



A Survey of Employment in the UK Veterinary Profession in 2002

The findings of a survey conducted by the
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

September 2002

The Report on the 2002 Employment Survey:

This final version of the report on the Employment Survey has been prepared for general circulation, and publication on the College web site.

Please send any comments or questions to me at the RCVS.

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SURVEY OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK VETERINARY PROFESSION IN 2002:

SUMMARY

Purpose

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) commissioned surveys in 1998 and 2000 on the employment status and type of work carried out by veterinary surgeons registered with the College. The RCVS plans to commission similar surveys regularly, to provide it with a soundly-based view of the veterinary profession, and the changes taking place within it. These surveys are both expensive and time-consuming, so the need for information must be balanced against the cost of collecting it.

The changes that took place between 1998 and 2000 did not, in the view of the RCVS, justify another full-scale survey after only two years, in 2002. However, it was agreed that a survey of the main features of veterinary employment would be worthwhile, to bring the College's information up to date, and to indicate when a more detailed survey might be needed.

Method

The previous surveys were mailed to Members separately. For this smaller survey, questionnaires were sent out to all Members, currently more than 20,000, with their Retention Fee notices in January 2002. (A copy of the questionnaire is included with this report as Appendix A.) We requested that filled-in questionnaires be returned with Retention Fee payments. Since the fees were not due until March 31, this delayed the return somewhat. By 30th April, 5,917 forms were returned to the RCVS, a response of 29%. This was lower than the 49% achieved with a full survey in 2000, and lower again than the 61% achieved in 1998. This decline may illustrate a problem of frequent surveys; fatigue amongst the subjects. It also suggests that targeting a selected sample may be more effective in future.

Main Changes Since 1998 and 2000

The main change visible in any study of the veterinary profession is the feminisation of the profession, which inevitably brings with it changes on working patterns, especially in mid-career when women are more likely to be taking career breaks or working part-time. These changes can be observed across the three studies.

There are other changes taking place –notably the continuing shift away from large animal/farm practice towards small animals. This study also picks up a decline in equine practice. Working hours are also reducing, although an increase in on-call time is observed, and a reduction in holidays.

New Findings

The CPD questions (in section 4) were improved, to try to draw out more information than the questions used in 2000. They distinguished between the availability and the quality of CPD.

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1. ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Response by Membership Category

The 5,917 replies can be broken down using the answers to Question 1 into the various membership categories, and the percentages compared with those on the full database of members held at the College. Table 1 shows the comparison:

	Survey Sample	Database
Home	76%	66%
Overseas	11%	16%
Retired	13%	11%
Irish	1%	7%
Temporary	0%	0%

This shows that the response from Home Members was higher than expected, at the expense of the Irish and Overseas Members. Amongst Home Members the response was in fact 33%, higher than the average of 29% for all categories. Since UK veterinary employment is the main concern of the survey, this is probably an advantage, and in the main part of this report replies from Home Members are the only ones analysed.

It is interesting to note that this Survey had only a minor over-representation of retired Members. 20% of the respondents in the Communications Audit were retired.

Response by Gender

The breakdown of the sample by gender is compared to the database in Table 2

	Survey Sample	Database
Male	63%	64%
Female	37%	36%

This shows that the sample reflects the gender breakdown in the profession quite accurately, with female Members slightly more obliging in returning their questionnaires than the men. It is worth noting that in 2000, 33% of Members were female, and 34% of replies came from them.

2. FINDINGS BASED ON ALL VETERINARY SURGEONS REGISTERED WITH THE RCVS

Employment Status

Table 3 shows the breakdown of employment status in all classes for all vets, with the comparable figures from the 2000 survey. There is an increase in the proportion of vets in employment, both full and part-time, and a corresponding fall among the partially and fully retired.

	2002	2000
Full Time	69%	66%
Part Time	12%	11%
Unemployed	1%	1%
Career Break	3%	3%
Partially Retired	2%	4%
Fully Retired	12%	14%

Table 4 shows the outline 2002 results divided by gender, and compared to the 2000 results. The figure for "employed" includes the partially retired, and the members who identify themselves in this class has fallen sharply.

	Male		Female	
	2002	2000	2002	2000
Employed	80%	79%	89%	88%
Career Break	2%	1%	4%	6%
Fully Retired	16%	19%	4%	5%

Veterinary Surgeons employed within the profession

82.3% of the sample were working in practice, compared with 79% in 2002 and 76% in 1998. The number with more than one occupation continued to increase, to 12.5% in 2002, up from 9% in 2000 and 4% in 1998.

Table 5 shows the breakdown of some of the areas of veterinary employment other than practice, compared with the 2000 results. The differences are not great, but apart from Government they are all increases, leading to a 10% change in the total.

