

Draft RCVS Accreditation Methodology

For consultation
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RCVS Accreditation Methodology

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) has a statutory responsibility under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, for regulating the professional education of veterinary surgeons and veterinary practitioners (to include vet nurses). In order to safeguard the interests of the public and animals, the RCVS sets the standards for veterinary education, and ensures only those who have completed a recognised qualification are eligible to practice in the UK.
- 1.2 RCVS accreditation of professional degree programmes provides assurance that standards are being met and drives the quality improvement of veterinary education. The accreditation of qualifications is an evidence-based, peer reviewed process that ensures that not only are the published standards met and maintained by each educational establishment, but also that educational innovation and good practice is recognised and shared with stakeholders. RCVS accreditation activities have been developed to be consistent, transparent, valid, and reliable and the qualifications are subject to a rigorous quality assurance cycle that is flexible enough to respond to the changing demands made of the profession as well as to allow for a variety of delivery models.
- 1.3 The accreditation process recognises the ways in which veterinary care and professional education have evolved over recent years and continues to develop and draws upon advances in quality assurance methodology. To provide the best possible focus on quality, RCVS accreditation is moving from a process previously based primarily on the consideration of 'inputs' (e.g. policies and procedures) to a hybrid approach which also considers outcome-focused evidence on how standards are being met. This approach provides the flexibility to assure educational standards are achieved across different models of programme delivery, including 'traditional', community-based, local partnerships and work-based approaches.

1 – Introduction

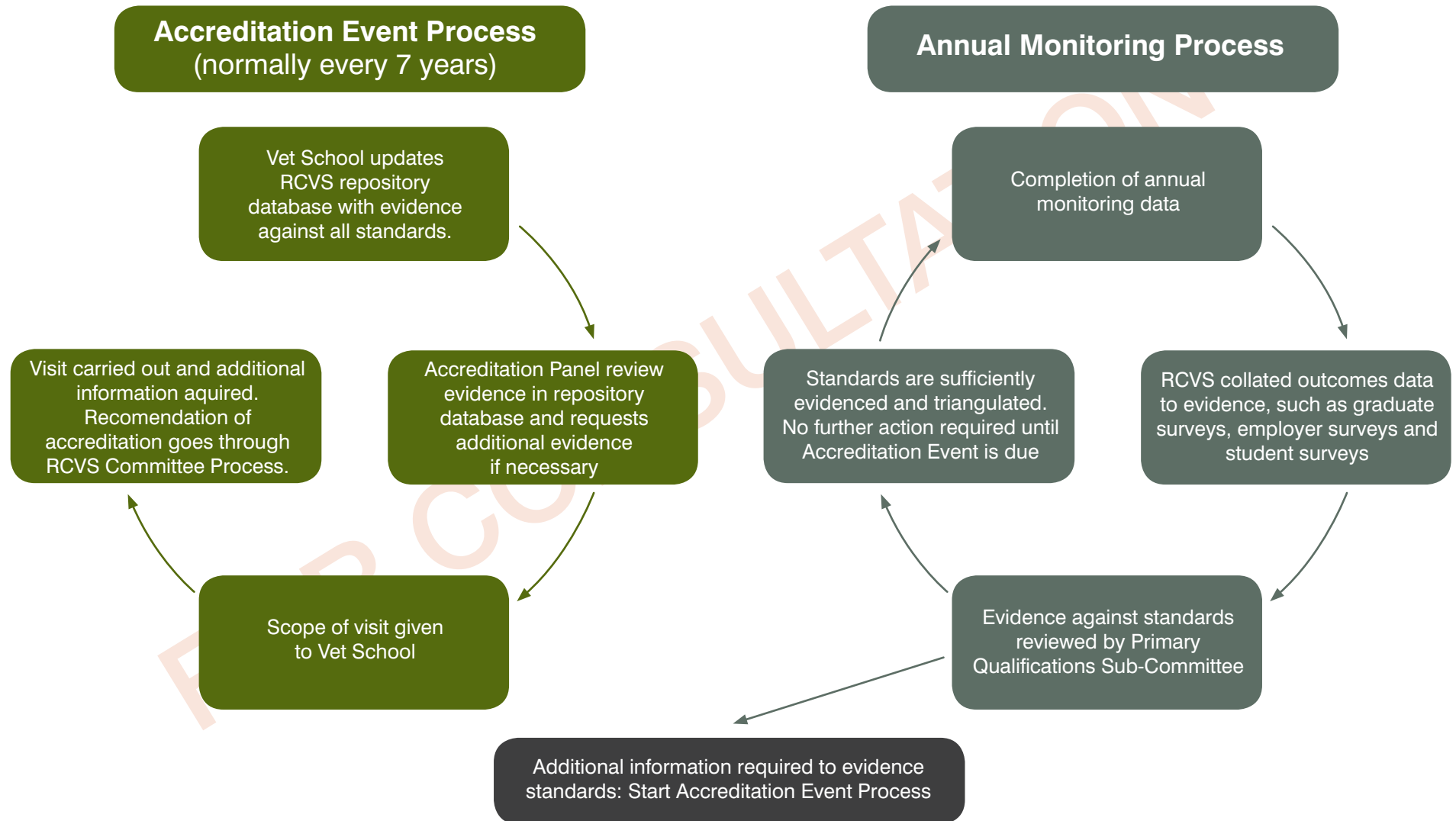
- 1.4 Furthermore, the increased assurance provided through evidence demonstrating positive or effective outcomes, enables a more risk-based approach to accreditation to be adopted. Through a combination of annual data monitoring and risk-based accreditation events including bespoke visitations, the accreditation cycle enhances the opportunity to recognise emerging issues early so that attention can be focused on potentially higher risk areas of the education programme and the appropriate support can be delivered in a timely fashion.

