a full copy of which can be found in Annex

5 – “RCVS Visitation Appeal Procedure”. This procedure has been introduced in 2017, as a result of our self-evaluation, in order to address the requirements of the ESG. Up until 2017, any institution that wished to appeal an accreditation decision would have needed to make a case to the Privy Council. Whilst this meant that a mechanism existed, it constituted a very high hurdle, and, as such, might be seen as unfairly onerous. RCVS has, therefore, introduced an appeals procedure which it feels is proportionate, utilising members of the existing examinations appeals committee of the RCVS which comprises members of both professions and lay representatives. A flowchart of the appeals process is given below. A school which was unhappy with the result of the process outlined below would still have recourse to the Privy Council, which now forms a final independent external appeal process.



## 11. Information and opinions of stakeholders

249. The main stakeholders of RCVS are the institutions which it accredits, and the students and the employers of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. Following its accreditation activities, RCVS writes to the university with a feedback survey in which it welcomes feedback on the visitation process and opinion on the procedures of RCVS accreditation. Universities have the opportunity to commend areas where they feel that RCVS has exceeded expectations, as well as suggest changes or areas for improvement within both the accreditation standards and the visitation process. An example of this feedback survey can be found in Annex 6. Whilst feedback has always been sought, until recently this was on an informal basis. The more formal surveys were introduced in 2016 and currently RCVS has received no feedback from visited institutions. RCVS is considering ways of improving this response rate, such as digitising the feedback mechanism.
250. A feedback survey is also sent to the visiting team and results of these surveys are considered by the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee and the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee. If warranted, the feedback can lead to changes of process, or an update to the RCVS standards of accreditation. Overall, feedback from visiting teams has been extremely positive and constructive and has led to some useful refinements to RCVS accreditation processes.
251. Standard 6 of the “RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees” deals with a number of aspects of the student experience and Standard 12 mandates vet schools to gather data from employers as part of ensuring that educational objectives are being met. The Veterinary Schools Council recently developed a joint employer survey, in order to try to improve response rates and RCVS agreed to circulate this to employers to encourage them to complete it. Visitation timetables for veterinary school visits include opportunities to talk to both students and employers. Students from all years of the programme and alumni/employers are invited to dedicated lunchtime sessions. These sessions are for students/employers and alumni only: no staff are permitted to attend and thus participants can speak freely about any issues they wish to raise.
252. In addition, there is an opportunity for staff and students to attend a confidential session with visitors. This session, usually held on the Thursday of a visit, is advertised in advance to all staff and students. The member of RCVS staff who will be supporting the visit provides a confidential email address and phone number such that anyone can request a session direct with the visiting team. If they cannot attend at the time designated in the programme, an alternative time is agreed. RCVS asks the university to provide a separate room in a quiet location for these meetings, such that those attending can do so in confidence.
253. Although RCVS is independent in its operations, it works in cooperation with the Veterinary Schools Council (VSC), which comprises the Heads of Veterinary Schools in the UK, and also the individual veterinary nursing institutions. Through this organisation, the collective views of the institutions which RCVS accredits are fed into RCVS committee meetings, where any issues presented are considered. The Veterinary Schools Council also acts as a consultative body, where RCVS can seek opinion on any changes that it makes to its accreditation standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees.
254. Veterinary nurse accreditation activity is also subject to an evaluation process by both the visitors and the accredited higher education institutions. This feedback is reviewed by Veterinary Nurse Education Committee and is used to review operations or standards to improve future accreditation activity.
255. RCVS also works closely with the Department for Education, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on recognition of new veterinary schools and other veterinary legislative issues.

