

RCVS NEWS

A SPECIAL REPORT FROM THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS

AUGUST 2009



Holiday reading? Send us a postcard...

Just in case you are short of summer holiday reading, we have some suggestions. Four separate RCVS consultations are currently open for your comments, on veterinary legislation, Extra-Mural Studies (EMS), veterinary nursing qualifications and the Practice Standards Scheme.

Each has been publicised in the media and *RCVS News*, and on RCVSonline; in addition, stakeholder organisations have been informed directly. But we know you are all busy people and it's hard to keep track of what's going on in veterinary politics, so this special issue of *RCVS News Extra*, which summarises all four consultations, aims to help you plan your holiday reading... and don't forget to send us a postcard (or better still, an email) with your views: they do matter.



Four chances to have your say

Consultations are open: we want your views



The veterinary profession is constantly evolving and moving forward. Change is currently upon us in several key areas: veterinary legislation, EMS, practice standards and veterinary nursing qualifications. But development can only be successful if everyone is behind it. I am therefore delighted to be writing with details of four current consultations and inviting your comments and views.

The reports and proposals to be considered represent the culmination of a considerable amount of hard work by a variety of working parties, groups and bodies, and I am grateful to their various members for their hard work and commitment. Some of you may have been following developments on RCVSonline, where many committee papers are now available. For others, this may be the first time you have engaged with the issues: we welcome comments from all interested parties.

“The topics considered by these consultations are tough nuts to crack – particularly veterinary legislation, which lies at the heart of everything that we do.”

Environmental impact

Over the years, we have issued consultations on a variety of subjects. In the past, we would have issued a paper copy of the full consultation to all members and, in some cases, all veterinary nurses. The print run, of what can often be lengthy documents, often hit 30,000 – that’s a lot of paper and a lot of postage. This time around, the consultation paperwork is available online, with hard copies on request – the contact details are listed on the following pages. We hope that this will not only save money, but also help to reduce our carbon footprint.

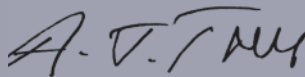
In addition to writing in this way to all members and listed/registered veterinary nurses, we have also contacted the relevant veterinary and veterinary nursing organisations and other stakeholder groups. If you are a member of any of these groups, you may prefer to feed your comments to them, or you are welcome to contact us directly. Please also pass this document on to other members of your practice team who might be in a position to contribute, for example, your practice manager may have useful input to the Practice Standards Scheme review or on EMS.

Publication of responses

It’s perhaps worth pointing out that copies of the responses received may be made available publicly at the end of the consultation period, and the information they contain may also be published in a summary of responses. If you do not consent to this, please make clear that your response is to be treated as confidential. You should also be aware that we may be required to communicate information to third parties on request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Speak up!

The topics considered by these consultations are tough nuts to crack – particularly veterinary legislation, which lies at the heart of everything that we do. The changes we make over the coming months could affect each and every one of you, so please do spare the time – whether it’s on the beach or from your busy practice lives – to give us your views. They will be heard and your input will make a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. D. TREES'.

**Professor Sandy Trees
President**

Veterinary Surgeons Act

Do you agree with Council's priorities for change?

The Veterinary Surgeons Act has hit middle age – and it no longer allows us to keep up with modern expectations. Where do we go from here?

We take our statutory powers from the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (VSA). It has long been recognised by Council that it is out of date and does not allow us to regulate the profession in a way that is in keeping with what might be expected by society.

In 2005, following earlier consultations, RCVS Council called for extensive changes to the arrangements for regulating both veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. Last year, however, in response to a review of the VSA by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, the Government made clear that it had no plans to bring forward amending legislation for the time being.

A Veterinary Legislation Group was set up by Council last summer, under the chairmanship of Professor Stuart Reid, to look afresh at priorities for change and how they might be implemented. The Group included veterinary surgeons, a veterinary nurse and lay people. A representative of the British Veterinary Association attended as an observer.

