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Not just a lick of paint

New corporate identity and website

After a gestation period to rival an elephant’s, we have launched our new website (www.rcvs.org.uk). It has a lot of new features, but also a new look. In fact it, and the *RCVS News* you hold in your hands, are the first fruits of our identity overhaul.

Changing an identity is about more than just a lick of paint. When an organisation has made the decision to change, it has to do a bit of soul-searching first. The logo is a very visible element, and it needs to be right, but a review of corporate identity goes deeper than this.

To communicate effectively, an organisation must be clear about what it stands for and ‘who it is’. Even when, as in our case, the majority of activities are prescribed by law, answering these basic questions is easier said than done.

So, before thinking about change, it was important to understand what people thought about us. We carried out research among vets, veterinary nurses, animal owners and other stakeholders. Were we surprised by the results? Not entirely, but in some key places, yes.

We knew that people found our role confusing. Veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses feel we ought to represent their professions: members of the public fear we do. In fact, representation is the role of the British Veterinary Association or British Veterinary Nursing Association.

More surprising were the negative connotations of the strapline we have been using for the last ten years: ‘Promoting and sustaining public confidence in veterinary medicine’. Animal owners described it as “clinical and arrogant”, “too politically correct” and even “unnerving”.

Furthermore, the Royal College name does not help to convey our regulatory function.

We can’t change our name, but we have switched to a new strapline – **‘Setting veterinary standards’** – which we hope will leave people in no doubt as to our regulatory role. It also describes our Charter activities, such as setting standards for practices, veterinary nurses and postgraduate education.

The new identity feels modern but, through its use of a shield device, maintains a link with our long history. It was described by veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses who helped to develop the brand as “simple, clear and clean, with a strong message” and “modern and approachable” – reflecting key principles of the College.

Turn to page 8 for an overview of the principles that underpin our new approach, plus a guided tour of our new website.

Council switch-round

New university appointees



There have been some changes to the university-appointed membership of RCVS Council, following Professor Quintin McKellar's move from Principal of the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) to become Vice-Chancellor at the University of Hertfordshire, and Professor Malcolm Bennett's standing down as a University of Liverpool appointee.

Professor Stuart Reid, formerly a University of Glasgow-appointed Council member, has become Principal of the RVC and fills the seat vacated by Professor McKellar. Replacing Professor Reid for Glasgow is the acting head of the veterinary school, Professor Ewan Cameron (pictured).

Professor Susan Dawson (pictured), new Head of the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Liverpool, replaces Professor Bennett.

Registrar Jane Hern said: "I would like to thank Professors McKellar and Bennett for their contributions to the work of the RCVS, and to welcome on board our new Council members."

Twelve of the 40 seats on RCVS Council are filled by university appointment, with two seats allotted to each university with an approved veterinary degree (the University of Nottingham would be granted seats upon its degree gaining approval). These members currently include one veterinary nurse and four lay people.

Feeling benevolent? Vote!

Election charity is Veterinary Benevolent Fund

The RCVS and VN Council elections are now open and, as last year, for each vet and VN who uses his or her vote, we will contribute 20 pence to charity. This year, our chosen charity is the Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF), which supports veterinary surgeons, nurses and their families who may be facing health, financial or similar difficulties (www.vetlife.org.uk).

If you do not wish a contribution to be made on your behalf, please 'opt out': details of how to do this can be found in the election issue of *RCVS News Extra* which, together with ballot papers, is enclosed in this mailing for those eligible to vote. If any of these papers is not enclosed, please contact Ian Holloway (i.holloway@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0727).

"Those on RCVS and VN Council may not represent their professions directly, but they are a reflection of them," says Jane Hern, RCVS Registrar. "Veterinary surgery and nursing are professions that regulate themselves, so it's up to their members to vote on who should do that on their behalf."

There will be opportunity to quiz all candidates online on vetsurgeon.org and vetnurse.co.uk, as appropriate. Please bear in mind that candidates are busy people – so may not respond immediately – and keep your questions courteous and succinct.

As previously, votes can be cast online, by post or by SMS text from a mobile phone, and must be received before 5pm on 27 April 2011 – a slightly earlier

deadline than normal, which takes account of the extra public holiday for the Royal Wedding.

This year there are 10 candidates for the six seats available on RCVS Council, and four candidates for three seats on VN Council. Normally, all seats are for four-year terms, however, as one of the VN seats has become vacant due to a member retiring mid-term, the veterinary nurse with the third largest number of votes will sit for one year only.

To ensure proper independence from the RCVS, the election process will again be managed by Electoral Reform Services.



A memo for Europe

New agreement between RCVS and ACOVENE

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed to affiliate the RCVS with ACOVENE (the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education), the body that accredits veterinary nurse education programmes in the EU.

ACOVENE was established to allow greater movement of trained veterinary nurses within Europe by quality-assuring veterinary nursing training programmes and their delivery across the continent. It has nine accredited schools and one application in progress, and is actively supported by the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA).

Under the terms of the arrangement, any establishment accredited to offer VN training by the RCVS will be considered an affiliate

member of ACOVENE – it's a tribute to the high standards maintained by the College and its Awarding Body.

An annual quality-assurance visit will be undertaken to one of the UK's 50 centres, but there will be no fee to the centre for this. As a consequence of the

new agreement, the RCVS will also take a permanent seat on the ACOVENE Board.

RCVS-approved centres are now able to use the ACOVENE logo on their stationery, promotional materials and certificates. For more information, contact vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk.



Jacqui Molyneux elected JVP

New Junior Vice-President: communication with the silent majority a priority

Mrs Jacqui Molyneux was elected Junior Vice-President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons at the March meeting of RCVS Council. She was uncontested and is due to take up office on RCVS Day on 1 July 2011.

After graduating in 1981 from the University of Bristol, Jacqui started her career in small animal practice in Liverpool, under the watchful eye of Don Hight. Following her husband's promotion, she then moved to the North East where she set up her own practice in a small mining town near Consett. This practice, which was rebuilt in 1997, was accredited as a Veterinary Hospital in 2002, and became part of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme four years later.

Jacqui obtained her Certificate in Small Animal Surgery in 2000 and is currently studying for a Masters in Clinical Oncology with the University of Birmingham. Throughout the last decade, she has become increasingly interested in veterinary politics and was invited to join the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons' (SPVS) Council in 2000. Her enthusiastic involvement in all aspects of the Society's activities culminated in her current role as SPVS President.

Jacqui was elected to RCVS Council in 2005 and served for four years on the Disciplinary

Committee, as well as chairing the Small Animal Surgery Certificate Board and serving on VN Council, becoming its Vice-Chairman in 2007.

“Communication with the profession will be a priority, not for the vocal minority, but with the silent majority.”

She has also chaired the RCVS Awarding Body Board since 2009, which undertook a review of the VN training system, and, after prolonged consultation with the profession, launched the new Diploma in Veterinary Nursing last September. Jacqui remarked that this new system so far seems to be encouraging more students and more practices to get involved with VN training, which in the medium term will enable every small animal practice to have a veterinary nurse as part of their professional team.

Commenting on her election, Jacqui said: “As I have become more and more involved with the RCVS and the work of its committees, I am amazed at the amount of work being done behind the scenes by both Council members and the RCVS staff. It's sad that many of the profession live



in fear of the RCVS as they are only aware of its regulatory function.

“While I serve on the Officer team, communication with the profession will be a priority, not for the vocal minority, but with the silent majority who have no idea of the breadth of the work that the RCVS undertakes each year,” she added.

Independence day draws nearer

Work goes ahead on legislative reform order

The planned changes to the RCVS Preliminary Investigation and Disciplinary Committees are moving ahead. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has formally launched a project to prepare a legislative reform order amending the Veterinary Surgeons Act, and the College is represented on the Project Board by the President and the Registrar.

The legislative reform order, to be made under the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006, will change Schedule 2 to the Veterinary Surgeons Act. Currently the Schedule says that both the Committees must be made up entirely of members of the RCVS Council. If Parliament agrees, this will be changed so that, following a transitional period, Council members will cease to sit on the Committees. Instead, they will be made up of external veterinary surgeons and lay members appointed by the RCVS Council. The appointments process will follow what is now standard practice for public appointments, with open advertisement and a transparent procedure. The new arrangements will mean that members of the Committees are seen to be independent of the RCVS Council and not involved in its policy debates. There will also be more flexibility to deploy whatever number of Committee members is needed in order to handle the workload.

The next step will be public consultation in the spring on the contents of the legislative reform order. When the outcome of the consultation has been reported to the Minister, Jim Paice MP, it is hoped that he will give the go-ahead to place the order before Parliament for approval in the autumn.

Golden jubilee award

VN Council celebrates outstanding achievement

Do you know someone who has made an outstanding contribution to veterinary nursing? To mark the 50th anniversary of the VN qualification being established, VN Council has launched a new jubilee award to recognise either an exceptional contribution to the development of veterinary nursing and/ or a positive contribution to animal welfare.

VN Council strongly felt that the award should be accessible to a wide spectrum of veterinary nurses, so nominees could come from those veterinary nurses involved in clinical practice, research, teaching or politics – in fact, any aspect of veterinary nursing.

The award will be presented at RCVS Day in London, on 1 July 2011.

Nominations should be received by 1 May, and more information, together with the nomination form, can be found online at www.rcvs.org.uk/VNat50.

- For more news about our 50th celebrations, turn to the Communications and Events pages



Pet promotion

Promoting responsible pet ownership is a key aim of National Pet Month (NPM), and one that fits neatly with veterinary surgeons' and VNs' *Guide* commitments.

This year NPM runs from 2 April to 2 May, and asks veterinary practices to host events around NPM themes and raise money for charities, including the RCVS Trust. For more information – and a free event pack – visit www.nationalpetmonth.org.uk.

Premises fees due

The Register of Veterinary Practice Premises (RVPP) fees are due by 1 April 2011. The fee is set in the Veterinary Medicines Regulations at £40. Initially, the fee was to be reviewed after three years (the RVPP became effective in 2009), but the 2010 regulations were delayed and are currently being made by Defra, so there has been no opportunity for the College to input as the consultation has closed. The next review when the fee can be considered will take place in 2012, to take effect in 2013.

Student round-up

Thirty-one new training practices (TPs), including eight auxiliary training practices (aTPs), have been approved this year, bringing to 1,559 the number of practices where veterinary nurse students can train. Over the twelve months prior to February, 1,168 new student VNs enrolled on the new Level 3 Diploma, compared to 1,121 onto the old award over the same period last year. By March, we'd issued log-ins to the Nursing Progress Log to 1,800 students, both new and those with a Level 2 NVQ qualification transitioning to complete their training.

Early bird catches the news

This issue of *RCVS News* brings you updates from our 3 March Council meeting. But if you are one of the 440 people who follow us on Twitter, it's all old news to you!

We launched our Twitter account (@RCVS_UK) in September last year, and since then have been tweeting two or three times a week with news and updates on College activities. It's where you will hear the news first, so why not follow us today? We look forward to hearing from you.

The Trust has also recently joined the twittersphere, so while you're in the tweeting mood, follow them too, on @RCVSTrust.



Report uncovers pet welfare deficit

Comprehensive PDSA report shows significant issues



PDSA Director of Veterinary Services, Richard Hooker at the launch of the PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2011

The health and welfare needs of over ten million cats, dogs and rabbits across the UK are not being properly met, according to a new report from the PDSA.

In the PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report, over 11,000 owners were 'scored' (out of a possible 100) on how well they were looking after their pets, according to the five welfare needs defined by the Animal Welfare Act (environment, diet, behaviour, companionship and health). Owners scored an average of 63 out of a possible 100, which, according to the PDSA, highlights a significant need for improvement in certain areas of animal health and welfare.

“Our report reveals that there is much work to do to raise awareness of what pets need to live healthy and happy lives.”

The report looked specifically at cats, dogs and rabbits, and estimated that around five million cats, four million dogs, and over 700,000 rabbits could be suffering, mentally and physically, because they are not receiving all the essential health and welfare requirements necessary for their happiness and wellbeing.

Speaking at the launch of the report, PDSA Director of Veterinary Services, and member of

RCVS VN Council, Richard Hooker, said: “Nationally, the overall awareness of the existence of the Animal Welfare Act is just 45%. The Act outlines the five basic and guiding principles designed to safeguard the wellbeing of pets and the fact that so many owners are not familiar with it is extremely worrying. Our report reveals that there is much work to do to raise awareness of what pets need to live healthy and happy lives.”

On a more positive note, the number of cats and dogs registered with veterinary surgeons seems to be reasonably high: 83% of cat owners and 90% of dog owners said their pet was registered. Rabbits fared less well, with only 56% of rabbit owners saying their pet was registered with a vet.