## 12. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Experienced in accreditations both nationally and internationally	Small profession means that most academics have had interactions, any potential conflicts of interest need to be carefully managed	The opportunity to positively influence veterinary education both nationally and internationally	Uncertain political environment with regards to the UK relationship with Europe
Holds formal legal status as sole accreditor of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse education in the UK	Relatively limited pool of visitors to draw from in some highly specialised subject areas, e.g. Veterinary Public Health	Opportunity for greater visibility globally via ENQA membership	An unfounded fear of the regulator potentially inhibits the constructive current working relationships with stakeholders
International pool of visitors (Vet Schools) ensures worldwide expert experience on visitations	Only have international influence with those countries where a mutual recognition agreement exists	RCVS' affiliation with the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education (ACOVENE) could be further strengthened by ENQA endorsement.	Government in favour of deregulation
High quality standards and procedures which have been adopted by international accrediting agencies (e.g. ACOVENE)	Changing aspects of our Standards is a relatively lengthy process due to the number of sub-committees involved.	Opportunities to share best practice with other regulators both at home and abroad.	A significant number of RCVS members come from Europe- something that could have the potential to shift depending on the results of Brexit.
RCVS is in a strong financial position, with significant financial reserves. RCVS income guaranteed from member and associate registration fees with overall income for 2016 being £10.03m.	Cuts in Higher Education funding affecting universities.	Opportunity to further scrutinise our own procedures through both internal and external QA	Brexit may lead to reduced income from registration fees
Most accreditation visits (Vet Schools) involve multi-national teams comprising members from international accrediting	Decisions by other international accrediting bodies, e.g. Changes to their standards, could lead to difficulties in	Opportunity to improve the reputation of UK graduates around the world	Visitors dropping out at the last minute

continued overleaf...

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
agencies, providing additional objectivity	maintaining commonality of accreditation activity between international agencies	To increase consultation with the profession on various issues both locally and internationally	Changes to overarching QA monitoring by Government agencies of universities in the UK which could lead to confusion in the HE sector
Visits organised by a central office for streamlined communication		To further campaign to protect the title of 'veterinary nurse' to make the RCVS regulatory jurisdiction clearer.	Threats to UK HE funding could have a negative impact on veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse programmes, which are expensive to run
Reports are considered against the standards through two layers of committees ensuring impartial and consistent decision making by professionals		A new training programme for vet school visitors has started, with scope to enhance and develop visitor training using online components for refresher.	
Well-established and published external evaluation process of education institutions		Veterinary nurse school visitors to be selected from the profession and developed in line with the vet school visitors.	
RCVS visitors are internationally respected; and often appointed by other international accreditation bodies for their own site visits. The visitors utilised by the RCVS hold a range of expertise and skills		Scrutiny from Audit and Risk Committee is designed to raise and enhance Standards set by the RCVS	
Accreditation of our standards and processes by the United States Department of Education		Veterinary and Veterinary Nurses futures projects shaping the strategic direction of both professions	



## 13. Current challenges and areas for future development

256. The RCVS is an historic organisation established in 1844 by Royal Charter to be the governing body of the veterinary profession.

257. As the sole accreditor of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing qualifications in the UK, the RCVS has forged a unique niche in the veterinary profession as the regulator not only of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing education, but as regulators of training practices, "Practice Standards", and of the professional members and associates of the College. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons works together and on behalf of external stakeholders, such as BVNA, BSAVA, BVA, SPVS, ACOVENE, EAEVE<sup>64</sup>, and all UK veterinary schools. Projects such as 'Vet Futures' and 'VN Futures'<sup>65</sup> have been driven by the RCVS, and development of defined routes of evolution, actions, and working parties have now been set as a result of this process, written by the professions, for the professions. It is with these activities and these special relationships that the RCVS is uniquely placed as the hub of standard setting and innovation across multiple disciplines within the veterinary professions in the UK.

258. The RCVS Veterinary Nursing "Awarding Organisation/ Higher Education Institute Standards" have largely been adopted by ACOVENE as the basis of its quality and standard check protocols. "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees" are also largely harmonised with those used by EAEVE, AVBC, SAVC and AVMA. The standards used for both veterinary nursing and veterinary surgeon institution accreditations encompass not only checks on outcomes for students, but on the standard of the internal quality process, resources, course structure and assessment structure. A cyclical audit and accreditation cycle ensures real-time monitoring of the institution's development, and

the RCVS adopts a responsive approach to student or University led communication regarding quality issues of the provision.

259. Historically, veterinary nurse accreditation reports have not been written for publication and have subsequently not been published. However, as from January 2018 this will change and all accreditation reports will be published on the RCVS website.

260. The RCVS has four statutory and four main standing committees (<http://www.rcvs.org.uk/about-us/committees/>). These are populated with individuals who are experienced in their fields, and it is these committees that predominantly hold the RCVS and members of the profession to account. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, they are not employed by the RCVS. Where conflicts do arise with individuals in these committees, a declaration of interest protocol is consistently implemented, and conflicts of interest are published on the RCVS website<sup>66</sup> in the public domain.