Table 5: Employment of veterinary surgeons in non-practice areas; 2002 compared to 2000 survey		
	2002	2000
Government	14%	15%
Universities	9%	7%
Commerce/Industry	4%	3%
Charities/Trusts	3%	2%
Total	30%	27%

Part-time employment

Table 6 shows the numbers of veterinary surgeons working part-time, male and female, in the 2000 and 2002 samples. The 2002 sample shows a definite change from the 2000 results, with the numbers of men working part-time sharply up, and the numbers of women down.

Table 6: Part-time employment of veterinary surgeons by gender: 2002 compared to 2000 survey				
	Male		Female	
	2002	2000	2002	2000
All part-time	9.5%	5%	23.9%	30%
20-39 hours	5.7%	3%	14.1%	18%
Less than 20	3.8%	2%	9.8%	12%

All part-time comparisons have changed in a similar way; in 2000 37% of women aged 31-40 worked part-time, but in 2002 this had fallen to 30%. In 2000 this group made up 41% of all veterinary surgeons working part-time, but in 2002 this had fallen to 35%. However women are still more likely to be working part-time than men; 63% of all part-timers were women (recall they make up 36% of the profession).

Unemployment

In the 2002 sample, 1.1% of women veterinary surgeons available for work were unemployed, the same as in 2000. 1.3% of the corresponding group of men were unemployed, up from 0.5% in 2000. The numbers are so small that it would not be safe to draw any strong conclusions from the changes, though both figures show that unemployment remains a minor issue for veterinary surgeons.

Career Breaks

The 2002 sample shows differences from 2000 here as well. 4.3% of female veterinary surgeons potentially available for work were taking a career break, compared to 7% in 2000. 2.3% of men were taking a break, compared to 1.3% in 2000. 5.4% of women in their thirties were taking a career break, down from 8.4% in 2000. In all, women made of 56% of those taking a break, also down from 76% in 2000.

Retirement

Table 7 shows the breakdown of partly and fully retired veterinary surgeons, in total and by gender. The feminisation of the profession is relatively recent, and men make up a disproportionate part of the partially and fully retired.

Table 7: Retired veterinary surgeons, in total and by gender, 2002			
	All	Male	Female
All retired	13.9%	19.1%	5.0%
Partially Retired	2.0%	16.4%	4.3%
Fully Retired	11.9%	2.7%	0.7%

In fact, a lower proportion (73.5%) of male veterinary surgeons over 60 have retired partially or fully than female veterinary surgeons (84.0%) of the same age.

3. FINDINGS RELATING TO VETERINARY SURGEONS BASED IN THE UK

Introductory Note

The findings in this section relate only to the Home Members in the sample. These number 4 504 out of the 5 917 who replied (about 76%).

Age and Gender

In the sample, 38% of the full-time working veterinary surgeons were women, compared to 32% in the 2000 survey. In full-time practice, 38.6% of the veterinary surgeons were women, up from 34% in 2000.

Women in full-time practice aged between 20-29 make up 22.0% of the total, and outnumber men of the same age who are 20.6% of the total.

Employment Sector

Table 8 shows the summarised numbers of veterinary surgeons by sector of employment for the 2002 and 2000 surveys. In both cases, there is an 8% overlap caused by veterinary surgeons working in more than one area. 9.9% worked for DEFRA or its equivalents, similar to the 10% who worked for MAFF and its equivalents in 2000.

	2002	2000
All practice	80%	81%
Government	13%	14%
University	8%	5%
Commerce/Industry	4%	3%
Charities/Trusts	3%	3%
Other	0%	2%

In 2002, 6% of veterinary surgeons stated that they worked only in a specialist or referral practice. In 2000 the figure was 3%.

Position in Practice:

Table 9 shows the position of the veterinary surgeons in the practice where they worked. 35% were principals or partners, but this proportion is known to increase with the age group, though less for female veterinary surgeons than for men.

Principal	14%
Partner	24%
Full-time Assistant	43%
Part-time Assistant	11%
Locum	9%

Table 10 shows the differences between men and women veterinary surgeons in their 30s and 40s. It repeats the conclusion from the 2000 survey that men are more likely than women to become principals or partners in a practice. The apparent decline in the number of women between 2000 and 2002 may be an artefact caused by a small sample, rather than a genuine effect, but the lower number of women is correct.

	Male		Female	
	2002	2000	2002	2000
Age 30-39	63%	60%	23%	29%
Age 40-49	87%	87%	46%	63%

Hours Worked

The average hours worked across all categories of employment was 46 hours, compared to 47 hours in 2000 and 48 hours in 1998. Veterinary surgeons in practice worked on average 43.3 hours per week, but if part-timers are left out of the calculation, this increases to 51.6 hours per week. Full-timers were on call for an average of 27.3 hours per week, which was higher than the 23 hours per week recorded in 2000.

Time spent in Practice on Various Activities

Table 11 shows the percentages of time spent on different animals and activities by general practitioners.