FOR CONSULTATION

Glossary of terms

Accreditation Cycle	This is the whole cycle including the accreditation event every 7 years and the annual monitoring process
Annual Monitoring Process	The annual process of data collection from the Vet School
Accreditation Event	This encompasses everything outside of the annual monitoring process – the school updating the repository for the accreditation review, the consideration of evidence and the bespoke visitation
Accreditation Review	This is the initial review of the school's evidence against the accreditation standards which will ultimately shape the scope of the visitation
Accreditation Panel	The visitation that is carried out; this will be bespoke and the scope decided on by the Accreditation Panel following the initial review of evidence in the repository (i.e. focusing upon standards where more evidence or triangulation of evidence is required)
Accreditation Visit	The visitation that is carried out; this will be bespoke and the scope decided on by the Accreditation Panel following the initial review of evidence in the repository (i.e. focusing upon standards where more evidence or triangulation of evidence is required)
Accreditation Visit Team	The team that carries out the visit, formed from the relevant members of the Accreditation Panel

2. The Accreditation Cycle



3. Accreditation Event

- 3.1 The accreditation event encompasses a review of evidence submitted by the vet school against all the accreditation standards (the accreditation review) and, using a risk-based approach, a bespoke visitation to focus on the standards where further evidence is required to demonstrate they have been met (or to triangulate existing evidence).
- 3.2 An accreditation event will take place for each veterinary programme no less than every 7 years as standard to fit in with the approved period of accreditation, unless triggered earlier as a result of the annual monitoring process or notification of substantial changes to the programme, or as recommended by the Education Committee at the last accreditation event.
- 3.3 Approximately six months before the accreditation of an established veterinary programme is due to lapse, the RCVS will contact the veterinary school to begin the Accreditation Event.

Accreditation Panel

- 3.4 The appointment of members of each Accreditation Panel is ratified by the RCVS Education Committee, following recommendation from its Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee (PQSC). This will be done in advance of the Accreditation Event.
- 3.5 The members of any Accreditation Panel will be chosen from a list of people that are on the RCVS list of accreditation experts, and who have undertaken the required training.

3. Accreditation Event

- 3.6 The Accreditation Panel will comprise up to six members, plus a student representative, with the necessary combination of educational and subject expertise, clinical and academic experience. Between them, panel members will have a mix of expertise to cover the basic sciences, paraclinical, and clinical sciences to cover all aspects of the curriculum. At least one panel member must be a practitioner with a background in clinical practice outside of academia, and at least one panel member must be an educationalist (either from a veterinary or healthcare-related profession, i.e. someone with further expertise on higher education curricula, assessment standards and educational models).
- 3.7 There must be someone who holds, or who has recently held, a senior academic position and who understands the organisation and funding of universities and the complex requirements for veterinary education on the panel.
- 3.8 A panel Chair must have already had experience of being an Accreditation Panel member on a previous occasion and have recent experience as a committee Chair.
- 3.9 The Accreditation Panel may also include multiple observers in either a quality assurance role, or in a training role attending with a view to participating as a panel member at a future date.