New priorities

The Group developed a report which considered recommendations for more limited changes to the Act, focusing on three priority areas:

- The composition of the Preliminary Investigation and Disciplinary Committees
- The jurisdiction and powers of the two committees
- The composition of Council itself

The report was considered by Council in June, which agreed that views be sought on the suitability of these proposals.

Veterinary nurses

We remain committed to achieving statutory regulation for veterinary nurses. We believe that veterinary nursing should be formally recognised as a profession and veterinary nurses should be subject to statutory regulation on the same lines as veterinary surgeons. The Veterinary Legislation Group has not, however, recommended including this in the shortlist of proposals for changes to the VSA, for two reasons:

- The necessary legislation will be substantial
- The Veterinary Nurses Council has already taken the right steps to prepare the ground by setting up the Register of Veterinary Nurses under powers in the Royal Charter. A new profession will normally only be recognised and made subject to statutory regulation when voluntary arrangements are well-established

In addition to hearing views on these proposals from veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, we will also be seeking input from groups representing animal owners and keepers.



Who should respond?	Veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, interested bodies and the public
How to take part	A consultation paper is online at www.rcvs.org.uk/consultations Hard copies are available from Jeff Gill, Policy Officer: j.gill@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0735
Deadline	21 October 2009
What next?	Responses will be considered by Council at its November meeting

Practice Standards

Do the proposed new Standards represent better practice?

It's five years old now, and standing firmly on its feet – but the Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) is not complacent. The standards have been scrutinised to ensure they remain relevant and achievable.

When the Scheme was launched in 2005, a commitment was made that the standards would not change for five years, unless new legislation (such as the Veterinary Medicines Regulations) required it. Membership of the Scheme continues to grow: we have had 126 applications to join the Scheme in the first six months of this year, representing 264 premises, compared with 61 applications in the whole of last year. There are currently 2,351 practice premises under the ambit of the Scheme – approximately 50%.

The Practice Standards Group, chaired by Jill Nute and comprising representatives from all of the key veterinary and veterinary nursing organisations, is now keen to update the standards.

“Greater emphasis has been placed on clinical outcomes and training.”

Detailed review

Following a painstaking process – the Group has met eight times to consider the changes – proposals have been made for new standards to be implemented during 2010. The objective is to ensure that they remain relevant to current veterinary practice. However, it is unlikely that any already-accredited practices will be required to

invest in additional facilities or equipment to meet the new standards. Instead, greater emphasis has been placed on clinical outcomes and training, for example, the introduction of performance review for all clinical staff (which includes the Professional Development Phase for new graduates).

A restriction on the appointment of a PSS Inspector to an initial five-year term, with application to be made for further appointments, is also proposed, together with an on-site review of inspectors by a member of the Practice Standards Review Group or a Senior Inspector.

No more tiers

The Group recommends that the ‘tiers’ should be dropped. The categories will retain their descriptive names, for example, Small Animal General Practice or Equine Veterinary Hospital. Feedback suggests that clients,

and the profession, found the tiers (one, two or three) to be misleading.

We have revamped the layout of the Manual, to include guidance that was previously available online. Guidance for each relevant standard can now be seen at a glance. There is also an icon to indicate if documentary evidence will be required.

In addition, the new format clarifies the derivation of each standard, so that legislative requirements are distinguished from those required under the *RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct* and those indicated by better practice.

We would welcome all views on the proposals.



Who should respond?	Any member of the practice team, whether from an accredited practice or not
How to take part	The draft new Manual is online at www.rcvs.org.uk/consultations Hard copies are available from Eleanor Ferguson, Practice Standards Scheme Manager: e.ferguson@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0720
Deadline	31 August 2009
What next?	Responses will be considered by the Practice Standards Group at its 3 September meeting and thereafter by Council in November

Veterinary nursing awards

How can we make the system more user-friendly?

The expiration of our veterinary nursing awards accreditation next year has provided us with an exciting opportunity for review.

This timing coincides with the introduction of a new national framework for qualifications, the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). This gives us a unique opportunity to address many of the concerns expressed about training by practices, and, in particular, the heavy and expensive burden of practical teaching and assessment that NVQ awards entail. As now, qualifications will continue to address Lantra's National Occupational Standards (NOS) in veterinary nursing, which are themselves under review.