Commenting on the report, RCVS President Peter Jinman said: “The PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report is an excellent initiative. The Animal Welfare Act was a landmark piece of legislation but evaluating its impact on the way people care for their animals is critical to an understanding of its success. I would urge others to assist PDSA in refining its PAW Report, so that resources can be focused on achieving continued improvement in companion animal health and welfare.”

The report, which contains tips and advice on meeting the five welfare needs that your clients may find useful, can be downloaded from:

www.pdsa.org.uk/pawreport.

Need to know: new registration requirements

How to ensure you renew your registration correctly

The new registration regulations approved in November 2010 by the Privy Council apply to all veterinary surgeons. To remain on the Register, as well as paying the retention fee, veterinary surgeons must renew their registration annually. Retention fees are due each year on or before 31 March, and registration details need to be confirmed by 30 September.

You may find it simplest to confirm your registration details alongside paying your retention fees, and we will send a form with your fee-reminder. Using our new website, you can also now pay fees and renew your registration online (although initially you will need to notify the RCVS if your Register entry needs changing, in due course you will be able to make certain changes online yourself).

The renewal form is pre-filled with your Register entry details, which you need to check are correct. This information is public; we are legally required to publish it in the Register and vets are obliged to keep it up to date.

Please make sure that your Register address is where you work. This can be a PO Box number; however, it is now a registration requirement that workplace addresses should ordinarily be used for the Register. If for some reason you don't have a

work address, for example, if you are a locum, then you can ask to use an alternative. You can also add and update any optional, additional addresses, emails and telephone numbers you'd like us to use to contact you, and which we do not publish or pass on to others.

The renewal form also contains a confirmation that your continuing professional development (CPD) is up to date.

Pay online

Alternatively, you can now pay your retention fees, confirm your CPD is up to date and your Register entry correct, online. Visit www.rcvs.org.uk, and use the instructions issued with your annual renewal notice.

If your Register details need amending, you will be asked to confirm this and return the form or email us about the changes, but can still pay your retention fees and confirm your CPD online.

We will send reminders to all those who do not renew their registration or pay their fees on time. Further reminders will be sent before the 30 September deadline to those who have paid but not completed their annual renewal confirmation of Register entry. After this date, we may remove veterinary surgeons who have not complied with

this regulation. Those who do not pay their retention fees will also be removed, as in previous years, on or after 1 June. Please note that from this year, fees received after 31 March will be subject to a late payment penalty of £35.

These registration regulations were agreed by RCVS Council in June 2010 (see *RCVS News*, June edition, page 3, and November, page 7), and subsequently approved by the Privy Council.

In June last year, RCVS and VN Councils each agreed to raise registration and retention fees for the financial year 2011-12 by 2%.

Veterinary surgeons' retention fees are as follows:

Veterinary surgeons' fees 2011-12	(£)
Home-practising retention fee	299
Overseas-practising retention fee	150
Non-practising retention fee	49
Restoration fee	299
Restoration fee following voluntary removal	76

If you have any questions about your Register entry, retention fee payments or renewing your registration, please contact the Registration Department (registration@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0707).

More elbow room

Refurbishment makes Belgravia House work harder

Visitors to Belgravia House may have noticed the works going on to convert the basement. This work is almost complete, and what was some 1,908 square feet of basement storage space has been transformed into two meeting rooms, a small office, a first-aid/staff-room, loos, an IT room, and some secure on-site book storage for the Trust Library.

The larger of the meeting rooms is fitted with videoconferencing equipment, and the smaller set up so that such equipment can be brought in when needed. Not only will this save time and travel costs, but it fits with our wider 'green' strategy.

These extra facilities are badly needed by RCVS Council members and staff, due to the increasing demands of Disciplinary Committee (DC) hearings, up from 14 days of listings in 2005, to 47 days last year. These hearings occupy two floors of the building, and the consequent lack of meeting space has been a particular problem for the Preliminary Investigation Committee, whose workload links to that of the DC.

"These benefits are substantial," says Bradley Viner, RCVS Treasurer. "For a start, it will cut to near zero our need to hire local meeting facilities, which, at a room-only cost of around £400 per day,

will be a considerable saving. Our limited room availability also created calendar difficulties for Council members, many of whom work hard to fit their RCVS commitments around their day jobs."

As works progressed, the project evolved to respond to new legislation (for example, which required us to fit hearing loops), and issues

uncovered when the library stacks that previously filled the space had been moved.

By, in effect, creating an extra floor for the building, we have given Belgravia House a new lease of life. With increased capacity in terms of communications technology, facilities and meeting space, it should meet our needs for the foreseeable future.



"We have given Belgravia House a new lease of life."

New look reflects desire for clarity

What's behind our new brand

If you read publications from the front, you will have already seen a short article about our new look. If you read publications from the back, you will have seen our new logo itself. If you plunge in randomly... you're here, welcome!

Just as our readers fall into many types, so do the visitors to our website and the users of our services. So before we embarked upon a review of our communications, we set out to better understand the views of these different groups about the College.

We carried out research with veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses, animal owners and those more closely linked to the College, such as Council and staff members.

The bulk of our research indicated that the role of the College was confusing to the outside world, particularly to animal owners – a key target audience. We were also confused with the Royal Veterinary College and the British Veterinary and British Veterinary Nursing Associations.

Some members of the profession wanted to keep us at arm's length, others wanted us to be more proactive. Opinions were varied and, potentially, this was due to a lack of understanding about our core role and the limits of our regulatory scope.

We were perceived by some to be old-fashioned, traditional and stuffy – although “getting better”. Meanwhile, staff were frustrated by a gap between what the College is trying to achieve and its external perception. Things have moved on, but this is not always recognised: “What we are is not what we are seen to be,” summed up one staff member.

Under-pinning principles

Once we knew what people were saying about us, our next step was to identify what we *wanted* people to say about us, and decide if our wish-list was feasible.

This meant a consideration of the principles that underpin and inform our activities as a College. A set of principles should comprise no more than five or six, and, in our case, they should be borne in mind by all those communicating on behalf of the College – whether they are staff or Council members.

As might be expected, it took some time to agree on a set of principles – and the list could have been twice as long. However, those shown in the box were agreed as appropriate for a modern regulator.

It's important that these nice words are not just left to gather dust in a Brand Handbook. Instead, training will be put in place to help staff members and others make sure we ‘walk the talk’.



For example, we will look at how we deal with difficult phone calls, to ensure we can do this with **understanding**; we will review the briefing materials and standard position statements available to staff, so that responses can be made with **consistency**; and, we will keep our disclosure policies under review to ensure we are as **open** as possible, within the constraints of data protection and other regulations.

Behind the logo

As a Royal College, we don't need to be trend-setters, but it made no sense to carry on with a visual style that reinforced a commonly-held view that we were old-fashioned and out of touch, particularly once we had agreed on a set of words to describe how we would rather be seen.

The next step was to develop a logo which helped us to convey these values. Design is always subjective, so reference back to the agreed set of principles was key when working through the selection process, to ensure the final logo helped us communicate what we wanted, rather than just reflect the taste of a small group of people.

There are practical considerations too. Over the last decade, since the branding was last reviewed, electronic communications have become increasingly important. How a logo looks on Twitter needs to be considered alongside a full-scale reproduction on a certificate.

Developing a new logo is a long process – and starts with casting a wide net. Over a period of many months, our design consultants, Poulsen-Selleck, have shown us over fifty different variations on a range of themes. After several phases of research, feedback and modification, we settled on the new logo above.

The new logo itself is simple and clear – a critical factor these days when so much communication is electronic, rather than being beautifully printed on a litho press.

With its reference to the strength and history of the shield around the ‘V’, coupled with an uncluttered design, it offers a balance between heritage and modernity.

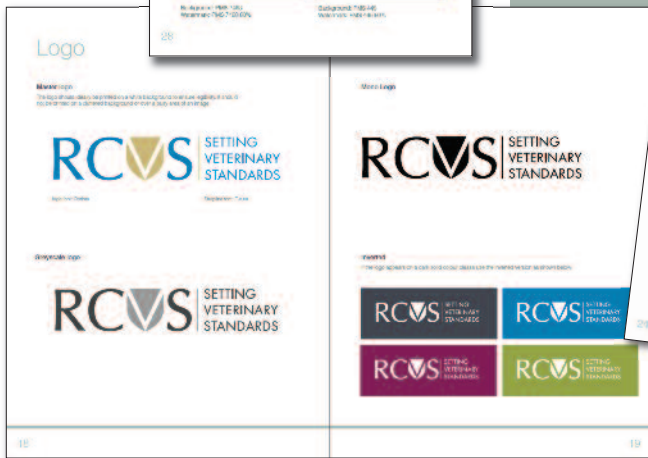
The incorporation of the new strapline within the logo gives a new clarity of message and makes the logo work harder for us as a communications tool. ‘Setting veterinary standards’ aims to quickly convey our role as regulator, as well as encompassing the proactive standard-setting activities we carry out under our Charter, for example, the Practice Standards Scheme, the Register of Veterinary Nurses and postgraduate education.

The blue and gold palette conveys a sense of professionalism. It was described by one of our research participants as reflecting ‘the gold standard’ of service, something we aim to achieve. It's lighter than our old navy and burgundy strip, allowing us to use a range of complementary colours to brighten literature and reports.

Keeping it in the family

As well as the main identity, the College had a family of sub-brands: namely, the Practice Standards Scheme, the Professional Development Phase, veterinary nursing, the awarding body and the RCVS Trust – the last two being separate organisations in their own right. On advice from our consultants, we have slimmed down this range of individual identities, to avoid confusion and dilution of the core College brand. We have also brought the subsidiary identities in-line with the new College look, as you can see opposite.

In each case, the RCVS is a consistent link, but shown in different colours to allow the Trust and the awarding body (now RCVS Awards) to continue to carve their own identities as independent bodies. The ‘dividing line’ that separates the core brand from its explanation – whether that's in words, such as ‘charitable trust’, or in an image, such as awarding body's familiar dove – is also consistent.



Practical concerns

Our handling of the Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) logo presented a particular challenge as it is one of the most public-facing of our brands. On the one hand, we did not wish to make huge changes, as awareness of the brand is still developing and we know that practices have spent money on plaques and other branded materials. On the other hand, practices in the Scheme are RCVS-accredited, and so the Scheme's branding needs to continue to mirror that of its parent body.

In the event, we have maintained the layout and wording in the new suite of PSS logos, while bringing in the new font and colours. This way, practices can update their materials when it suits them, as the old and the new brands can work alongside each other during a transition period. As with the old PSS brand, the new logo will be trademarked.

In fact, this pragmatic transition period will be used across all of our branded materials – not just for PSS – as it makes no economic sense to jettison printed materials unnecessarily. Instead, publications such as the *Guide*, CPD Cards, Register and other literature will be updated as and when required.

Our new principles

Fair

We have the legal power to regulate and must behave fairly and impartially. We manage the interface between the profession and the public. To maintain the trust of both, we must always act without fear or favour.

Open

Justice must not only be done, but be seen to be done. So our Council meetings and Disciplinary Committee hearings are held in public and we publish our procedures and decisions. Our activities are open and so are we.

Understanding

We show clear understanding of our field of operations; equally we aim to understand the needs of our wider audience.

Forward thinking

We have a long past, but are more interested in where we are going. We seek to ensure that the veterinary profession, and the College itself, is always fit for purpose, and that veterinary standards move with the times.

Accountable

We occupy a position of trust and as a public body we must be answerable for our actions. We must be willing to provide reasons for our decisions and keep our governance under review.

Consistent

People will look to us for guidance and they will not expect us to be contradictory. We must act as custodians for the standards of the profession and apply them with consistency.

Web's new wonder

A quick tour of our new website

Launched this month, our new website reflects comprehensive research with site visitors – veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses, students, journalists and animal owners – to ensure it contains the information visitors want, where they expect to find it.

Our research indicated that when people found what they were looking for on the old site, the information was generally good, but they had trouble tracking it down. This was partly because the site had to serve a broad range of visitor types within a single navigational structure: a bit like one map trying to cater for drivers, walkers and cyclists.

The new site has a split structure with dedicated subsites to enable us to tailor information for our visitors' needs.

And of course it makes the best of our new branding, resulting in a fresh, professional-looking design, with vast improvements to how information is organised, and navigation and search facilities.

The website is a living medium so the College is keen to hear feedback from users about what they like, and what could be improved, to help inform further developments. Let us know on communications@rcvs.org.uk.