Stage 1: School is invited to prepare evidence in support of accreditation standards

- 3.10 Evidence against the accreditation standards should be submitted into the secure online repository database, where all accumulated data and evidence against each of the accreditation standards will be stored (including any annual monitoring data) for each programme. This will be hosted on RCVS servers and access will be restricted to those involved in the review of evidence as part of accreditation.

- 3.11 Examples of evidence which could be provided for each standard is provided in the guidance, however the list is not exhaustive or prescriptive, and the school should submit the data or evidence which it feels best demonstrates compliance. All evidence should be uploaded directly into the repository and any additional information forwarded through an alternative medium will not be accepted, unless through prior and exceptional arrangement.
- 3.12 Supporting evidence and documentation should be itemised by accreditation standard and indexed carefully to ensure ease of retrieval by those reviewing the evidence during the accreditation process. Each item provided in the repository should include a 20-30 word description, to capture what is contained within.
- 3.13 The RCVS will support and supplement the data submitted by schools, with outcomes data gathered through independent surveys of recent graduates and employers.
- 3.14 Once the school has been through the initial process of supplying evidence, they will be able to provide updated data as appropriate at any time, for example when internal quality assurance data becomes available or when any changes in relation to any standards has taken place, i.e. facilities upgrades, curricula updates etc.

Stage 2: Review of evidence in the repository

- 3.15 The RCVS Education Department will begin the initial review of the evidence submitted to the repository (stage 1), in addition to the consideration of relevant annual monitoring data and any outcomes data collected by RCVS e.g. graduate and employer surveys. A summary of this evidence will be given to the Accreditation Panel, noting any standards which appear to have strong evidence supporting them, as well as standards lacking evidence or where additional triangulation is required.

3. Accreditation Event

- 3.16 Once the school confirms that all documentary evidence has been uploaded to the repository, by the published date, the Accreditation Panel will begin their consideration of the data against each of the accreditation standards. This will be done using an Accreditation Standards Rubric (See Annex), using the summary of evidence as a template to check against the information in the repository. Each member will be asked to consider evidence submitted for all the standards, in order to provide a reliable assessment and a balanced approach.
- 3.17 Each panel member will carry out their initial review independently, adding to the rubric showing where evidence to support compliance is present, or where gaps in evidence are apparent and further evidence needs to be obtained during the visitation. Each rubric entry will be linked to specific sources of evidence in the repository considered to support each standard, and evidence that triangulates this, to ensure that the rationale and transparency of the panel's decisions can be demonstrated. In the majority of cases, for already established programmes, the panel will be looking for triangulation of any input data with evidence on outcomes and / or processes.
- 3.18 Any additional evidence may be requested in documentary format, or it may be more relevant to gather this through the visit to the Vet School.
- 3.19 On completion of the independent reviews by panel members, the RCVS Education Department will summarise the findings in a report. The panel will then agree on which standards have already been met and triangulated and begin to consider the priorities for the accreditation visit.

Stage 3: The Accreditation Visit

- 3.20 A bespoke accreditation visit follows the accreditation review. The accreditation review will determine the scope, focus and duration of the visit.

- 3.21 The Accreditation Panel will have considered the summarised findings and the evidence within the repository and have completed the rubric independently. The panel Chair will then notify the Education Department on the standards to be prioritised during the accreditation visit, along with the membership of the accreditation visit team. The Accreditation Visit Team will consist of the relevant members of the Accreditation Panel, initially determined by the scope and areas of priority of the visitation. However, other panel members could also form part of the Accreditation Visit Team. The Chair of the Accreditation Panel will Chair the Accreditation Visit Team and will always be present on the visit. Normally, the Accreditation Visit Team would be comprised of at least four members of the Accreditation Panel (the Chair, the student representative plus two other members), as well as at least one member of the RCVS Education Department.
- 3.22 Once the scope and focus of the visit has been identified, a confirmed date for the accreditation visit will be agreed by the RCVS in consultation with the veterinary school, the exact duration and focus of the visit having been established following the accreditation review.
- 3.23 For established veterinary programmes, it may not be necessary to revisit areas where they have been able to submit sufficient and relevant evidence to demonstrate continual compliance, resulting in a shorter visitation which focusses on areas without evidence, or limited evidence needing triangulation, or where there have been recent changes or new risks. For newer programmes, where outcomes data will inevitably be limited and facilities will not be so familiar to the RCVS, a longer and more in-depth accreditation visit would be necessary.
- 3.24 The duration and focus of an accreditation visit will be risk-based, depending on the outcome of the Accreditation Review.