261. Institutions delivering both the veterinary surgeon and veterinary nursing qualifications are monitored against the standards ("RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees"<sup>67</sup> and "Awarding Organisation/Higher Education Institute Handbook"<sup>68</sup>) via a five yearly (veterinary nurse) and seven yearly (veterinary surgeon) accreditation cycle for education establishments. Increase in quality monitoring of veterinary nursing qualifications enables responsiveness to the rapid evolution of this younger profession.

### Challenges and Opportunities

262. With the RCVS drawing on a relatively small pool of experts for veterinary education accreditation, it can be a challenge finding impartial professionals to serve

64 BVNA – British Veterinary Nursing Association, BSAVA – British Small Animal Veterinary Association, BVA – British Veterinary Association, SPVS – Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons, ACOVENE – Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education, EAEVE – European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education

65 <https://www.vetfutures.org.uk/>

66 RCVS Council lay members - <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/rcvs-council/council-members/appointed+lay+members/janice-shardlow/>  
VN Council lay members - <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/vn-council/vn-council-members/>

67 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/rcvs-accreditation-standards/>

68 <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/awarding-organisation-and-higher-education-institution-handbook/>

the various committee activities, especially as a strict conflict of interest policy applies. The RCVS will continue to strive to retain impartial committee members, and to continue to network with members and associates of the RCVS to recruit future suitable members. One method for achieving this impartiality is through the use of lay members on committees, comprising professionals from other sectors<sup>68</sup>.

263. The changes to standards and rules can be an extended process due to the various levels (up to two) of committees before RCVS Council ratifies the committee decisions, and this can therefore reduce responsiveness to market forces. A significant change to standards and procedures could take up to a year to implement. However, this level of scrutiny prevents decisions being made or overturned capriciously, and enables a more global view of standard and rule changes to be adopted.

264. The RCVS currently enjoys a unique relationship with the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education (ACOVENE), and this relationship will continue to be nurtured to enable the increase of reciprocal arrangements with European veterinary nursing schools. This international visibility will enhance the standards of education and training of veterinary nurses globally.

265. Quality monitoring activities are additional services provided to the veterinary nursing schools in order to respond to the rapid movement of the profession in

between the five yearly accreditation cycles, and are currently performed by a single member of the RCVS veterinary nursing team. While one team member performing the audits suggests greater consistency of audit conventions, it could lead to bias. In order to guard against this, the reports are scrutinised by committee members, and the findings are then reported to RCVS Council. These quality monitoring activities and their outcomes will also be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee, which will be the group of impartial external reviewers of all veterinary nursing and Education audit and accreditation activities, allowing another layer of scrutiny and accountability for the quality assurance activities of the education and veterinary nursing departments. Similarly, there is a limited pool of visitors suitable to be selected for accreditation activities, and this is an area for development for both the veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse fields.

266. Currently, protection of the title 'veterinary nurse' is not statutory. RCVS may revisit this in the future and instigate a further campaign to government to protect the title in order to raise the status and profile of this important profession with the public.

267. The financial health of the RCVS rests largely with the registration fees collected from members and associates of the College, a significant portion of whom are overseas registrants. One outcome of Britain's exit from the EU could be a reduction in the numbers of EU

68 RCVS Council lay members - <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/rcvs-council/council-members/appointed+lay+members/janice-shardlow/>  
VN Council lay members - <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/who-we-are/vn-council/vn-council-members/>

veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses registering to practise in the UK. A RCVS Brexit task force has already been appointed to address this threat, and will continue to function until the threat is mitigated. In addition, the threat of a highly complex and lengthy disciplinary case or cases over a financial year could have an impact on the health of the RCVS financial reserves.

268. Any successful bid for Scottish independence has the potential to significantly alter the RCVS relationship with the two veterinary schools in Scotland, with the possibility of loss of income due to the schools no longer being regulated by the RCVS. However, any such move would be balanced by the consequent reduction in costs to RCVS.