Information for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses arranged thematically, rather than by audience, responding to an increasing 'team' approach within practice

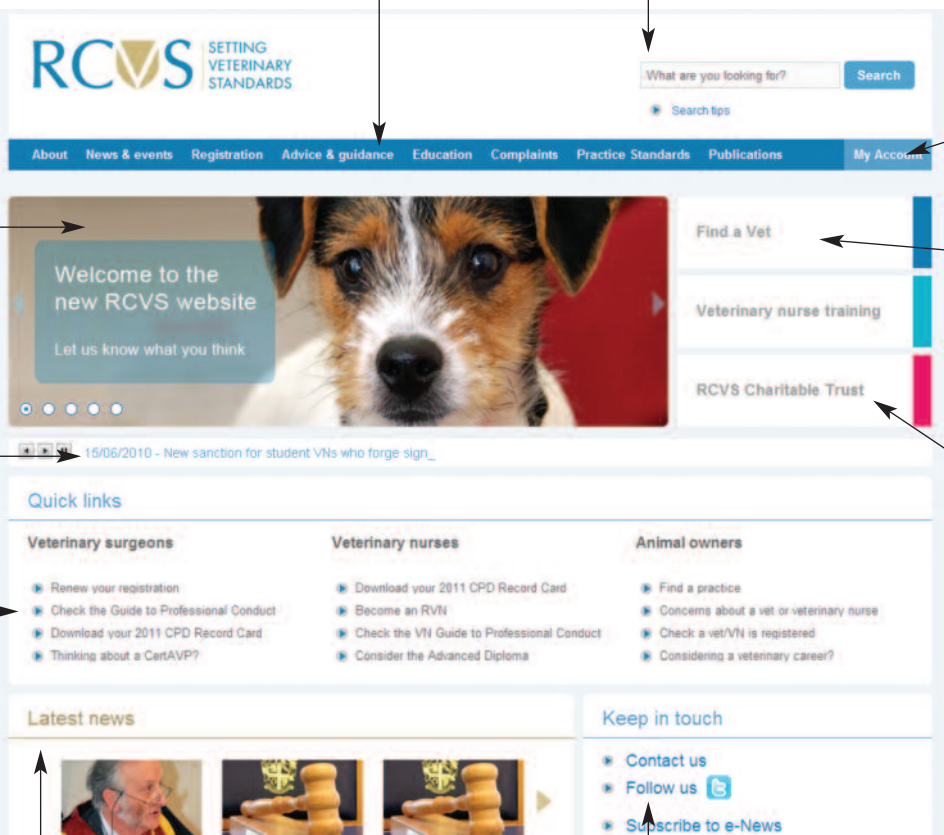
Improved search functions for the whole site, and dedicated search tools for *Guides to Professional Conduct*, publications, documents and the news archive

A 'My Account' facility to enable veterinary surgeons to confirm their registration renewal details and pay their retention fees online (other functions will be added)

Photographic banners to highlight responsibilities and ongoing activities

Ticker-tape feed for quick updates

'Quick links' to popular areas



A separate section for animal owners, with the popular Find a Vet search tool at its heart. There is also expanded advice on choosing, and using, a veterinary practice, and, in case of need, when making a complaint

Dedicated subsites for the veterinary nursing awarding body – RCVS Awards – which is a separate organisation from the College, and for the RCVS Charitable Trust

Latest news and views from the College

Social media links and RSS feed

Guide enigma broken by Code makers

New draft Code of Professional Conduct ready for consultation



RCVS Council has agreed a new draft Code of Professional Conduct for consultation following the efforts of the Guide to Professional Conduct Working Party. The Guide has been in its current format for over ten years and no longer reflects the current preference among professionals for more concise guidance documents.

In June 2010, the Working Party was established under the chairmanship of Council member Clare Tapsfield-Wright (pictured) to review the Guides for both veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. The Working Party has met regularly since then and reported its progress to the Advisory Committee.

The Working Party is supported by both the Advisory Committee and RCVS Council in recommending that the new Code should:

- Be a short, principles-based document using the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe's Code of Conduct as the starting point
- Include a compulsory continuing professional development requirement, the RCVS Health Protocol, more on clinical competence and give prominence to relevant medicines issues
- Use consistent language to distinguish between what must be done and what is advised
- Be supported by additional advice on specific areas of veterinary practice or issues, for example, clinical governance
- Be available in electronic and hard copy, with links or references to any additional RCVS advice
- Apply as appropriate to veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, taking into account the views of the Veterinary Nurses Council

"The new Code was approved in draft, and will soon be available online for members of the profession and the public to comment upon."

The resulting draft Code is a marked change in style and format from the existing Guide. It includes a revised declaration, which underlines the primary importance of animal health and welfare:

"I PROMISE AND SOLEMNLY DECLARE that my constant endeavour will be to ensure the welfare of animals committed to my care and that I will pursue the work of my profession with integrity and accept my responsibilities to my clients, the public, the profession and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons."

It also includes shorter principles-based sections and a five-point list outlining that the overarching duty of veterinary surgeons is to ensure the welfare of animals committed to their care and to fulfil their professional duties, by maintaining:

- 1 Professional competence
- 2 Honesty and integrity
- 3 Independence and impartiality
- 4 Client confidentiality and trust
- 5 Professional accountability

A separate document is under development for veterinary nurses, which will share broadly similar underlying principles and be the subject of separate consultation.

The new Code was approved in draft, and will soon be available online for members of the profession and the public to comment upon. Meanwhile, the Working Party will continue drafting the new Code of Professional Conduct for veterinary nurses and assembling the additional advice illustrating the principles and responsibilities set out in both documents.

The feedback received from the initial consultation will help the Working Party to complete drafting of the new Codes before approval by RCVS Council.

Know your Guide?

The latest in a series of quick reminders from the RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct

Working with farriers...

- Both veterinary surgeons and farriers are involved in the treatment of horses' feet. While veterinary surgeons are exempt from restrictions and regulation by the Farriers Registration Council, farriers are subject to the restrictions in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966.
- There is no clear demarcation line between veterinary surgeons and farriers in the exercise of their professional responsibilities. Therefore the working relationship between veterinary surgeons and farriers is particularly important, and this should involve consultation and cooperation.
- Veterinary surgeons should make every effort to discuss cases personally with farriers.



CRB checks

In the June 2010 issue of *RCVS News*, we noted the delay in publishing an Advice Note on 'Criminal Records Bureau checks and the Independent Safeguarding Authority', due to likely changes brought about by the election of the new Government. In February 2011, the findings of the Review into the Vetting and Barring Scheme were published and the recommendations made will result in new legislation and arrangements being introduced to regulate those working with children or vulnerable adults. We will be following developments and, in the meantime, the Advice Note is available on request from profcon@rcvs.org.uk.

Quiz time

With the imminent introduction of the disciplinary system for RVNs (see pages 14-15), now's a good time to brush up on your VN Guide. Try our online quiz at www.rcvs.org.uk/VNguidequiz.

Guide Update and CPD cards

The 2011 *CPD Record Cards* have been issued to home- and overseas-practising veterinary surgeons and registered veterinary nurses, and 2011 *Guide Updates* have been issued to home-practising veterinary surgeons and registered veterinary nurses. The *Guide Update* should be read in conjunction with the full 2010 *Guide*, or go online, where the most up-to-date *Guide* is always available.

Code of Conduct for Council members

A draft Code of Conduct for Council members was discussed at the March meeting. It included areas such as Council members' legal liability, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, communication, conduct and feedback. The draft was developed on recommendation from the Governance Review Group, and Council agreed to adopt it. The new Code will be available online shortly.

Court rituals

New Advice Note on giving evidence in court

Our guidance in relation to giving evidence in Court (*Guide to Professional Conduct, Annex m – Guidance to Veterinary Surgeons and Veterinary Nurses Giving Evidence in Court*) has been clarified with the provision of a new Advice Note.

The Advisory Committee approved an additional Advice Note, dealing specifically with veterinary surgeons as professional witnesses, giving veterinary or expert opinions in addition to factual evidence in court.

Veterinary surgeons giving factual evidence are not required to give a veterinary opinion on those facts, but may wish to do so. The Advice Note highlights the need for veterinary surgeons to consider whether they have sufficient factual knowledge, veterinary experience or qualifications to give an opinion, and to be cautious about giving opinion evidence on the central issue of the case unless instructed and acting as an expert.

When giving opinion evidence on the central issue, veterinary surgeons should consider all the relevant facts available in the case and update their opinion as additional information becomes available. Veterinary surgeons giving opinion evidence should include in a witness statement the facts on which opinions are based, their experience or qualifications, any other material relied upon, reasonable alternative veterinary views and a statement confirming the primary duty and responsibility to the court.

Veterinary surgeons should also disclose any potential conflict of interest to the party instructing them, which could include a relationship with any other party, including a prosecuting organisation or enforcement authority.

The Advice Note – Professional witnesses – veterinary surgeons giving factual evidence for a court hearing who also give a veterinary or expert opinion – is available online at www.rcvs.org.uk/advicenotes (Advice Note 33).



Recouping losses

Recovering the costs of dismissed appeals

Where the RCVS Disciplinary Committee directs that a respondent veterinary surgeon's name is suspended or removed from the Register, he or she has an opportunity to appeal to the Privy Council. If the respondent's appeal is upheld, the RCVS may be ordered to pay the legal costs of his or her appeal. If the appeal is dismissed, the respondent may be ordered by the Privy Council to pay the RCVS legal costs associated with the appeal.

It can be problematic for the RCVS to recover its legal costs in such cases and, recently, a significant sum of money was received to settle such a debt and release the respondent from a charge on one of his properties. In 2004, the Privy

Council dismissed an appeal by Mr Maurice Kirk and ordered him to pay the RCVS legal costs (Kirk v RCVS [2004] UKPC 4 (19 January 2004)). Late last year, Mr Kirk paid £77,297 to the RCVS in costs from the above judgment and subsequent orders of the Court.

In another more recent case, a veterinary surgeon whose appeal was dismissed by the Privy Council is paying the RCVS legal costs by instalments. In 2008, the Privy Council dismissed an appeal by Mr John Williams and ordered him to pay the RCVS legal costs (Williams v RCVS [2008] UKPC 39 (28 July 2008)). The total costs were £43,418 exclusive of statutory interest (8% per annum). On 31 December 2010, Mr Williams had paid the RCVS a total of £43,000 of the debt.

Employers' support key to PDP success

Research highlights employers' role

The support of employers is key to the success of the Professional Development Phase (PDP) – that's the message from questionnaires which were completed by recent graduates at the Veterinary Defence Society's reunions.

The survey was handed out at reunions at all of the veterinary schools bar Edinburgh, which was cancelled due to bad weather. Of the 263 graduates from 2009 who completed it, only 35% said that their employers had been aware of the PDP. Although this is up from 11% when we carried out the exercise with 2008 graduates, it is still a low figure, and this is in spite of regular coverage of the PDP at meetings and in veterinary media, and the availability of extensive guidance for employers.

"A refined PDP might well lead the way for employers to get more involved."

A further 33% said that they received no discussions about their performance at all – let alone a structured appraisal. This is a figure which chimes with our Survey of the Veterinary Professions 2010 – where 43% of recent graduates did not receive an appraisal during their first year in practice.

The PDP is there to help recent graduates consolidate and reflect upon their growing experience. "Although there is no onerous contribution required from employers, our evidence suggests that it works best when employers are supportive from a practical point of view – allowing recent graduates time to complete it – and are also prepared to actively engage with the PDP during appraisals and performance reviews," says Head of Education, Freda Andrews. "It is certainly not a question of the PDP removing responsibility from employers for ensuring their recent graduates are well supported during their crucial early years."

This view is backed up by RCVS Council member and Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons President, Jacqui Molyneux: "The concept of the RCVS producing a tool to give guidance to supporting new graduates in their first job is welcomed," she says. "The more supportive practices are doing their own system anyway, and there are some frustrations with aspects of the PDP, but a refined PDP might well lead the way for employers to get more involved."

A PDP handbook for employers is available at www.rcvs.org.uk/pdp. A copy of the handbook is sent to each new graduate signing up for the PDP to pass on to their employer.

VNs on the farm

Farm animal training comes a step closer

Plans are underway to develop a farm animal or mixed practice pathway for the new Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing.

The move has been catalysed by the prevalence of mixed practice in the Republic of Ireland. The acceptability of an RCVS qualification to the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) is an important consideration; without VCI approval no student VN may legally work in a practice south of the border.

The new pathway is being developed in conjunction with Greenmount College in Northern Ireland and the VCI, and the farm animal stream will join the existing two pathways – equine and small animal – which were launched last summer.

From the outset, the core units of the Diploma were designed to be a foundation for specialisation in any area of work and, for the first time, VN education now includes comparative functional anatomy and basic animal husbandry across all species.

Work commenced in January on the project and we hope that the third option will be available from September. Once developed and added to the

RCVS portfolio of qualifications, this new pathway will be available across the UK.