3. Accreditation Event

- 3.25 A visitation will always include meetings with students from each cohort year, meetings with staff, tours of facilities as required, plus a representative sample of any off-campus sites responsible for the delivery of core teaching (determined by the RCVS). Video evidence of the facilities in distributed sites may also be invited so that in-person visits are not necessary. Locations to be visited or that require video evidence will be selected by the RCVS.
- 3.26 Wherever possible, to ensure reliability and coherence, the visiting team will work as a group for the visit, to enable all of them to see the relationship between the various parts of the curriculum and the degree. Circumstances may arise, however, which justify the chair delegating specific tasks to a subgroup of the team.
- 3.27 The visitation team expects to meet groups of staff who represent a broad range of disciplines and levels of experience, extra-mural and any adjunct staff, students, and external stakeholders. Wherever possible, to promote an open and honest dialogue between staff members and the visitation team, senior staff members of the school should not be present at meetings on each standard, unless directly involved in that area. Visitation teams will wish to speak to as wide a range of individuals as possible, so repetition of staff members across multiple meetings should be discouraged.
- 3.28 Opportunities will be offered for all students, educators and support staff, to meet with the visitation team confidentially to discuss any aspect of the programme's achievement of the accreditation standards. These confidential sessions must be advertised by the school to staff and students beforehand, and an RCVS staff member's contact details provided so that individuals can communicate privately with the visiting panel if they wish. These could be arranged to take place virtually over a two-week window prior to the visit if needed, however physical meetings will also be possible. There will also be the opportunity for all students and staff to provide feedback on the standards anonymously through an online tool.

- 3.29 Visitation schedules will be structured so that the visit can be an iterative process, allowing for on-site changes if required, and including additional time to allow further consultation with key individuals and groups if necessary.

Accreditation Visit Rubric

- 3.30 The Accreditation Standards Rubric (See Annex) completed during the Accreditation Review, will be used as a starting point for the visitor team to assess achievement of the accreditation standards being reviewed on the visit.
- 3.31 During the visitation, the rubric should be considered by the whole panel at the end of each day, so that areas which need further exploration with the school can be identified, as well as agreeing on areas of compliance.
- 3.32 Any area of deficiency must be supported by commentary. 'Recommendations' are actions which the school must address in order to retain accreditation, whereas 'Suggestions' are given to aid with programme improvement and not mandatory for accreditation purposes. Any suggestion or recommendation must be linked to a specific deficiency, and cross referenced with specific evidence or notable gaps in evidence. Areas of excellence or innovation referred to must also be cross referenced to specific evidence. The standards have been drafted with the aim that each standard is completely individual to avoid a situation whereby a deficiency and / or recommendation would be applicable across multiple standards. Therefore, a deficiency or recommendation made against one standard would not also need to be repeated against another standard.
- 3.33 The visitors will then agree their decision on areas of compliance and recommendation. These will then go back to the whole Accreditation Panel (if not all present on the visit) to agree on the final recommendations.
- 3.34 The completed Accreditation Standards Rubric (See Annex) will be published on the RCVS website once finalised.

3. Accreditation Event

Verbal feedback to school

- 3.35 After the visitation has taken place, the visitation team will meet the Vice Chancellor of the university (or equivalent), and the head and senior staff of the school, to provide a factual summary of the strengths and opportunities for improvement of the programme in relation to the RCVS standards. Any areas of excellence, suggestions, and recommendations from the panel will be communicated, and the next steps of the process outlined. The Chair will confirm that the panel are not the decision makers, and that the completed rubric showing their findings will be considered by the full Accreditation Panel (if different to the visitation team) and then through the formal RCVS committee process, before the decision on accreditation is taken and the accreditation event formally ends.

RCVS committee process

- 3.36 Following the visitation, the rubric and visitation panel commentary will be shared with the full Accreditation Panel (if different from the visitation team) and each member will consider whether compliance has been demonstrated against each of the standards independently, based on the evidence highlighted in the rubric. Where there is any disagreement, the panel will discuss the standard and evidence provided and a consensus reached.
- 3.37 The finalised rubric will then be returned to the school for a check of factual accuracy, usually within one month. Once the school has confirmed factual accuracy, the rubric will be considered by the RCVS's Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee, which will confirm or amend any recommendations. A copy of the final rubric is sent to all members of the Accreditation Panel.