269. RCVS's strategic plan includes a number of major projects with potentially far-reaching impacts on the professions. For example 'VN Futures' and 'Vet Futures' have been looking to the future of the professions to identify issues that will need addressing. These include for veterinary nurses: creating a sustainable workforce, structured and rewarding career paths, confident, resilient, healthy and well supported workforce, proactive role in "one health" initiatives (which is a collaboration between veterinary nurse and human nursing professions), maximising nurses potential and a clarified and bolstered role via legal reforms to the Veterinary Surgeons Act. For veterinary surgeons, the ambitions identified were: to become a leading force for animal

health and welfare, valued for the societal role in which they are placed, confident, resilient and well- supported practitioners, a broad range of diverse and rewarding career paths, thriving, innovative and user focused business, and development of exceptional leaders. Through these projects, the RCVS hopes to guide and influence strategic development of both professions, including the consequent changes needed to veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse education to reflect the future needs of the professions.

270 One of the key aims within the RCVS Strategic plan is a review of graduate outcomes, which is a significant piece of work for the RCVS and its partners over the next 2-3 years. The project includes an exploration of the skills and competences that will be needed by veterinary professionals of the future and what this means for the structure and content of the undergraduate veterinary degree and any postgraduate implications. Consideration is being given to enhancing moral reasoning and ethical decision-making, the wider roles of veterinary surgeons and helping undergraduates to learn to work with uncertainty and develop reflective practice. The project will also explore the viability and desirability of limited licensure; a financially sustainable model for EMS provision that meets the changing needs of students and the profession and encouragement of a more diverse profession, in relation to ethnicity, socio-economic background, gender etc., including reviewing the application and selection process for UK vet schools.

# **Self-Assessment Report of The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons**

Annexes

AO/HEI Standards for Veterinary nursing Licence to practise qualifications		Significance	Likelihood	Risk
<b>Sustainability</b>				
2.c	AOs and HEIs must demonstrate that there is a sufficient need for all new qualification(s).	2		2
<b>Qualification design and delivery</b>				
3.a.	Licence to practise qualifications must address the RCVS Day One Competences for Veterinary Nurses and, in the case of HE programmes, relevant benchmark statements.	4		4
3.b.	Licence to practise qualifications must contain the minimum Guided Learning Hours (GLH) as defined by the body entrusted for setting GLH for your sector. Prior to registration students must complete a minimum of 2,990 hours in duration, actively engaged in training (GLH and clinical placement), excluding annual leave and absence.	4		4
3.c.	Programmes of study delivered by Centres must incorporate a minimum of 1,800 hours of clinical work experience, to be gained in a veterinary practice registered with the RCVS as a Training Practice (TP) or an Auxiliary Training Practice (aTP). This must be in addition to the GLH as set by the relevant bodies. It is the AO/HEIs responsibility to ensure these requirements are being met.	4		4
3.d.	Work-based learning requirements must articulate with the RCVS Day One Skills for veterinary nurses and be specified, recorded and assessed in a format that is readily auditable and accessible to learners, work supervisors and quality assurance personnel.	3		3
3.e.	Methods of summative assessment must be detailed within the modules. Assessments need to be valid and reliable and comprise a variety of approaches. Direct assessment of RCVS Day One Skills for Veterinary Nurses must form a significant component of the overall process of assessment.	4		4

<b>Qualification quality management</b>				
4.a.	AOs and HEIs must be compliant with all criteria stipulated by their accrediting national regulatory authority.	4		4
4.b.	Student selection criteria must be in place including the minimal acceptable qualifications to be achieved prior to commencing the qualification. The number of students registered for the qualification must be consistent with the resources available including the availability of sufficient training practices to enable the required clinical experience to be undertaken.	3		3
4.c.	AOs and HEIs must allow the RCVS access to people, premises and records relevant to the management and delivery of the accredited qualification, and must cooperate with RCVS quality assurance activities in relation to the delivery and assessment of such qualification(s).	4		4
4.d.	AOs and HEIs must employ sufficient suitably qualified staff to administer and quality assure the proposed qualification(s).	3		3
4.e.	Quality assurance staff must demonstrate, and maintain, relevant occupational and academic competence in relation to the evaluation of assessment materials and decisions.	3		3
<b>Assessment</b>				
5.a.	Qualification assessment strategies must be appropriate, valid and fair. A pass must be achieved in each assessment assessing the RCVS Day One Competences for Veterinary Nurses and RCVS Day One Skills for Veterinary Nurses.	3		3
5.b.	Reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, fitness to practise policies and an appeals procedure must be in place, taking into account the licence to practise requirement for all students to achieve all competences contained in the RCVS Day One Competences for Veterinary Nurses and RCVS Day One Skills for Veterinary Nurses.	2		2
5.c.	Mechanisms must be in place to allow Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) to be taken into consideration.	3		3