“A farm animal or mixed practice pathway for the Diploma had always been envisaged, but the extensive consultation with employers and colleges last year did not show it to be an immediate priority,” explains Head of Veterinary Nursing, Libby Earle. “However, we very much hope that employers with mixed practices, and colleges in areas where livestock farming is prevalent, will consider it as an alternative to the current small animal-focused training.”



Seeing the specialists

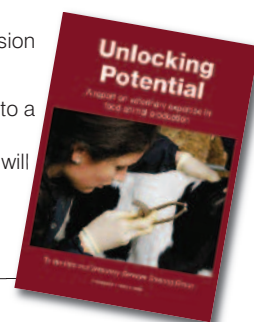
Stakeholder input sought

The next step for the Specialisation Working Party (WP) will be a stakeholder meeting, on 22 March 2011.

The WP was set up to consider the clarity and effectiveness of the postgraduate qualification structure for veterinary surgeons, particularly in the light of criticisms in Professor Philip Lowe's report to Defra: *Unlocking Potential – A report on veterinary expertise in food animal production*.

Under the chairmanship of Professor Sir Kenneth Calman, the WP will consider the development of a simplified postgraduate structure, to ensure that the route to specialisation is transparent for both the profession and the public.

Stakeholders' views will feed into a draft blueprint for the future of veterinary specialisation which will go out to general consultation before being considered by Council in November 2011.



Final furlong for Nottingham

Nottingham nears approval – and a round up of other visitations

When the University of Nottingham's School of Veterinary Medicine and Science opened, in 2006, it was the first new UK veterinary school for over 50 years. But it's been in limbo in terms of RCVS recognition for the last five years, as we needed to wait until the first cohort of graduates had passed through the system before we could consider approving the degree for registration purposes.

That period of uncertainty should soon be at an end: this July, the first batch of students will graduate. As part of the process of approval, a visitation team, led by Professor Lance Lanyon (pictured below, with document), put the Nottingham School through its paces in mid-February. As usual, the visitation considered in detail the course's curriculum and assessment arrangements, teaching facilities and staffing, and took account of student views as well as those of the faculty. The visitation panel included veterinary surgeons from Portugal and Switzerland, an



observer from Australia, and an Italian veterinary student who was nominated by the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) to look in particular at the student perspective.

The report of the visitation will be submitted to the Education Policy and Specialisation Committee (EPSC) in May, prior to being considered by Council in June. If all goes well, and Council approves accreditation, the Privy Council will then have to formalise proceedings with a new recognition order.

“The finals can effectively be considered as RCVS examinations.”

As a back-stop, and to ensure that Nottingham graduates are not disadvantaged if this final stage of the process takes time, two RCVS-appointed external examiners have been monitoring Nottingham's examinations and will have a key role in agreeing the pass list. This means the finals can effectively be considered as RCVS examinations, on the strength of which students can be admitted to the College, regardless of the approval status of the degree at that time.

Voyage to Cook

To another new veterinary school – this time on the other side of the world. Professor Stuart Reid joined an Australasian Veterinary Boards Council

(AVBC) accreditation visitation to James Cook University in Townsville, North Queensland, in summer 2010. The AVBC commended the new school, saying: “An innovative curriculum has been implemented which has prepared students for the personal and professional challenges of becoming a veterinarian.” The AVBC visitation report was considered by EPSC in February and, on EPSC's recommendation, Council supported the AVBC's approval of the degree course, which means that James Cook's veterinary graduates can now register with the College without taking our Statutory Membership Examination.

A more established Australian veterinary school – at the University of Queensland, in Brisbane – has been on our radar for some time, with its facilities and staffing levels causing concern. The AVBC carried out a visit last year, which was attended on behalf of the RCVS by Professor Lance Lanyon and Dr Barry Johnson. On the strength of the visit, and in particular the improved facilities at the new Gatton Campus, the AVBC decided to lift the school's conditional approval status and restore full approval, a move supported by RCVS Council in March.

Finally, at its March meeting, Council agreed to continue approval for the Royal Veterinary College's veterinary degree, following a visitation last February, under the chairmanship of Professor Stuart Reid, who was at that time Dean of the Glasgow Veterinary School and not in his current new role as Principal of the RVC.

Nose-to-tail recording

Online recording system for lifelong learning comes closer

A single lifelong online recording system to take veterinary surgeons from the recording of Day One Competences as undergraduates, through the Professional Development Phase (PDP), and on to continuing professional development (CPD), came a step closer after Council approved an outline plan and associated budget.

The new system is designed to emphasise the continuum of professional learning and provide a tool to make recording of professional development activities easier and more reflective. Privacy of data will be a key consideration. It will be particularly good news for students and practices involved with the delivery of Extra-Mural Studies (EMS), as different recording systems currently exist across the veterinary schools. It will bring a welcome update to the existing PDP database, as well as providing vets with an online tool to plan and record their CPD – bringing us into line with many other professional bodies.

The preferred supplier for the system is SkillWise, a company that already has a good track-record of working with the College, as it developed the well-received new online Nursing Progress Log (NPL), which replaced the old paper-based portfolio for recording student veterinary nurses' skills and experience. SkillWise won a competitive tender for the project.

"The public expectation is that professionals will maintain their skills and knowledge throughout their careers, and that they will be able to account for how they are keeping themselves up to date," says Freda Andrews, RCVS Head of Education.

"Having an online recording system will provide a structure for vets to plan their CPD, make it easier to record what's been achieved, and may even help with the learning process, by providing a system to hold notes, learning diaries or other documents in a single place."

"Having an online recording system will provide a structure for vets to plan their CPD."

The proposed new system has been welcomed by those involved with the delivery of EMS: "The RCVS is to be congratulated for taking on this project," said Penny Watson, EMS co-ordinator for Cambridge Veterinary School and also an active CPD provider herself. "Use of a unified

online system for recording clinical skills in the veterinary schools, on EMS, PDP and CPD should have tremendous benefits for our students' progress through veterinary school and beyond. Students will be better able to keep track of their learning achievements which will surely encourage them in to a mind-set of lifelong learning."

The precise timetable for the implementation of the new online system is not yet finalised, but it is likely that the CPD section will be available during 2012. We will be seeking the help of user groups to fine-tune the system as we near launch.

Although carrying out 105 hours of CPD over a three-year period (45 hours for RVNs) is compulsory, as is the PDP for new graduates, using the online recording system will not be – although we hope many will find the new service to be of benefit.



Success on many levels

New Level 3 Diploma brings positive change

Shaking up veterinary nurse training with the new Level 3 Diploma wasn't optional (as the government was scrapping NVQs) but it allowed us to cut red-tape and create more choice, for practices, centres and colleges, and for students themselves.

The response from practices has been excellent and we have accredited 31 more training practices (TPs) this year, including eight as auxiliary training practices (aTPs) – a new and practical option if there is not a sufficient caseload or comprehensive enough facilities to provide the full range of experience for students. Opportunities for student VNs to train now exist in 1,559 practices.

"More training practices also means more opportunities for aspiring veterinary nurses to qualify, and puts training within reach of a wider group of would-be RVNs," says Libby Earle, Head of Veterinary Nursing.

We have been able to replace the lengthy NVQ assessment portfolio with the Nursing Progress Log (NPL), an online record, completed by students and clinical coaches, of the tuition, experience and competence students have gained in their training practice.

"The Level 3 Diploma has been in place for little more than six months, yet VN student numbers are already up."

Feedback so far suggests practices and students like the NPL and, with comparatively few IT glitches, some 1,800 students had been issued with their log-ins by the start of March. There have been some upgrades since launch, for example,

reports can now be extracted and centres can email regular student progress reports to employers. There will be some further fixes and upgrades, such as multiple logging for students entering experiences. Some of the refinements will carry a cost, so we will consider first how current arrangements bed in.

And student enrolments are increasing: 1,168 students enrolled with the RCVS during the twelve months prior to 1 February 2011, compared with 1,121 during the same period of the preceding year. Enrolments in January 2011 were almost double the figure for January 2010.

"The Level 3 Diploma has been in place for little more than six months, yet VN student numbers are already up," says Libby. "This bodes well for the supply of qualified, competent RVNs demanded by veterinary practices, and for those keen to enter the veterinary nursing profession."

Research squares up for a hit

Concerns about impact of fees hike

Belgravia House is only a few hundred yards from Millbank Tower, where an angry student was recently convicted for throwing a fire extinguisher from the roof.

As befits an organisation with a Royal Charter, the RCVS does not engage in such activities... but that's not to say we're unconcerned about the proposed fee increases.

At its February meeting, the Education Policy and Specialisation Committee discussed its concerns and, in particular, the possible impact on intercalation and postgraduate veterinary research of tuition fees hitting the £9,000 mark.

The Committee, under the Chairmanship of Professor Stuart Reid, felt that higher tuition fees could act as a disincentive to intercalate, which, as intercalation is key in raising awareness of research as a veterinary career, could have longer-term consequences for the health of veterinary research.

Professor Reid, in collaboration with the Chairman of the Public Affairs Committee, Lynne Hill, undertook

to write to David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, to express the College's concerns. They also aim to seek confirmation of Mr Willetts' recent suggestion in a letter to the British Veterinary Association that students could benefit from additional maintenance loans to cover periods of Extra-Mural Studies (EMS), providing that veterinary schools confirm that EMS is an integral part of the degree course.

In addition, a motion was laid before Council in March which recommended that a Working Group be set up to consider the impact of fee changes on the future diversity of the veterinary profession and on the likelihood of veterinary students intercalating primary science degrees within the veterinary degree course, and to determine if the College could act in any practical way to reduce the impact. The principle of the motion was passed, although leave was given to the Officer team to refine the proposed terms of reference for the Working Group, to ensure that it could achieve something meaningful.



Exam dates

The Certificate written examinations will be held at the Emmanuel Centre, Marsham Street, London SW1 3DW, on either **Tuesday 19 July** or **Wednesday 20 July 2011** – candidates will be advised which date relates to their subject.

The Diploma written examinations will be held at the RCVS, Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF on **Tuesday 5 July 2011**.

Candidates will be advised of clinical, oral and practical exam dates by subject.

Deadlines

Specialist fees

Annual fee notices for RCVS Recognised Specialists will be sent out in April, and fees are due by **1 July 2011**. In addition, Specialists who first listed in 1997, 2002 and 2007 are required to re-apply by **Friday 19 August 2011** – a reminder will be enclosed with the annual fee notices, where relevant. The deadline for new applications is **9 September 2011**.

Fellowship

The deadline for new applications for the RCVS Diploma of Fellowship is **1 August 2011** (by Thesis or by Meritorious Contributions to Learning). For further information, visit www.rcvs.org.uk/fellowship or contact Janet Etheridge on 020 7202 0701.

Certificates

Candidates who are currently enrolled for the old-style RCVS Certificate and who have not yet applied for final approval of their experience must do so by **1 November 2011**, in order to enter for the last examination, to be held in 2012.

Enrolment for those candidates who do not apply by this date will lapse, as there will not be a further opportunity for them to enter for the old-style Certificate.

Lifelong learning for VNs

Review of post-qualification options

In April, a Working Party will kick off a review of the qualifications that the RCVS offers to qualified veterinary nurses under the Charter.

Currently, there is only one RCVS option for qualified VNs – the Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing (Dip(AVN)).

Although the DipAVN was relaunched in a modular format in 2007, the qualification itself dates from the early 1990s, and reflects a time when all VNs qualified with Further Education-level qualifications, making it appropriate to set a post-registration qualification at approximately Higher National Diploma (HND) level, where the DipAVN remains.

However, over the last twenty years, the entry-level qualifications of veterinary nurses have become

more varied. For example, our 2010 Survey of the Professions indicated that 9% of those entering veterinary nurse training already had a degree. So it's time to review and widen what the College offers by way of Charter qualifications.

Chaired by Kathy Kissick (pictured), the Working Party will consider a range of options, which might include individual undergraduate-level clinical modules, a Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing Practice and a Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing Practice, which would be set at postgraduate level and include a research route.

The Working Party will develop initial ideas, which will then be put out to consultation amongst veterinary nurses, their employers, and the public.



RVNs – are you ready?

The new disciplinary system: your questions answered

The disciplinary process for registered veterinary nurses (RVNs) goes live on 1 April. Do you know what it entails? We hope our Q&A will help...

The new disciplinary system is another milestone in veterinary nursing's development as a profession that is qualified, competent, and accepting of its own professional responsibility.

The complaints and disciplinary procedures apply to all veterinary nurses qualifying since 1 January 2003, for whom registration is a condition of listing, and VNs who qualified previously and opted to register. Below are answers to some of the questions you may have: if you have other concerns or questions, then please do contact the Professional Conduct Department (020 7202 0789 or profcon@rcvs.org.uk).