- 3.38 The rubric is then sent to the Vice Chancellor of the university for formal comment / response. 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 the RCVS. (Please note, the report in this instance refers to the rubric as detailed in section 3.) The university is invited to comment to the RCVS on its responses to any recommendations in the report.
- 3.39 On receipt of any formal comments from the university, these are considered again by the RCVS’s Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee, which will then make a recommendation on accreditation status to the RCVS’s Education Committee, having taken the university’s response into account.
- 3.40 Following a decision by the RCVS Education Committee, the school will be notified of the result and both the outcome and rubric will be published on the RCVS website. Areas of excellence and innovation will be recognised and highlighted on these pages, as well as at quality improvement events hosted by the RCVS, where vet schools will be invited to present their innovative practices to a wider audience.

Dashboard

- 3.41 Hosted on the RCVS website will be a dashboard of accreditation data collected through its accreditation activities. Alongside reports from accreditation visits to veterinary schools, detailing the programmes achievement of the RCVS accreditation standards, there will be the results of thematic analysis reviews.

4. Annual monitoring

- 4.1 The RCVS asks for annual reports each autumn as standard from the schools in order to monitor registerable veterinary degree courses. This is done in accordance with Section 5(5) of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. A secure, online repository will be hosted by the RCVS where schools will be required to upload documentation relating to the accreditation standards, to allow for ongoing collection of evidence and data which can also be used to inform that accreditation process.
- 4.2 Please refer to the annual monitoring guidance for further detail on this process.
- 4.3 Annual monitoring data will be reviewed, alongside any RCVS-collated outcomes data (e.g. graduate or employer surveys), or any new risks identified during the normal cycle, and then considered by the Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee. If further action is required as a result, this will be recommended to the RCVS Education Committee, which will decide whether further evidence needs to be requested or an accreditation event needs to take place earlier in the cycle for an accredited programme.
- 4.4 Data collected through the annual monitoring will not be published, other than limited data around student numbers, which forms part of the RCVS annual report: *RCVS Facts*. The full dataset will however be available internally to other RCVS committees for consideration if required or requested.

Accreditation Event triggered by Annual monitoring process

- 4.5 In the result of further action being required as a result of the annual monitoring process, an Accreditation Event will commence, regardless of when the next event would have been scheduled to take place. The process would follow in the same way as laid out in section 3.

Accreditation Evidence

Rubric: examples

Guidance on the Accreditation Rubric

- 1) The template will be a living document, populated at each stage of the accreditation event by RCVS staff and visitors to demonstrate compliance with each standard.
- 2) Additional boxes can be added if required at each stage, where multiple forms of evidence are submitted and considered.
- 3) Generally, there would need to be multiple sources of evidence including process / outcomes evidence as appropriate in order for a standard to not be explored further in the visitation (risk-based approach).
- 4) The repository will be indexed against each standard, and schools will be able to upload new evidence each year, eg annual reports, in order to build a comprehensive longitudinal picture. This would add strength to the evidence which would be a factor in the risk analysis.
- 5) RCVS-collected data such as graduate / employer surveys will also be shared with schools, to add to their own repository.
- 6) The rubric will be considered by RCVS committees when reaching an accreditation decision.

Standard		Repository Evidence						Further evidence needed on visitation?	Visitation Evidence						Recommended Outcome		
		Type = Input, Process or Outcomes							Type – Input, Process or Outcomes						Standard Met	Partially Met	Not Met
		Supporting evidence #1	Type	Supporting evidence #2	Type	Supporting evidence #3	Type		Supporting evidence # 1	Type	Supporting evidence # 2	Type	Supporting evidence # 3	Type			
1.1	The spaces, infrastructure, physical and digital resources across the programme must provide an effective learning and teaching environment, support student welfare, and meet the needs of educators and support staff.	Student numbers broken down against lecture and seminar room capacity	Input	strategy for development / maintenance of digital and physical infrastructure	input			Yes	Tour of new facilities	outcome	discussion with staff and students to establish how the space is used and if it is fit for purpose	outcome			X		
1.2	The learning environments across the programme must ensure the health and safety of students, staff and animals and comply with all relevant jurisdictional legislation including health, safety, biosecurity and UK animal welfare and care standards.	Health and Safety Policy Biosecurity Policy Procedure for staff and student inductions to include health and safety and animal welfare	Input	Incident logs for on-site farm	Outcome	Detailed audit reports of health and safety committee meetings with actions and responses (with photo / video of new safety measures implemented)	process	No							X		
1.3	All learning environments (within the School and off-site) should be quality assured to ensure they are conducive to learning and teaching, and support the achievement of learning objectives.	Details of student facilities available at off-campus locations including mitigation of barriers to learning	Input					Yes (need process / outcomes evidence for triangulation)	Verbal feedback from students confirmed dissatisfaction of outside learning environments – poor internet connection, lack of quiet study area, dangerous practice standards	Process and outcome	Practice QA checklist not sufficient	Process	Student feedback and evaluations not yet acted upon	Outcome			X
1.4	The learning environments across all aspects of the programme must demonstrate good practice standards and promote high standards of animal husbandry and care at all times.	PSS Certification of all IMR practices (in-date)	Input	Results of School internal QA Audits	Process			No							X		