Annex 1 - VN Standard risk assessment example

5.d.	Appropriate security arrangements must be in place to safeguard the integrity of assessment processes.	3		3
5.e.	The design and quality assurance of assessments must be carried out by personnel who are specifically qualified to execute these functions.	3		3
5f.	There must be procedures in place to maximise the fairness, validity and reliability of assessment outcomes, including but not limited to academic peer review of assessment content, proofing of scripts, supervision and invigilation, maintenance of records and moderation processes.	3		3
5g.	There must be appropriate moderation processes in place to ensure parity within and between individual units of study, across the programme, with other institutions; and to ensure that each student is fairly treated.	2		2
5h.	All modules or units of a qualification that address the RCVS Day One Competences for Veterinary Nurses and RCVS Day One Skills for Veterinary Nurses must include unseen independent examination as an element of the assessment strategy.	3		3
5i.	Independently assessed Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), or a similarly robust, objective and evidence-based form of examination, must be employed to test the safe and effective acquisition of clinical skills.	4		4
5j.	Practical assessment must be carried out by individuals who are specifically qualified to evaluate practical skills and performance, and who have sufficient occupational experience and qualifications to support safe and effective judgements of clinical competence.	3		3
<b>Centre approval and quality assurance</b>				
6.a.	Centres/delivery sites approved for the delivery of the accredited qualification must address the requirements for personnel, resources and facilities stipulated within the RCVS Standards and procedures for the approval and monitoring of Centres.	3		3
		4		
		5		
6.b.	Awarding institutions must conduct a site visit, including an audit of facilities and resources, before approving any centre to deliver a licence to practise qualification.	3		3
		4		
		5		

Annex 1 - VN Standard risk assessment example

6.c.	AOs and HEIs must conduct a minimum of one site visit to each approved Centre/delivery site and/or its affiliated Training Practices, annually, based on a documented risk assessment policy.	3		3
		4		
		5		
6.d.	Centres delivering a licence to practise qualification must be notified to the RCVS.	2		2
6.e.	AOs and HEIs must set in place binding agreements with Centres that articulate both their national and professional regulatory obligations.	3		3
<b>Self evaluation and reporting</b>				
7.a.	Awarding institutions must evaluate the delivery of a licence to practise qualification across all approved centres and provide a report to the RCVS annually, or when otherwise required to do so.	2		2

## **Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons**

### **Veterinary Nurse Licence to Practise Sub-Committee**

#### **Terms of reference**

##### **Purpose**

1. The Veterinary Nurse Licence to Practise Sub-Committee shall undertake the following functions:
  - a. Consider reports of visitors (including follow-up reports) to Awarding Organisations and Higher Education Institutions, their delivery sites and training practices and make recommendations to VN Education Committee on recognition of veterinary nurse licence to practise qualifications
  - b. Consider annual monitoring reports from Awarding Organisations and Higher Education Institutions and, where appropriate, their centres
  - c. Consider and make recommendations to VN Education Committee on the appointment of RCVS visitors and observers
  - d. Keep RCVS visitation/accreditation criteria under review and in line with any relevant international standards and to consider annual statistical returns
  - e. Oversee the work of the pre-registration examination sub-committee and ensure the standards for entry onto the RCVS Register of Veterinary Nurses by this route is compliant with relevant directives
  - f. Oversee provision of the electronic student experience log and professional development record and their periodic review

##### **Relationships and Accountability**

2. The Veterinary Nurse Licence to Practise Sub-Committee shall report to the Veterinary Nurses Education Committee, on all matters concerning veterinary nursing education policy and the development, accreditation, assessment and quality monitoring of professional qualifications for veterinary nurses.
3. The Committee shall provide reports to the Veterinary Nurses Education Committee.

##### **Membership**

4. The Committee shall represent major stakeholders in veterinary nurse education and continuing professional development and 6 members shall be appointed by the Veterinary Nurses Education Committee. Membership shall be based on skills and therefore include:
5.
  - a. Veterinary Nurse academics
  - b. Veterinary Nurse practitioners
  - c. Chair of the pre-registration examination sub-committee

6. Members of the Committee shall not normally represent more than one interest.
7. The Committee shall meet on a minimum of three occasions annually.
8. The quorum for a meeting of the Committee shall be not less than 4 members personally present, or able to take part through live teleconference.