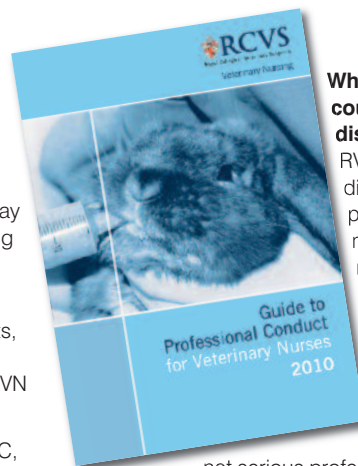
How does the disciplinary system work?

Complaints received by the RCVS can go through up to four consecutive stages. Each stage acts like a filter, determining whether or not that complaint will be taken further, or closed:

1. **Assessment** – decides if a complaint against an RVN raises an issue that could constitute serious professional misconduct.
2. **Investigation and case examination** – gathers information from the people involved and decides if the allegations have substance.

3. **VN Preliminary Investigation Committee (VN PIC) consideration** – decides if there is a case which needs to be referred to a VN Disciplinary Committee hearing. Under the new Health Protocol, some complaints involving health-related fitness to practise may be dealt with by the VN PIC, rather than going to a public hearing.
4. **VN Disciplinary Committee (VN DC) hearing** – a tribunal that decides on the facts, whether serious professional misconduct is proved, and says if any action will be taken. VN DC hearings are public.

If a complaint is closed before it reaches VN DC, the RCVS may give advice to the RVN, and tell the complainant the nature of the advice, but can apply no other sanction.



What type of things could an RVN be disciplined for?

RVNs could be disciplined for serious professional misconduct. This means behaviour that raises a question about fitness to practise.

There are no blanket definitions for what is or is

not serious professional misconduct, because much depends on the particular circumstances of each case. However, some things clearly do involve issues of serious professional misconduct. For example, dishonesty, whether in discussions with clients or being convicted of theft. VNs are asked, when they register, to declare criminal convictions, and the impact of such convictions on fitness to practise will be considered. The RCVS can also remove from the Register anyone fraudulently registered as a veterinary nurse.

The *Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses* sets out the expectations concerning professional behaviour, so stick to the *Guide*.

What happens if someone makes trivial or unfounded complaints?

The RCVS has to consider all complaints which fall within its jurisdiction, even if they seem trivial. RVNs need to respond constructively to allegations; in some cases, the RVN's response will show that there has been a misunderstanding, and failing to respond to complaints could raise questions about serious professional misconduct.

This said, any complaints we receive that clearly do not constitute serious professional misconduct will be closed at the first stage of the disciplinary procedure. Examples might include an appointment not running to time, alleged minor disturbances with practice neighbours (for example, about parking), and employment matters, such as poor time-keeping (unless this affects animal welfare).

In complaints which could constitute serious professional misconduct, the alleged facts are investigated thoroughly, and the charges must



also reach, and be proven, at a VN DC hearing (a tribunal at which the RVN is entitled to use legal representation), in order for any sanction to be applied.

Can a nurse be disciplined for genuine mistakes?

Everybody makes mistakes sometimes, and a straightforward mistake is very unlikely to amount to serious professional misconduct – even if the outcome of the mistake is serious.

Repeated or reckless mistakes may require the RCVS to investigate, but it is more likely that such issues will be a matter of discipline by the practice, rather than the RCVS.

What about negligence?

Negligence means that the treatment of an animal by a veterinary nurse falls below the standards expected of a reasonably competent member of the profession, to the detriment of the animal.

Unless it is so serious as to constitute serious professional misconduct, negligence is not something which we have power to address, although we can investigate to determine this.

Negligence is not a criminal offence, but may be pursued in a civil court. It requires proof of quantifiable, and consequential, loss or damage, which is not usually the case with companion animals. If negligence is found, a court can order the payment of civil damages or compensation (one good reason for having professional indemnity insurance, as the *Guide* requires). Generally, practices are vicariously liable for employees' negligence.

What happens when there is more than one version of what happened?

Our investigations are thorough, and we listen to, and obtain evidence from, the different people involved. If a case reaches the VN DC, the Committee considers evidence put forward by both the College and the respondent nurse, and judges what the facts are and whether they amount to misconduct.

What happens if a vet is involved in the complaint?

If a case concerns both a veterinary surgeon and a veterinary nurse, the preliminary investigation of both would be carried out in tandem but the disciplinary hearings would be separate. What constitutes serious professional misconduct also differs due to the different nature of the responsibilities of veterinary surgeons and RVNs – as indicated by the respective *Guides*.

Who will oversee the disciplinary process, will it be just vets?

Several RVNs will manage and oversee the complaints process, along with RCVS staff. The

RCVS Professional Conduct Department – which can close a complaint at the first stage – has legally qualified staff and will seek the advice of an RVN when there are clinical aspects to complaints.

The VN PIC will include three RVNs, as well as a lay observer and a veterinary surgeon. Two RVNs will also join existing members of the RCVS Disciplinary Committee to form the VN DC.

Will RVNs or vets be held responsible for complaints involving other practice employees or students?

Whether a vet or an RVN, if you are responsible for someone's work – for example, as their manager or supervisor – you must make sure that the person you ask is both legally entitled and competent to do it. Depending on the particular circumstances, responsibility for what has happened may be shared between an RVN and their supervising veterinary surgeon.

As an RVN, it is possible that you could be line-managed by someone who is neither a veterinary surgeon nor another RVN, and asked to do something you know you should not do. In this case, you should raise your concerns with your line manager and, if this doesn't resolve the problem, let the practice principal know. You can also contact Professional Conduct Department staff for advice.

Will the RCVS keep count of complaints against an RVN?

Yes, complaint files are held at the RCVS and the VN PIC will be told of previous complaints against a RVN. The RCVS does not generally give any information to the media about complaints unless they are to result in Disciplinary Committee hearings.

Can RVNs be disciplined for a lack of continuing professional development (CPD)?

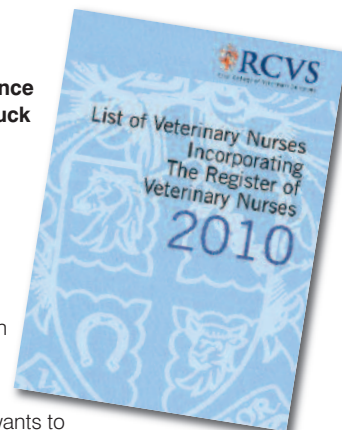
Potentially; although our current approach is to offer RVNs guidance and support so they can complete suitable CPD – RVNs are required to complete and record on their *CPD Record Card* 45 hours averaged over any three-year period (ie an average of 15 hours per year). It is likely that poor compliance with CPD obligations would be taken into account in any complaint.



What is the difference between being struck off and being suspended?

An RVN who is suspended from the Register will be automatically restored after the period of suspension is over.

An RVN who is struck off and who wants to be restored to the Register must apply to be considered for restoration. Applications for restoration can only be made ten months after the strike-off date.



How will RVNs' roles change if they are struck off or suspended?

Struck-off or suspended RVNs can no longer use the letters RVN after their name. The new *Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons* (due before the end of the year) will say that veterinary surgeons must not delegate Schedule 3 work to anyone who has been removed from the VN Register. How else an RVN's role is affected depends mainly on the employer.

How can struck-off RVNs be differentiated from other VNs on the List?

For all VNs who qualified after 1 January 2003, joining the non-statutory VN Register is a condition of joining the VN List. Under the new procedures, a separate section of the List/Register will identify those removed from the Register.

Like vets, any VN can be removed for not paying their retention fees. This is not part of any disciplinary procedure and, once restoration fees are paid, their name will appear on the List/Register as before.

Why won't you remove struck-off RVNs from the List?

Lawyers have advised us that we do not have the power to remove VNs from the List without new legislation. We are seeking appropriate changes to the law.

Can RVNs appeal if they consider they have been treated unfairly?

The VN DC will operate to standards of proof similar to those found in the criminal courts, and will be assisted by a legal assessor. If an RVN is unhappy with a decision to remove or suspend his or her name, there is an appeal procedure to an independent senior barrister or solicitor.

If the complaint is closed before reaching the Disciplinary Committee, and a complainant is unhappy with how the RCVS has handled matters, he or she can ask for a review of the RCVS decision.

Step towards the stand

Join us at BSAVA Congress

Step this way... and visit the RCVS stand (533) at BSAVA Congress (Birmingham, 31 March to 3 April) to bag your free pedometer, as part of our 'take the next step' campaign.

The campaign, being launched at Congress, will mark 50 years of veterinary nursing by urging everyone to take the next step – whether that's becoming a VN student, registering, taking the Advanced Diploma or even standing for VN Council – and move the profession forward.

By visiting the stand, you will also be able to take part in our animal-track identification competition and be in with a chance to win £100 of Blacks vouchers.

While at Congress, why not join our session on Saturday 2 April (2.15pm, Hall 6 in the ICC), and find out how proposed changes in law and regulation could affect you. Open to all Congress delegates, the session will cover an update on RCVS

legal and regulatory issues, including the new Health Protocol and the launch of the disciplinary system for registered veterinary nurses.

We hope to see you in Birmingham!



Annual celebrations

Date for your diary

RCVS Day – our Annual General Meeting and Presentation of Awards – will take place on Friday 1 July 2011, at One Great George Street, Westminster.

All members and veterinary nurses are welcome to attend the day, which will start at 10am with AGM business, followed by the presentation of awards, including Honorary Fellowship and Honorary Associateship, at 11am. RCVS President Peter Jinman will present a review of his year before formally welcoming new Council and VN Council Members, and Dr Jerry Davies to the role of President for 2011-2012.

Following a talk from our guest speaker (still under wraps at the time of going to press), the day will conclude with a fork luncheon in the Great Hall.

Further details and information about how to apply for tickets will be in our June issue of *RCVS News*.

Delve deeper into the RCVS

How do we spend your money?

Meat the RCVS Days are held throughout the year and are an excellent opportunity for those working in the veterinary and veterinary nursing profession to gain a deeper understanding of how their regulatory body functions.

Our next Meet the RCVS Day will take place on Friday 15 April, and will include much more than a tour of our new Lower Ground Floor meeting rooms!

Guests will be part of a small group who will get the chance to look behind the scenes at the RCVS and spend the day meeting members of the Officer team, senior staff and visiting College departments, with plenty of time to ask questions.

Cahir King (pictured), from County Down, came to a Meet the RCVS Day in January, after he was told about it by a colleague. Following his visit, he was inspired to consider continuing his postgraduate study:

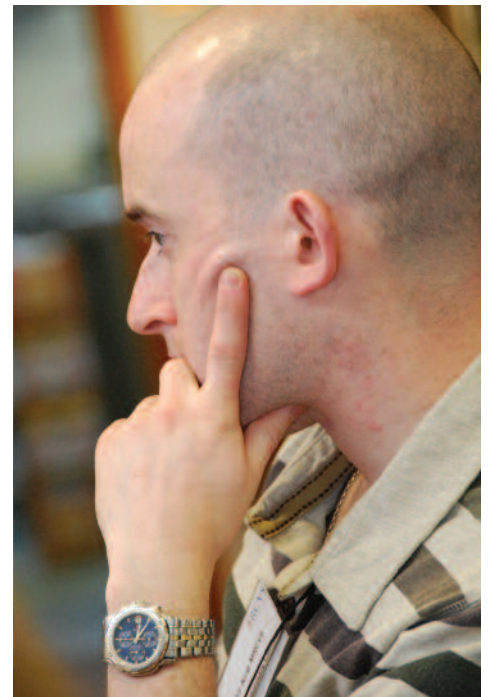
"I just wanted to thank you and the team for taking us round the College last week. It was a pleasure, and I found it both useful and inspiring. I may even restart my certificate as a result!"

Reasonable travel expenses are paid. For further details, and to book a place at the next meeting on 15 April, please contact Fiona Harcourt on f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0773.

Access all areas

For a more thorough examination of the RCVS and the work that we do, on Friday 6 May we will be holding a College-wide 'Open Day'.

Open to anyone involved in the veterinary profession, including representatives from veterinary and veterinary nursing bodies and animal owner groups, the day will give visitors the chance to explore a number of veterinary topics and talk directly to the staff involved in the developments that take place within the profession, and the role that the College plays.



The day will start at 10am with an introduction from RCVS President Peter Jinman, followed by break-out sessions on topics including:

- Complaints and the disciplinary system
- The new Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing
- Practice Standards Scheme
- Lifelong learning
- The veterinary and veterinary nursing professions in 2011

Heads of Departments and members of the Officer team will be available and happy to answer questions or discuss any subjects in greater detail. The day is expected to finish at approximately 4.30pm.