Standard		Repository Evidence						Further evidence needed on visitation?	Visitation Evidence						Recommended Outcome		
		Type = Input, Process or Outcomes							Type – Input, Process or Outcomes						Standard Met	Partially Met	Not Met
		Supporting evidence #1	Type	Supporting evidence #2	Type	Supporting evidence #3	Type		Supporting evidence # 1	Type	Supporting evidence # 2	Type	Supporting evidence # 3	Type			
4.1	The school must have a strategy for widening participation which considers all aspects of diversity, and engages students from different ethnic and social backgrounds. The school must be proactive in their marketing to attract a diverse cohort of applicants and regularly review, and provide evidence of, their progress towards targets.	Detailed admissions policy and strategy documents, the contents of which detail appropriate and ambitious targets for widening participation across relevant groups	Input	Demographic data across recent years on admissions, progression and graduation demonstrates targets on increasing diversity are being met	Outcome	Committee minutes record consistent reviews whether targets being met, and identifies action plans to improve outcomes where progress is limited	process	No							X		
4.2	The school must provide accurate and current information regarding the educational programme easily available for prospective students. The information must include the accreditation status of the degree course (whether by RCVS or other relevant accrediting bodies), selection and progression criteria, the demands of the course and the requirements for eventual registration/licence, including fitness to practise	Marketing and other information available and readily accessible, with all the necessary information included. All information is current and reviewed regularly (updated versions evident in repository)	Input					Yes (need process / outcomes evidence for triangulation)	Review of attrition data (inc. associated reasons for leaving the programme)	Outcome					X		

Standard		Repository Evidence						Further evidence needed on visitation?	Visitation Evidence						Recommended Outcome		
		Type = Input, Process or Outcomes							Type – Input, Process or Outcomes						Standard Met	Partially Met	Not Met
		Supporting evidence #1	Type	Supporting evidence #2	Type	Supporting evidence #3	Type		Supporting evidence # 1	Type	Supporting evidence # 2	Type	Supporting evidence # 3	Type			
4.3	Selection and progression criteria must be clearly defined, fair, defensible, consistent and free from discrimination or bias. The criteria should also include relevant factors other than academic performance. The academic requirements for entering the programme should be sufficient for the student to cope with the demands of the programme upon entry	Selection and progression policy and strategy documents, including rationale	Input	Data analysis on admissions, progression and attrition rates, with a focus on any trends associated with different grades / criteria at the point of selection	Outcome			No							X		
4.4	The school must demonstrate their selection and progression criteria and processes are effective in identifying students with the potential to achieve the RCVS Day One Competences. This must be achieved through regular and effective training for staff involved and the routine collection and analysis of selection and progression data, to enable them to evaluate, reflect and adjust the selection and prog	Training programme content for staff, including selection data analysis, selection methods (if appropriate) and standardisation	Input					Yes (need process / outcomes evidence for triangulation)	Longitudinal data on trends / correlations between selection criteria and progression rates	Outcome	Verbal accounts / answers from relevant staff describing process for (and example of) when criteria have been adjusted as a result of data analysis / reflection	Process & outcome			X		

Standard		Repository Evidence						Further evidence needed on visitation?	Visitation Evidence						Recommended Outcome		
		Type = Input, Process or Outcomes							Type – Input, Process or Outcomes						Standard Met	Partially Met	Not Met
		Supporting evidence #1	Type	Supporting evidence #2	Type	Supporting evidence #3	Type		Supporting evidence # 1	Type	Supporting evidence # 2	Type	Supporting evidence # 3	Type			
4.5	There must be clear policies and procedures as to how applicants with disabilities or illness will be considered and, if appropriate, accommodated on the programme, taking into account the requirement that all students must be capable of meeting the RCVS Day One Competences by the time they graduate.	Policy for admitting and supporting students with disabilities or illness	Input	Details of those students with a disability and how they are accommodated on the programme in order to meet Day One Competences.	Process	Achievement rates of students with disabilities	Outcome	No							X		