Julie Dugmore RVN  
Director of Veterinary Nursing  
October 2017





## Higher Education Institution Self-assessment Report

### Higher Education Institution Annual Self-assessment Report (suggested template)

1. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must submit a self-assessment report using this template to the RCVS on an annual basis. The report must be submitted no later than 30 November to cover the preceding academic year. If the HEI requires an extension to this submission date this must be agreed with the RCVS. Failure to submit by the agreed deadline constitutes a non-compliance with accreditation criteria and may affect the approval status of the HEI.
2. The purpose of the report is to provide the RCVS with an annual overview of the HEIs provision and quality in relation to veterinary nursing qualifications.
3. Please report as fully as you are able; your self-assessment report gives RCVS a picture of how your License to Practice qualification is operating. If you have made any amendments to the qualification or developed new teaching and assessment strategies, please include this information. You must also report any matters that compromised, or threatened, your qualification during the year.
4. The report must cover all qualifications that lead to professional registration as a veterinary nurse.

#### Section 1 Qualification Information

Self-explanatory.

#### Section 2 Changes

Please provide an overview of any significant changes to the staff, course curriculum, programme design or delivery methods which have taken place since your last annual self-assessment report (or since September last year if this is your first report). Include any changes to your institution's organisational structure or staffing which have a bearing on the delivery of veterinary nursing qualifications, and comment on the annual monitoring for the physical resources at the delivery sites. Include numbers of TPs that are primary and secondary affiliated, and state how these numbers have changed from the previous year, if applicable.

#### Section 3 Recruitment and outcomes

Please provide details of the number of students registering for and completing each qualification each academic year. Please provide the examination pass rates per qualification, and the destination data of each student- this should include percentage of the cohort in various destinations, with a note on type of further training or employment

#### Section 4 OSCE results

Please complete statistical information for each affiliated centre.

#### Section 5 Student feedback

Please provide details of any student feedback activity you have undertaken.

## **Section 6      External regulator feedback (e.g. RCVS, QAA, etc)**

Please provide details of any feedback received from external bodies.

## **Section 7      External examiner feedback**

Please provide a copy of your last external examiner report.

## **Section 8      Qualification action plan**

Documenting that you recognise, and take action, to address problems with your qualification is a mark of good management. This section describes how you have been addressing the quality of your qualification and the action you have taken to address the following:

1. The conditions and recommendations identified within your last RCVS quality monitoring report
2. Actions identified by external examiners and QAA auditing activity
3. Issues that have arisen since your last self-assessment report that have actually, or potentially, compromised the quality of your qualification. Include here also any perceived or future threats to the institutions quality assurance, (e.g. staff turnover, centre merger, external reports, etc)
4. Planned developments

**Annual self-assessment report for Higher Education Institutions approved to award qualifications leading to a licence to practice qualification**

Section 1 Programme information	
1.1	Name of Awarding Organisation:
1.2	Name and position of report author:
1.3	Course title(s):
1.4	Year of review:

Section 2 Changes				
2.1 Staff changes since last report				
Name:	Position including modules teaching on:	Date appointed:	Hours/ Week:	Replaces (name) / new appointment?
2.2 Qualification delivery changes since last report (course curriculum or assessment changes, additional deliveries etc.)				
Change(s) made:			Reason and evaluation:	

2.3	Checks of Physical Resources at Centres:	
Practical Training resources		
Library Resources		
Theory Teaching rooms		
2.4	Training Practices (TPs)	
Training Practice numbers	Affiliated	Non Affiliated
Discussion of changes of TP numbers/ general comments:		

Section 3 Recruitment and Outcomes						
3.1 Number of students enrolled and attrition – Higher Education programme year 1						
Name of award:						
Academic year 2015/16	Number of students entering this academic year	Cohorts	Number of students who have left	Number who have achieved award:	Primary reason for leaving (Number should total 100%)	
					% academic reasons	% personal reasons
3 years previous						
2 years previous						
Last year						
Current year to date						
3.2 Number of students enrolled and attrition – Higher Education programme year 2						
Name of award:						
Academic year 2015/16	Number of students entering this academic year	Cohorts	Number of students who have left	Number who have achieved award:	Primary reason for leaving (Number should total 100%)	
					% academic reasons	% personal reasons
3 years previous						
2 years previous						
Last year						
Current year to date						
3.3 Number of students enrolled and attrition – Higher Education programme year 3						
Name of award:						
Academic year 2015/16	Number of students entering this academic year	Cohorts	Number of students who have left	Number who have achieved award:	Primary reason for leaving (Number should total 100%)	
					% academic reasons	% personal reasons
3 years previous						
2 years previous						
Last year						
Current year to date						