Look out for further information online, or contact Fiona on the details above to reserve your place.

VNs: looking back, looking forward

Summer seminar to celebrate

We are currently in the planning process for our seminar to celebrate 50 years of veterinary nursing.

The event will take place during the week commencing 20 June – final date is TBC – and will fall into two parts. The morning sessions will celebrate the achievements of veterinary nursing in its first half-century. The second, more challenging, section, will consider where veterinary nursing goes from here, and will hear from those involved in other allied professions, and the experiences of VNs in other countries.

It's sure to be an interesting day, but as delegate places will be limited, we intend to publicise a

summary of the papers and presentations in an *RCVS News Extra* over the summer.

Do you have something to contribute to the event? Maybe you were one of the first veterinary nurses to qualify and have had an interesting career? Perhaps you have strong views about the future direction of the profession? Let us know! Contact Lizzie Lockett on l.lockett@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0725.

Meanwhile, keep an eye on the website – www.rcvs.org.uk/VNat50 – and the veterinary nursing media for more details over the coming months.

London, we're listening...

Capital venue for Regional Question Time

The Hilton London Metropole hotel, near Edgware Road, in central London, will be the venue for our next Regional Question Time meeting, on Thursday 24 March.

Do you have concerns about providing 24-hour cover? Worried about the regulation of veterinary nurses? This is your opportunity to ask the President, Registrar, other members of the Officer team and VN Council members, your burning questions. Open discussion is encouraged and what's on the agenda is up to the delegates, however, to get an idea of what's likely to be discussed on the night, below are some of the questions raised at our last meeting, in Norwich:

- Is the College more likely to be involved in issues of competence and negligence than before?
- How is the new Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing working out?
- Is the College worried about levels of compliance with export certification?
- How can the RCVS effectively police the profession when owners of practices who are not vets are effectively outside its jurisdiction?
- What do we do to ensure competence of EU graduates?
- Do you carry out any research about who leaves the profession and why?
- Am I obligated to do house calls out of hours?
- What's the College's position on the sacking of clients?

To book a place at the meeting in London, which starts with a finger buffet at 7pm, followed by Questions at 7.30pm, contact Fiona Harcourt on f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0773. Please note, space is limited and allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

For those a little further north, a Regional Question Time meeting will be held in Inverness on Thursday 19 May. All veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses living within reasonable travelling distance of the meeting venue will be sent a personal invitation, so look out for yours nearer the time.



Practice Standards Scheme Concerns?

On Thursday 24 March in central London, and Thursday 19 May in Inverness, we will be holding free, private 45-minute sessions for veterinary team members who have any concerns about the Practice Standards Scheme. Perhaps you are facing an inspection or thinking of joining the Scheme: this is the perfect chance to chat one-to-one to an inspector. Sessions run from 11am to 5pm and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Contact Fiona on the details above to book your place.



Celebrating the foundations

Vet2011 marks profession's 250th anniversary

2011 sees the 250th anniversary of the first veterinary school, in Lyon, which is being celebrated around the world in the form of Vet2011. A range of events is being organised, from Algeria to Venezuela: see www.vet2011.org for more details.

So what's happening over here? RCVS Day, on 1 July 2011, will have a Vet2011 theme, as well as celebrating 50 years of veterinary nursing.

The British Veterinary Association Congress (22-25 September, London), 'Vets in a changing world', will also have an international dimension, with the Wooldridge Memorial Lecture being given by Dr Peter Roeder on 'Making a Global Impact', and a day of sessions from the Association's Overseas Group (www.bva.co.uk/congress).

The RCVS Trust is well placed to celebrate the veterinary profession's history, with its considerable archive of historic books and artefacts. It's planning an exhibition of key pieces later in the year – see the June issue of *RCVS News* for more information. If you can't wait that long, see page 22 of this issue for the first of our 'History of the profession' columns.

"The RCVS Trust is well placed to celebrate the veterinary profession's history, with its considerable archive of historic books and artefacts."



To recognise the milestone that Vet2011 represents, the RCVS Trust will be opening up part of its grants programme to the theme of 'Supporting Enquiring Minds' to seek out novel ideas and collaborations that have the potential to affect the profession long into the future. Further details to be announced.

Finally, if you are of a creative bent, it's not too late to enter the Vet2011 photography competition. See www.vetsinyourdailylife.org for more information (deadline 31 March).

Keep an eye on www.rcvs.org.uk/vet2011 for the latest Vet2011 news and events.



Report to Council March 2011

PI Committee Chairman Jill Nute

There have been three Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) meetings since the last Council meeting, during which time 25 new complaints, as well as ongoing complaints, were considered. Of these new complaints, the PIC has:

- closed eight complaints;
- closed five complaints with advice issued to the veterinary surgeon;
- held open three complaints (authorising one unannounced and two announced follow-up practice visits to ensure compliance with its advice);
- forwarded four complaints to the veterinary investigators for visits and interviews; and,
- referred four complaints to the Disciplinary Committee.

Additional PIC activities include:

- investigating 30 ongoing matters against 15 veterinary surgeons;
- continuing to investigate matters raised by the BBC's Panorama programme during summer 2010, and liaising with the BBC in this regard;
- monitoring four veterinary surgeons in association with health issues, one of whom has agreed to undertakings under the RCVS Health Protocol;
- referring 28 complaints to the College's solicitors to obtain formal statements; and,
- sending 60 complaints for case examination.

Two further excerpts from the PIC report are reproduced below for the profession's information and guidance:

Non-veterinary surgeons practising

There are currently eight cases of potential breaches of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, and one case of misusing the post-nominal 'MRCVS'. The misuse of MRCVS is being investigated by an overseas regulator and the case is awaiting consideration by its Investigation Committee. The Professional Conduct Department is liaising with three police forces and Regional Trading Standards Offices and has provided witness statements at the request of prosecution authorities pursuing offences. To date, two witness summons have been received to attend criminal trials; one accused has since pleaded guilty and sentencing was due to take place on 7 March 2011.

Supplying veterinary medicines with advice

During the past 12 months there have been a number of complaints about failing to explain the side effects and risks of veterinary medicinal products supplied to clients. For veterinary licensed drugs, a copy of the information leaflet should be given to the client, but the PIC acknowledges that, in practice, because packs are split up, this may be problematic.

The Committee advises that if packs are split, it would be helpful (and reduce the likelihood of a complaint to the RCVS) if the practice photocopied the relevant information leaflet and provided this when dispensing medicinal products. It is important, and is in the interests of animal welfare, that clients are provided with drug information leaflets alongside veterinary medicinal products.

The profession should also be mindful that when supplying 'off-label' medicinal products under the cascade, the Guide to Professional Conduct advises that clients are asked to sign a consent form, after the risks and side-effects have been explained.

The full report is available on RCVSonline (www.rcvs.org.uk).

Mr Michael Albring

Inquiry concerning: failure to make animal welfare his primary concern

DC decision: guilty of serious professional misconduct; suspend for ten months

Registration status: name suspended from Register on 22 February 2011

On 18 January 2011, the Disciplinary Committee decided to suspend from the Register Michael Albring, a veterinary surgeon formerly of VetCall practice, Bitterne, Southampton, for failing to make animal welfare his primary concern.

During the two-day hearing, which was adjourned in September 2010, the Committee heard that Mr Albring was said to have failed to make a home visit to attend Bear, a Newfoundland dog belonging to Mrs Thacker, when he knew, or ought to have known, that there were clinical or welfare grounds making a home visit necessary.

The hearing was held in Mr Albring's absence; the Committee considered that, having postponed the case last year at his request, Mr Albring had had ample time to prepare his case and submit any mitigations, and sufficient opportunity to attend. Additional adjournment would further delay the

Mr Peter Ardle MacMahon

Inquiry concerning: failure to provide adequate professional care and insufficient regard for animal welfare

DC decision: guilty of serious professional misconduct; judgment on sanction postponed for 12 months, with undertakings

Registration status: name remains on Register

On 19 November 2010, the Disciplinary Committee postponed judgment on sanction for 12 months in the case of Peter Ardle MacMahon, who it had found guilty of serious professional misconduct for cumulative failures to provide adequate professional care, and insufficient regard for animal welfare whilst treating a dog.

Mr MacMahon had faced a six-part charge after working as a locum for Vets Now at North End in Portsmouth, where, on the night of 14/15 July 2009, he treated Wilfred, a Cocker Spaniel who had ingested broken glass along with raw mince.

The Committee found that, having decided that surgery was an appropriate treatment, Mr MacMahon had not removed the glass identified on a radiograph. Nor had he even superficially searched

matter's resolution and not be in the wider interests of justice, or public confidence in either the RCVS disciplinary system or the veterinary profession.

On the evening of 19 December 2009, Mr Albring had been the veterinary surgeon on duty at VetCall, a practice that provides the out-of-hours emergency cover for several local veterinary practices, including the one where Bear was registered. When Mrs Thacker's daughter, Ms Davidson, telephoned VetCall to request a home visit as the dog had collapsed, she was told that it was against practice policy for the practice to be left unmanned so this would not be possible.

This was despite a written policy which accepted and made provision for the rare occasions when a home visit would be necessary. Phoning again later, the information about practice policy was repeated and Ms Davidson directed to a local animal ambulance service, which attended.

The ambulance driver found that the dog could not be transported in the ambulance and telephoned VetCall to say a home visit was needed. This was refused by Mr Albring even, the Committee noted, when the ambulance driver offered to collect Mr Albring, drive him to Ms Davidson's home 10-15 minutes away, assist with the euthanasia, and return him to the clinic. In the interim, Ms Davidson had also sought help from a separate practice

and, subsequent to Mr Albring's refusal to visit, their on-duty veterinary surgeon attended and euthanased Bear.

“A no-visits policy existed at the VetCall clinic and this must have added to the pressure under which the Respondent was working.”

The Committee found that Mr Albring's refusal to visit, once it was clear Bear could not be transported, and he knew that a home visit was necessary on welfare grounds, resulted in Bear spending longer than necessary in pain and distress. This was not a case where the pressure of work or the welfare needs of other animals prevented Mr Albring from attending, and it was also relevant that Mr Albring was specifically employed to work out of hours in an emergency clinic. Serious, too, was his failure to reply promptly to communications from the RCVS, or show insight into the seriousness of his conduct.

In mitigation, the Committee accepted that this was an isolated case, and there were no previous

findings against Mr Albring. He was in sole charge of an emergency clinic covering 15-20 practices across Southampton and Portsmouth, which would make, in some circumstances, home visits difficult.

“The Committee is concerned that the actual policy pursued by the clinic regarding domiciliary visits was different to the written one,” said Professor Sheila Crispin, chairing the Disciplinary Committee. “In effect, a no-visits policy existed at the VetCall clinic and this must have added to the pressure under which the Respondent [Mr Albring] was working.

“The Committee is mindful that the object of sanctions is not to be punitive, but to protect animal welfare, to maintain public confidence in the profession and to maintain appropriate standards,” she continued, noting that as animal welfare had knowingly been neglected and Mr Albring had demonstrated no insight, a warning or reprimand would not be enough. “A period of suspension would be sufficient to maintain public confidence in the profession and uphold standards,” she said.

The Committee directed that Mr Albring's name be suspended from the RCVS Register of Veterinary Surgeons for ten months.

the stomach contents he had evacuated to check that a large piece of glass he had previously identified on the radiograph had been removed. He had also not taken adequate steps to prevent contamination of Wilfred's abdominal cavity prior to the incision to the stomach.

“Taken as individual allegations, these would not, in the opinion of the Committee, constitute serious professional misconduct.”

Mr MacMahon admitted he knew there had been considerable spillage of stomach contents into Wilfred's abdomen. The Committee found that, with this knowledge, for Mr MacMahon to use only 250ml of fluid to lavage the abdomen was inadequate. This contributed to the Spaniel developing chemical peritonitis which might have developed into septic peritonitis but for a second operation the next morning, after the dog had been returned to the care of his usual veterinary practice. The Committee also expressed concern that Mr MacMahon had failed effectively to communicate the abdominal contamination to Wilfred's usual vets when he was handed back into their care.

Taken as individual allegations, these would not, in the opinion of the Committee, constitute serious professional misconduct. However, the Committee was of the view that, taken cumulatively, the charge was proved, and therefore the treatment given to Wilfred, fell far short of the standard to be expected in the profession.

When considering mitigating and aggravating factors, the Committee accepted that Mr MacMahon and the veterinary nurse assisting him were unfamiliar with the premises in which they were working, resulting in a difficulty in locating important equipment, and there were also multiple urgent cases during the evening the operation took place. The Committee also noted that 17 months had passed since the operation, and no further complaints against Mr MacMahon had been received by the RCVS.