Easing the red tape

The new QCF aims to provide a more user-friendly and flexible system. Under the new arrangements, all qualifications will be built from units held on a national database and all units (and qualifications) will carry a value in terms of their level and the volume of learning involved. Qualifications no longer have to comply with set types, such as NVQs for work-based learning, giving far more flexibility in terms of what needs to be learned and/or assessed practically in the workplace, and what can perhaps be learned and assessed in the college environment. This could allow practices to concentrate on providing quality mentorship and work experience, with less emphasis on assessment and all the paperwork which that entails.

Encouraging students

The demand for qualified VNs has been rising steadily for several years and there is substantial evidence to suggest that employers find it hard to fill posts. However, the number of students in training has barely changed in the last ten years. We need to ensure that significantly more students can enter training and be supported in clinical learning. In order to do this, we need to make it easier, and cheaper, for practices to support the clinical training of VNs.

“We need to ensure that significantly more students can enter training.”

Could a larger proportion of VN training and education be provided within full-time further education? This would be possible now that the lower age-limit for students has been dropped, and would enable colleges to recruit direct from the school-leaver population.

We are keen to hear the views of those involved in the delivery of training, and employers of qualified nurses, on the range and level of knowledge and skills delivered by the current awards, the impact of training on employers of student VNs, meeting the increased demand for qualified VNs, and providing VNs for mixed or equine practices.



Who should respond?	Anyone involved in VN training, including training practices, colleges, centres and VNs
How to take part	A consultation paper is online at www.rcvs.org.uk/consultations Hard copies are available from the Veterinary Nursing Department: vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0788
Deadline	15 September 2009
What next?	Responses will be considered by the RCVS Awarding Body at its next meeting, and thereafter by the Veterinary Nurses Council in October

Extra-Mural Studies

How can we enhance its value and relevance?

All of the vets reading this who graduated in the AUK will have undergone some form of Extra-Mural Studies (EMS). The requirement has been around for over 70 years. But is it still relevant?

Although EMS has played an important role in undergraduate veterinary education for many decades, recent changes in the structure of undergraduate degree courses, coupled with increasing financial pressures on students, mean that the system needs to be reconsidered to ensure it remains relevant and valid.

“EMS has played an important role in undergraduate veterinary education for many decades.”

Through a Working Party chaired by Dr Barry Johnson, we invited views on EMS earlier this year and, during April, held four days of meetings with a wide range of veterinary associations, individuals and the universities before developing proposals which were put before our Education Policy and Specialisation Committee in May. These proposals are now available for consultation before final recommendations are put to Committees and Council in the autumn.

Key recommendations

The Working Party felt that the general aims and time spent on EMS remained valid and it made recommendations for improving its efficacy, relevance and flexibility.

Key proposals include:

- The need for better communication between all parties involved in EMS – the vet schools, the practices and the students
- Students must take responsibility for their EMS learning
- Universities should ensure students' records are monitored effectively
- Recording systems should be developed across universities
- Some parts of courses may be designated 'long course' so students can access increased loans
- Practices should carry out entry and exit interviews with students
- Students should be allowed more flexibility in their choice of EMS placements
- Students should spend more time in a 'base' practice
- Because of its importance, abattoir experience should be moved out of EMS and become, instead, part of the core curriculum

Involvement

EMS touches on nearly everyone in the veterinary profession – from those involved with delivering and receiving EMS, through those co-ordinating it at the universities, to those employers who benefit from new graduates with a solid basis in 'real practice'. We would be delighted to hear views on the proposals from everyone involved, so that we can ensure EMS continues to play a vital role in the development of a strong veterinary team for the future.

Who should respond?	Veterinary surgeons, educators, students and recent graduates
How to take part	A consultation paper is online at www.rcvs.org.uk/consultations Hard copies are available from the Education Department: education@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0791
Deadline	4 September 2009
What next?	Responses will be considered by the Education Policy and Specialisation Committee at its October meeting, and thereafter by Council in November



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