Annex 3 - Higher Education Institution Self-assessment Report

3.4 Number of students enrolled and attrition – Higher Education programme year 4 (if applicable)						
Name of award:						
Academic year 2015/16	Number of students entering this academic year	Cohorts	Number of students who have left	Number who have achieved award:	Primary reason for leaving (Number should total 100%)	
					% academic reasons	% personal reasons
3 years previous						
2 years previous						
Last year						
Current year to date						

3.5 Destination Data:	
Percentage continuing education or training:	
Please give details (if applicable):	
Percentage employed:	
Please give details:	
Other (please specify with percentage/ number, and details of destination):	

Section 4 Final (OSCE) examination pass rates			
Year	Number taking exam (1 <sup>st</sup> attempt)	Number passed exam (1 <sup>st</sup> attempt):	Pass rate (1 <sup>st</sup> attempt)
2 years previous			
Last year			
Current year to date			

Section 5	Student feedback
Please provide details of any feedback from students	

Section 6 External regulator feedback (e.g. RCVS, QAA, etc)	
Please provide details of any feedback from external regulators	



## Section 7 External Examiner feedback

Please provide details of any feedback from external examiners

### Section 8 Qualification Action Plan

A clear action plan should be given below with planned developments and changes to the qualification. The AO should consider reports from Ofqual, RCVS and internal quality monitoring. Institutions are encouraged to add in potential as well as actual threats to the quality assurance of the qualification, and should distinguish between actual and potential issues with the label 'A' or 'P' at the beginning.

Issue (A/P)	Action required	Action by whom	Date for resolution	Further action	Resolved

Section 9      Signature of Principal/CEO	
Signature of Principal/CEO:	
Print name and official title:	
Date:	

## RCVS visitation appeal procedure

### Scope of Appeals

1. This appeals procedure applies where an institution questions the formal outcomes of the accreditation process, where it can:
  - demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, **and/or**
  - that published standards have not been correctly applied **and/or**
  - that published processes have not been consistently implemented.
2. No appeal will be entertained in respect of the individual comment(s) made by the visiting team and contained within the visitation report.

### Definition of terms

3. In these rules:
  - "appeals panel" means a panel of the Committee constituted to hear an appeal;
  - "College" means the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons;
  - "Committee" means the Examination Appeals Committee;
  - "lay person" means a person who is not a veterinary surgeon or a registered veterinary nurse and has never been entitled to be registered as such;
  - "registrar" means the registrar of the College;
  - "the Council" means the Council of the College;
  - "formal outcome of the accreditation process" means the category of accreditation into which the institution has been placed **and/or** the period of accreditation that has been granted
  - "published standards" means the standards contained within the version of the "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees" that applies to the visit in question
  - "published processes" means the processes contained within the version of the "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees" that applies to the visit in question

### **Lodging of an appeal**

4. An institution must inform the registrar of its intention to appeal not later than two weeks from receipt of the letter confirming the formal outcome of the accreditation process. The appeal must then be made in writing by the Dean or Head of School no later than six weeks from receipt of the letter confirming the formal outcome of the accreditation process.

### **Initial consideration of appeals**

5. The first stage of the appeal process will involve a review of the process that had been followed by RCVS in reaching its accreditation decision, together with the argued basis for the appeal, by both PQSC at their next scheduled meeting. The Chair of the relevant visitation team may be asked to participate in the review process. The outcome of this review will be to either accept or dismiss the appeal. If accepted, Education Committee will review its original decision and may decide to amend it. It should be noted that acceptance of the appeal may not necessarily result in a change to the original decision.
6. An appeal will only be dismissed on one or more of the following grounds:
  - It relates to the individual comments made by the visiting team
  - It gives insufficient information to enable any judgement to be made
  - It is frivolous, vexatious or relates to a minor irregularity in the conduct of the accreditation process
  - It is unnecessary because deficiencies in the accreditation process have already been acknowledged and appropriate action taken
7. If the appeal is dismissed on any of the grounds mentioned, the institution may nevertheless elect to have the appeal considered by the Visitation Appeals Panel. The institution must pay a fee of £5000, but this will be refunded if the appeal is upheld.