The Committee further took into account that Mr MacMahon had little recent experience, having returned to practising veterinary medicine in January 2009, following almost ten years spent outside the veterinary profession. During this hiatus he undertook no continuing professional development (CPD), and completed only a five-week period of supervised practice prior to re-entering the profession.

“The Respondent placed himself in this situation:

he knew that he had been out of practice for ten years, had not done any formal CPD during that time and chose to accept an appointment to work as a locum in a sole-charge out-of-hours emergency clinic,” said Mrs Caroline Freedman, Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee. “A foremost aggravating factor is that animal welfare was adversely affected. A non-critical patient was placed at risk by the Respondent's failures.”

“A postponement of judgment, with suitable undertakings from the Respondent, is the correct course of action.”

The Committee reiterated that the purpose of sanctions was not to be punitive, but to protect animal welfare, to maintain public confidence in the profession and to maintain professional standards. “A postponement of judgment, with suitable undertakings from the Respondent, is the correct course of action,” said Mrs Freedman. Mr MacMahon has subsequently signed undertakings relating to CPD in both surgical and medical disciplines, and the Committee has postponed for 12 months its judgment as to any further sanction.

Mr Joseph Lennox Holmes

Inquiry concerning: insufficient clinical grounds for treatment; failure to obtain informed consent; working outside areas of competence; failure to refer; and, failure to provide adequate pain relief

DC decision: guilty of serious professional conduct; remove name from Register

Registration status: appeal lodged with Privy Council so name remains on Register at least until appeal is heard

On 11 January 2011, the Disciplinary Committee directed that Joseph Lennox Holmes should be removed from the RCVS Register, having found him guilty of serious professional misconduct for advising and undertaking surgical procedures without sufficient clinical grounds or considering alternative treatment options; failing to obtain the informed consent of his clients; undertaking procedures outside his area of competence; failing to refer or discuss the option of referral to a specialist; and, failing to provide his patients with adequate pain relief.

Mr Holmes, of Waltham Veterinary Clinic, Grimsby, faced nine charges relating to two separate complaints, at a two-week hearing in October 2010, which resumed on 10 January 2011.

These complaints concerned four consecutive staphylectomies and a tracheostomy that Mr Holmes performed on Jake, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel owned by Ms Marsden; and, the dental treatment he gave to three Persian cats called Dream Topping, Charlie Brown and Henry, together with the advice he gave to their owner, Mrs Auckland.

On 25 October 2007, Mr Holmes performed a staphylectomy on Jake during dental surgery. He gave the Committee various reasons why he thought the procedure was necessary; however, the Committee accepted the opinion of two expert witnesses, Professor Dan Brockman, a specialist in soft tissue surgery at the Royal Veterinary College, and Mr Andrew Ash, the senior veterinary surgeon at a 17-vet small animal practice, that there were insufficient clinical grounds for such a surgical procedure to be undertaken. The Committee also found Mr Holmes had not adequately considered other treatments, or obtained fully informed consent from Jake's owner for this procedure.

Mr Holmes performed further staphylectomies and a tracheostomy on Jake, a procedure described

by Professor Brockman as "by definition, high risk and best performed by a specialist". He did not consider referral, or inform Mrs Marsden that such referral was an option. Nor did he provide sufficient aftercare or pain relief. Following these surgeries, Jake was euthanased.

"The Committee found many aggravating factors in both cases."

In the second complaint, Mr Holmes performed dental extractions on two cats, Dream Topping and Henry, and advised removing teeth from a third, Charlie Brown, in October 2008. The Committee, however, accepted the view of expert witnesses Mr Ash and Dr David Crossley, RCVS Recognised Specialist in Veterinary Dentistry, that the dental extractions performed, and the advice given, were not justified on the available clinical evidence. The Committee also found that Mr Holmes did not discuss alternative treatment options with Mrs Auckland, or obtain her informed consent. In the case of Dream Topping, consent was sought after the cat had been sedated for an unrelated procedure and Mrs Auckland had felt under pressure to consent.

Mr Holmes had also relied on anaesthesia-inducing drugs to provide analgesia for the dental

Mr James Main

Inquiry concerning: administration of prohibited substance to racehorse and attempts to conceal actions

DC decision: guilty of serious professional misconduct; remove name from Register

Registration status: name to be removed from Register on 26 March 2011, pending any appeal

At the conclusion of a six-day hearing on 22 February 2011, the Disciplinary Committee directed that James Main be removed from the Register, following his administration of a prohibited substance to a racehorse and his subsequent attempts to conceal his actions.

Mr Main, a partner in the O'Gorman, Slater, Main & Partners veterinary practice in Newbury, and former lead veterinary surgeon to racehorse trainer Mr Nicky Henderson, faced four charges of serious professional misconduct concerning his treatment of Moonlit Path, a six-year-old mare owned by The Queen.

Three of the charges related to Mr Main breaching British Horseracing Authority (BHA) rules by injecting Moonlit Path with tranexamic acid (TA) on the day she was due to race; the fourth charge related to

his dishonest concealment of this treatment in his practice clinical records. Mr Henderson had himself faced a BHA Inquiry into this case in 2009 and subsequently been sanctioned.

"The Committee heard and carefully considered evidence from Mr Henderson and his employees, from BHA investigating officers and its Director of Equine Science and Welfare."

The Committee heard that on 18 February 2009, Mr Henderson's yard requested a veterinary surgeon attend Moonlit Path to administer an injection of Dycenene the following morning. The injection was requested as the mare was prone to exercise-induced pulmonary haemorrhage. Mr Main attended on the morning of 19 February and injected the horse with intravenous tranexamic acid. Moonlit Path raced at Huntingdon later that day, along with the eventual winner, and favourite, Ravello Bay – another horse trained by Mr Henderson. Moonlit Path finished sixth and a urine sample taken from her after the race tested positive for TA.

Of the four charges, Mr Main admitted injecting Moonlit Path with TA on the day she was due to race when he knew this breached the BHA's rule prohibiting any substance other than the horse's usual feed and water being given on race day. However, Mr Main denied knowing that, if tested, a horse would test positive for TA (thereby imposing a strict liability on the trainer); he denied administering a prohibited substance to a horse with the intention to affect that horse's racing performance; and, he denied dishonestly concealing the TA injection by omitting it from his clinical records and referring to it as a 'pre-race check'.

The Committee heard and carefully considered evidence from Mr Henderson and his employees, from BHA investigating officers and its Director of Equine Science and Welfare, from an expert equine physiologist and from Mr Main himself. In its findings, the Committee stated it was "unimpressed by Mr Henderson's evidence and surprised by his apparent lack of knowledge of the rules of racing".

Whilst the Committee accepted Mr Main believed at the time that Moonlit Path would not test positive for TA, it considered he failed to fully inform himself of the medicinal product he was using; especially so as TA does not possess a Marketing Authorisation as a veterinary medicinal product. In so doing, he did not meet his professional

extractions, without any other form of pain relief. The Committee agreed with the expert witnesses that this was wholly inadequate.

The Committee found many aggravating factors in both cases, including actual injury to animals from unnecessary surgery, and a serious breach of the trust in which Mr Holmes' clients had placed in him to make the welfare of their animals his primary consideration. His repeated misconduct had been sustained over a period of time in the face of a previous adverse finding of the Committee in 2006.

It also found that Mr Holmes failed to appreciate when a case was outwith his experience, and had continued his course of action despite Jake's deterioration; he had not considered referral or accepted that others in the profession might know more than he did; in formulating clinical practice and policies, he made no reference to peer-reviewed literature or continued professional development; and, his use of outmoded drugs and medicines intended for human use was of concern, as was his lack of appreciation of the need for adequate pain relief when performing painful surgical procedures.

Towards the end of the hearing, Mr Holmes said in mitigation that he regretted unreservedly any adverse effects that his treatment had had on the

animals concerned, and that he now realised that his long history of working alone had allowed him to become professionally isolated, to become over-confident in the value of his own experience and rather "set in his ways".

Having given serious consideration to postponing judgment, subject to undertakings from Mr Holmes, Disciplinary Committee Chairman Mrs Caroline Freedman said: "We are mindful that the sanction which we apply must be proportionate to the nature and extent of the misconduct found proved and must balance the public interests against the interests of the Respondent.

"We are, however, also mindful of Mr Holmes' conduct during the previous 11½ days of the hearing, during which time his every action was vigorously defended and no insight whatsoever was shown."

The Committee also considered suspending Mr Holmes from the Register. "In view of the serious and long-term nature of the conduct found proved in the charges, we do not feel that it is appropriate that Mr Holmes should be permitted to return to the Register without further assessment of his efforts to update his knowledge," said Mrs Freedman, before concluding: "The only appropriate sanction in each case is that the Registrar be directed to remove Mr Holmes' name from the Register."

obligation to provide Mr Henderson with the information and advice he needed.

The Committee concluded that TA was a prohibited substance and, whilst accepting that Mr Main's concern had solely been for Moonlit Path's welfare, he had actually breached BHA rules by affecting her performance through administering such a substance.

Finally, the Committee found that Mr Main had deliberately concealed the TA injection to Moonlit Path by describing it in his notes as a 'pre-race check' – a protocol developed over several years between the practice and Mr Henderson. Such inaccurate clinical records were in breach of the *RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct* and led the Committee to conclude he had acted dishonestly. The Committee also found Mr Main "did not act with candour" by claiming to have administered the TA injection the day before the race. On questioning by the Legal Assessor, however, he admitted that he had known that Moonlit Path was racing the same day that he administered the injection.

Professor Sheila Crispin, chairing the Committee, said: "[We] regard it as wholly unacceptable practice that a veterinary surgeon should be party to serious breaches of rules of another regulatory body in the field of animal welfare... and which go to the very integrity of racing.

"Whilst the findings relate to a single incident, [we] are satisfied that Mr Main's actions amounted to pre-meditated misconduct... It is highly relevant that Mr Main held positions of responsibility within the racing industry where he was required to uphold the rules and standards of the profession," she added.

"He failed to fully inform himself of the medicinal product he was using."

Noting Mr Main's "long and hitherto unblemished career as a highly respected equine veterinary surgeon", the Committee accepted Mr Main's evidence that the reason for the administration of tranexamic acid was solely his concern about the welfare of the horse. Nevertheless, it found his evidence was "evasive, lacking in candour and on some aspects of the case his evidence was untrue".

Professor Crispin concluded: "...proven dishonesty has been held to come at the top end of the spectrum of gravity of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect... Having considered carefully all the mitigation put forward on Mr Main's behalf, [we] have concluded that Mr Main's behaviour was wholly unacceptable and so serious that removal of his name from the Register is required."

Mr Takeshi Okano

Inquiry concerning: dishonest certification

DC decision: guilty of serious professional misconduct; suspend for eight months

Registration status: name suspended from Register on 17 January 2011

At the outset of the hearing held on 14-15 December, Mr Okano, of Lakeview Veterinary Centre in Deal, Kent, admitted charges that, whilst acting as Official Veterinarian, he had signed a number of certificates when he knew that he did not have all the information needed to do so.

On 23 June 2009, Mr Okano had been asked to act as Official Veterinarian to examine four horses and sign the certificates necessary for their export to the USA. The certificates required Mr Okano to certify he had received a written declaration from the owners that the animals had been in the UK for 60 days previously. Mr Okano also signed certificates indicating that the horses had only been in France, Ireland, or the UK for the same 60-day period. Despite having received no such declarations, and having no information whatsoever of where the horses had been, Mr Okano signed the certificates. At the hearing, no explanation for Mr Okano's actions was offered.

"The validity of any certificate is an integral part of the system relating to the export or import of animals," said Mrs Beverley Cottrell, Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee. "At Section G of the *RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct*, emphasis is given to the importance of certification, the importance of the signature and the guidance issued by DEFRA. These provisions are well known to the profession."

The Committee was satisfied that Mr Okano's actions in signing the certificates without the owners' declarations amounted to a serious departure from professional standards. In reaching a decision on sanction, it considered that, whilst a reprimand or warning would not be appropriate, neither would removing Mr Okano's name from the Register be proportionate, or necessary either in the public interest or to protect animals.

"Mr Okano is a young veterinary surgeon at the start of his career, who from the outset admitted his actions," said Mrs Cottrell noting that the testimonials from veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and clients, and his record of continuing professional development demonstrated his commitment to high standards within the profession. "In reaching this decision, we have paid particular regard to the fact that the false certification was neither persistent nor concealed, nor was he a senior veterinary surgeon."

The Committee directed Mr Okano's name be suspended from the Register for eight months.

Full details of disciplinary hearings are available at www.rcvs.org.uk/disciplinary.



Whether it's practice or food standards, do assurance schemes work?