	2002	2000	1998
Small Animals	73.5%	68%	66%
Horses	8.4%	9%	11%
Cattle	7.5%	9%	14%
Sheep	1.3%	2%	4%
Pigs	0.4%	1%	2%
Poultry	0.2%	0%	0.3%
Exotics	1.0%	1%	-
Meat Hygiene	1.1%	1%	1%
Fish	0.1%	0%	-
LVI	2.7%	2%	-
Practice Mgmt	3.0%	6%	-
Other	0.4%	1%	1%

These figures continue to show the trends set between 1998 and 2000. The time spent on small animals has continued to climb, to 73.5%, and the figure for cattle is even lower, at 7.5% compared to 9% in 2000 and 14% in 1998. Other figures are also lower, notably equine, which was 9% in 2000.

Note: future surveys should consider adopting a different definition of exotics – the current version led to a number of aggrieved telephone calls.

4. CPD QUESTIONS

Introductory Note:

The analysis supporting this was carried out only on Home Members, since they were the only ones whose responses were almost certainly relevant in this context.

Days Away from Work on CPD and Other Activities

Table 12 shows the average number of days spent away from work by veterinary surgeons undertaking various activities, with 2000 figures for comparison.

	2002	2000
Contributing to CPD	1.3	na
Undertaking CPD	5.6	5
Holiday	19.8	23
Veterinary politics	0.7	0.5
Other	1.2	na

The reduction in holidays is a little strange, but the figures for CPD and veterinary politics are very similar to those from the 2000 survey.

Satisfaction with availability and quality of CPD

Table 13 shows the views of respondents on the availability and quality and relevance of CPD. Both of these are high, although availability clearly causes more concern than the quality and relevance.

	Availability	Quality and relevance
Very Satisfied	12.1%	17.8%
Satisfied	66.4%	72.5%
Disappointed	19.5%	8.5%
Needs not met at all	2.9%	1.1%

There are no directly comparable figures for 2000, but table 14 shows the opinions of CPD given in the 2000 survey (Veterinary Surgeons' Opinions of CPD in their own field). This was a rather more vague question than the two asked in 2002, but there has evidently been an improvement, most marked in quality and relevance.

Good	11%
Adequate	44%
Poor	37%
No opinion	8%

Means of Undertaking CPD

Table 15 shows the average take-up of the methods used by veterinary surgeons to undertake CPD.

Courses and Conferences	64%
Computer or distance learning	4%
Reading	32%

Course and conferences are by far the most popular, but there appears to be a very poor take-up of computer based and distance learning programmes.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

RCVS VETERINARY EMPLOYMENT SURVEY 2002

Q1a) What is your Membership class?

Home Overseas Retired Irish Temporary

Q1b) What is your age group?

20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60+

Q1c) Gender?

Male Female

Q2) What is your current employment status (veterinary or non-veterinary):

Full-time Part-time (20-39 hours per week) Part-time (less than 20 hours per week)

Unemployed Taking a career break Partially retired

Fully retired

Q3) If in full-time or part-time employment are you working?

Within the profession Outside the profession

Q4) If employed outside the profession what is your type of work?

Write in: _____

Q5) If employed within the profession what is your type of work? Tick *all* that apply.

In practice: General/first opinion practice Specialist/referral practice/consultancy

DEFRA or equivalent: England Scotland (including SAC)
Wales Northern Ireland

Other Government: Ministry of Defence Food Standards Agency
Home Office Overseas Government

University: Veterinary School Other

Other Organisations: Commerce and industry Charities and trusts
Research councils

Q6) What are your total weekly hours worked and on call?

Hours worked Hours on call

Q7) If you are in practice what is your position?

- Sole principal
- Partner or director (if limited company)
- Full-time assistant (or employees of limited company)
- Part-time assistant (or employees of limited company)
- Locum
- Other (write in) _____

Q8) If you are in practice, please indicate the percentage of your working time during an average week which is spent in the following areas:

	%
Small animals (household pets excluding exotics)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horses (excluding LVI)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cattle (excluding LVI)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sheep (excluding LVI)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pigs (excluding LVI)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poultry	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exotics*	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meat hygiene	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fish for food	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Veterinary Inspector (LVI)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practice Management/Admin	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (write in) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total	100%

What is your primary area of interest (e.g) anaesthesia, radiology etc)

***Exotics are animals that are more likely to be known as living wild in another climate than as household pets in the UK. Snakes and iguanas would be considered exotics but not rabbits, budgerigars or tortoises.**

Q9) How many days a year do you spend away from work e.g. on Continuing Professional Development (CPD), on holiday or on veterinary politics (if none please write in 0)

- Contributing to, or providing CPD for others Undertaking CPD Holiday
- Veterinary politics Other (write in) _____

Q10) When undertaking CPD, how satisfied have you been with:

a) availability of courses in terms of frequency and location?

Very satisfied Satisfied Disappointed My needs were not met at all

b) quality and relevance of course content to your needs?

Very satisfied Satisfied Disappointed My needs were not met at all

Q11) What % of your CPD has been undertaken by the following means:

Attending courses or conferences

Computer based / distance learning programmes

Reading professional and/or academic journals

Please return this form in the envelope with your retention fee.