### **Composition of the Committee**

8. The Committee will be appointed from time to time by or on behalf of the Council. It will include veterinary surgeons, registered veterinary nurses and lay persons. Two members of the Committee will be designated by or on behalf of the Council as its Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

### **Visitation Appeals Panel**

9. The Committee will act through panels when dealing with appeals. An appeals panel will consist of between three and five members of the Examination Appeals Committee chosen by the Chairman of the Committee and will include one person who is not a member of Council.
10. The panel will select its own Chair. All members must sign a declaration confirming that they have no conflict of interest with the appellant institution and a statement to indicate that they will strictly adhere to the *“RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary*

*degrees*” as well as the “*Policy on managing potential conflicts of interest for visitation team members*”.

11. The appellant institution will be provided with copies of any information, apart from legal advice, which is made available to the appeals panel and will be given a reasonable opportunity to comment and make any further representations before the panel considers the appeal.
12. The appellant institution has the right to nominate an observer to attend the meeting of the panel. An observer may respond to questions from the panel; however they will not have voting rights when it comes to decision making. The Chair of the visit team may also be requested to attend the meeting as an observer to assist with any points of clarification.
13. An appeals panel will not include a person who has been involved in the initial assessment of the appeal, had any involvement in the visitation to the appellant institution or has any personal connection with the appellant institution which might bring that person's independence or impartiality into question.
14. The proceedings of an appeals panel will take place in camera and will remain confidential after the conclusion of the appeal.
15. The appeals panel may:
  - a. uphold the appeal and direct Education Committee to reconsider its decision
  - b. uphold the appeal, but confirm that the decision should remain unchanged
  - c. dismiss the appeal
16. Once the panel has reached a decision, by majority vote, its Chair will inform the registrar of its decision by submitting an adjudicating statement, including its reasoning. The registrar will arrange for the outcomes of the appeal to be communicated to the appellant institution, PQSC and Education Committee.
17. The decision of the panel shall be conclusive for all purposes.
18. Until the end of the appeal process, the visitation report will not be published and the appellant institution holds its current accreditation status.

### Post-Visitation questionnaire for veterinary school

<b>Visit</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Chair of visit</b>	
<b>Visiting team</b>	

In order to reflect and improve upon our processes, it's essential that our visitations are quality assured. We would be grateful if you would provide some feedback on the above visitation by answering the questions below.

**Name:**

**Position:**

**Type of visitation:** (Visitation, full re-visit, partial re-visit)

**1. Before the visitation:**

**Please rate the following factors**

	Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor
Organisation of the visit (dates, visiting team etc.)					
Organisation of the visit schedule					
Feedback following the visiting team teleconference					
Clarity of the standards and the rubric					
Written guidance on producing the SER					

**Please add any supporting/further comments below**

**2. During the visitation****a) Was the conduct of the visiting team in line with RCVS guidance (attached)?**Yes ☐No ☐**If 'No' please tell us why below****b) Was the conduct of the Chair in line with RCVS guidance (attached)?**Yes ☐No ☐**If 'No' please tell us why below****c) Was the feedback provided at the end of the visit clear and unambiguous?**Yes ☐No ☐**If 'No' please tell us why below****d) Please rate the overall organisation during the visit:**

Very good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very poor



3. Are there any further comments/suggestions for improvement that you would like to make? If so, please make them below.

Signature:

Date:

Thank you for your feedback

### Post-Visitation questionnaire for visitor

<b>Visit</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Chair of visit</b>	

In order to reflect and improve upon our processes, it's essential that our visitations are quality assured. We would be grateful if you would provide some feedback on the above visitation by providing us with some information below.

**Name:**

1. **Please comment on the visitation programme** (*comment on RCVS standards/rubric, university SER, timetable, base room documentation, liaison with school staff, reception by university, etc*)
  
2. **Please comment on the visitation team** (*did the team work within the guidelines stated in the RCVS Standards and Procedures document, was the level of expertise as high as expected, was the visitation performed in a professional manner, etc*)
  
3. **Please comment on the Chair** (*performance, competence, communication, efficiency, etc*)
  
4. **Please comment on the administration of the visit by RCVS office, both before and during the visit** (*comment on performance, communication, efficiency, etc*)
  
5. **Any other comments**
  
6. **Suggestions for improvement**

**Signature:**

**Date:**