David Clarke, CEO of Red Tractor Assurance

Assuring consumer confidence

Two decades ago, consumer confidence in the UK food supply hit an all-time low. The newspapers' favourite headline 'Listeria hysteria' reflected a problem from food processing. But many of the other problems, including BSE, salmonella from poultry products, pesticide and veterinary residues and concerns about animal welfare all focused on farming methods. The episode had far-reaching implications with changes to legislation and the creation, in 2000, of an independent Food Standards Agency. The industry responded by introducing self-regulation along the supply chain – which in the farming sector became known as 'farm assurance'.

Nowadays, we have farm assurance in just about every sector of UK agriculture from arable crops to fish farming. Most of the major commodity schemes are now operated as the 'Red Tractor Farm Assurance Scheme'. The Scheme tackles the safety of the food product, the health and welfare of livestock and environmental protection. It reflects the legislation and recognised industry good practice in a set of standards against which farms are inspected regularly.

Assurance is important in the supply chain. Every major retailer, many manufacturers and, increasingly, catering companies demand farm assurance as part of their buying specifications. As a result, most UK farm production comes from assured farms, around 80-90% by volume in most sectors.

A crucial question is, does farm assurance make any difference? A recent study suggests that the answer is 'Yes'. Commissioned by Defra¹ and completed by Warwick University it showed that, using routine inspections by Animal Health as a benchmark, assured farms have significantly higher levels of compliance with the legislation and codes of good practice.

In 2000, we introduced a consumer logo – the Red Tractor mark. This helps to differentiate assured foods at the point of sale and provides a vehicle for communication to consumers. The key objective is to encourage shoppers to select assured products. Consumer communications is of course a complex topic. We should not fool ourselves into thinking that most consumers are interested in the technical details most of the time. A lot of our effort goes into simply getting recognition of the Red Tractor logo, for example, by providing enticing recipes. But we can swing into another gear when the media cover the

next food scare, for example, dioxin in animal feed in Germany at the start of 2011. We can then tell consumers that products labelled with the Red Tractor logo have come through a system with safeguards against such problems.

The Red Tractor logo now appears on £11 billion worth of food products every year, from beer to butter and beef to beetroot. But the task of communicating the attributes of British farm standards to the consumer remains a day-to-day challenge.



¹The report is available on the Defra website and is likely to be published in a peer-reviewed journal in the near future. RCVS President, Peter Jinman, is the Red Tractor mark's Independent Director of Animal Welfare. For more information about the Red Tractor mark, visit: www.redtractor.org.uk.

Flagging up the past

A history of the veterinary profession... in somewhat fewer than 100 objects

This is the first of our series to examine the history of the profession through some of the artefacts we hold, an exercise particularly pertinent in Vet2011, when we celebrate the long history of the profession. Here, veterinary historian Bruce Vivash Jones and Trust Librarian Clare Boulton tell the heroic story behind a faded flag.

In a room in Belgravia House hangs a most incongruous object – a shabby, frayed, faded red and white flag. This was flown by the No 1 Cavalry Mobile Veterinary Section (CMVS), formed in 1938 to provide veterinary and remount services to the Greys and Royals, horsed cavalry regiments then engaged in anti-terrorist action in Palestine. However, in 1940, following the outbreak of World War Two, the Section was posted to Egypt, first assisting the Polish Carpathian Brigade and then drafted to Sidi Barrani to salvage 200 mules abandoned in the desert by the retreating Italian army. These were added to the mule companies they were assembling for the Greek campaign.

In 1941, the Section was sent to Syria to assist the 370-mile desert trek of some 3,000 horses and mules from Aleppo to Iraq: largely due to their veterinary care, less than one per cent of the column was lost. They then returned to Egypt, to be embarked in 1943 for the Sicily landing. Serving with the 8th Army as an advanced veterinary unit throughout the Italian campaign, they supported the pack mule companies that proved essential for supplying the front line in difficult terrain. Their 'Kicking Mule' insignia became one of the best known throughout Italy.

Following the breakthrough into Austria and the German surrender in May 1945, the Section was involved in rounding up some 58,000 *Wehrmacht* horses and mules. In just three months, they helped to sort, test and ship over 44,000 of them to farmers in Italy, Germany, Austria, Russia and Yugoslavia, just in time for the harvest. The unserviceable ones were used to help feed 200,000 prisoners-of-war and displaced people. The final act for the Section was to control a foot-and-mouth disease epidemic, requisitioning and distributing ex-*Wehrmacht* disinfectants.

Major A V Franklin, one of the commanders of No1 CMVS, handed the flag to Sir Thomas Dalling, then RCVS President, for safe-keeping at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons at a meeting of Council on 29 September 1949.

The flag is a tribute, not only to the No1 CMVS, but to all the Royal Army Veterinary Corps members who served during the Second World War, in a variety of countries, climates and disease problems, in a vital support role.



Stem cell research update

Progress report from a Trust Golden Jubilee grant-holder

In 2008, the RCVS Trust marked its fiftieth anniversary by awarding over £1,000,000 of funding for 59 research and animal welfare projects in the UK and overseas, the largest of which were two Golden Jubilee grants of £250,000 each.

One of these Golden Jubilee awards was made to Professor David Argyle, William Dick Chair of Veterinary Clinical Studies at the University of Edinburgh. His research aims to generate, from normal adult canine cells, cells that have stem cell characteristics, and to identify resident adult stem cells within body tissues.

This project is nearing completion, so we asked Professor Argyle about his work - and what advice he would give to practitioners applying for research grants.

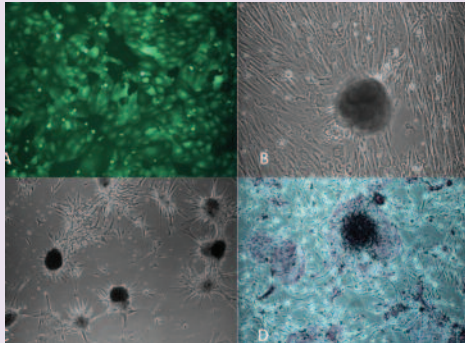
Why are these important areas to research?

Stem cells are the fundamental cells responsible for creating organisms and also maintaining those organisms throughout their lives. An understanding of stem cell biology has profound implications for understanding basic developmental biology right through to how disease affects tissues, and how the body responds to that disease. This will help us to develop new treatments for diseases such as heart disease, cancer and arthritis.

Why did you decide to focus on canine stem cells in particular?

The major work in our lab is currently focused on cancer in companion animals, specifically dogs. A few years ago, we identified key stem cells in cancer, which we consider to be the fundamental cells that are responsible for this devastating disease. However, to understand diseased stem cells, we realised that we needed a greater understanding of normal stem cells. This concept grew into the project that the RCVS Trust is funding, and has evolved to encompass a number of potentially very important outcomes, such as:

- A greater understanding of the fundamental biology of development in the dog
- A greater understanding of stem cells in disease, and how the canine body can regenerate
- Developing a mechanism by which we can isolate stem cells in culture and make them into organ-specific cells (for example, liver cells), then we can start to develop *in vitro* systems for drug testing.



What impact could your research have?

Apart from understanding development and disease, we anticipate that the major impact of our work in the welfare of dogs will be the reduction of a need for the use of dogs in research. All of the canine cells we used were derived from dogs that had been euthanased for clinical reasons, and taken with their owners' consent.

What was the most interesting thing that you've discovered so far through this research?

Our fundamental discovery is that we can induce adult cells to become stem cells, similar to the process described in mice only a few years ago. However, on top of this, we have evidence that cancer cells can also be 'reprogrammed'. This is early days, but could have profound consequences for our understanding of normal development and devastating diseases, such as cancer.

£250,000 seems like a lot of money – what are the main costs involved in clinical research of this type?

In fact, in today's climate, £250,000 is modest in research terms. A project like this costs us around £1,000 to £1,500 per month in consumables (for example, reagents and cell culture). On top of that, we need to employ an experienced person to carry out cell culture experiments. Our project funding also included the training of a PhD student – a veterinary surgeon – so we have had the added advantage that this programme is also helping to train the next generation of clinical scientists.

What has been the role of the Trust's funding – could this project have been carried out without it?

We could not have done this without the Trust's support. Because of its generous support, we have been able to gain invaluable data which has also allowed us to apply for even more financial support from the Research Councils to make this a major programme. This could have significant benefits for the future of research, not only in dogs, but in other species as well, including, potentially, humans.

“An understanding of stem cell biology has profound implications for understanding basic developmental biology right through to how disease affects tissues.”

What is the best thing – and the worst – about working in clinical research?

The best thing about clinical research is the feeling that you are advancing clinical practice and furthering our understanding of disease. The complex biology of animals never ceases to amaze, and the more we learn, the greater the opportunity for improving animal welfare. Coming up with new research ideas is a great way to spend time.

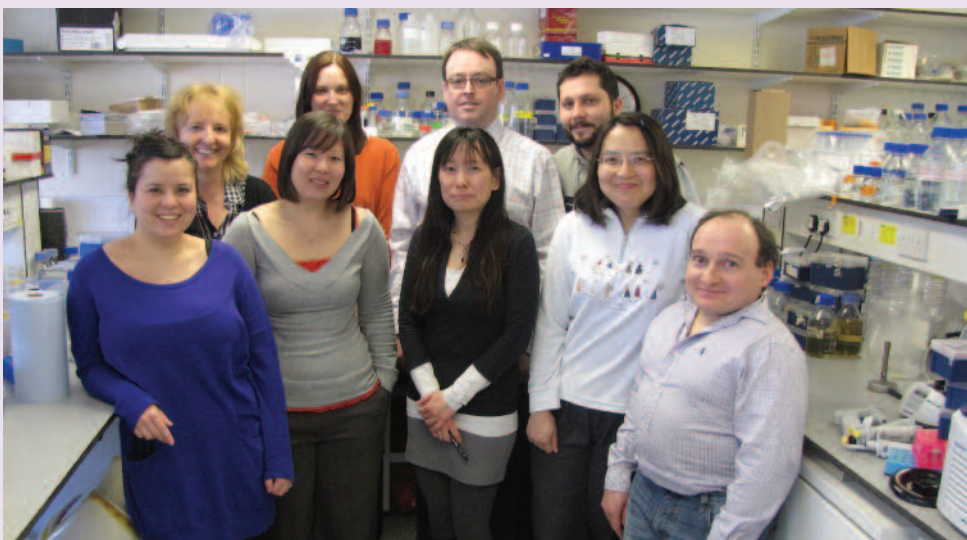
The worst, apart from the frustration when things do not go to plan, is the lack of funding world-wide.

Do you have any advice for veterinary surgeons – or veterinary nurses – considering applying for a research grant?

Speak to, and get help from, people who have been successful grant writers. I know the RCVS Trust is also working with other grant-makers to offer workshops on application processes.

So, what's next?

We are excited to continue with this work as it has opened up major avenues for us. We have applied for a major Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council grant to continue this work and are awaiting a decision.



Professor David Argyle (glasses, rear) with the Roslin Institute Companion Animal Cancer and Stem Cell Group

RCVS News at a glance...

Too busy to read the lot? Start here for important dates for your diary and story summaries, so you can decide what might be worth reading in full.

1 Branded

Our new look explained.

2 Fresh faces

New university appointees on Council.

Vote!

RCVS and VN Council elections now open. Do it for your profession.

3 Stadium gig

Jacqui Molyneux elected Junior Vice-President.

Independent means

Legislative reform order for independent PIC and DC moves closer.

Golden glow

Nominate a VN for our golden jubilee 'outstanding contribution' award.

4 Welfare woes

New PDSA report shines light on our nation of animal lovers.

5 Renewal requirements

How to renew your registration under the new rules.

Room without a view

New lower ground floor rooms give us space to grow.

6 Principled decisions

Understanding our new brand and identity.

8 Untangled web

A peak at our new website.

9 Coders get cracking

Council approves Working Party's draft new Code of Conduct: consultation soon.

Lucky strike

Advice on working relationships with farriers.

10 The whole truth

New Advice Note for those giving evidence in court.

At cost

We report on the recouping of legal costs associated with dismissed appeals.

Support act

New research highlights that PDP-ers need support of employers.

11 Special treatment

Working Party focusing on route to specialisation.

Just visiting

Update on recent visitations, including the story so far for Nottingham.

VNs all mixed up

Mixed-practice qualification pathway for VNs in the pipeline.

12 Online recording

Plans approved for lifelong learning recording system.

13 Career ladder

What next for qualified VNs?

Fees pleas

Letter to Minister planned regarding student fee increases.

14 R u ready?

Are RVNs ready for the new disciplinary system? It launches 1 April: our Q&A should help.

16 Step to it

Join us at BSAVA Congress to launch our 'take the next step' campaign to celebrate 50 years of veterinary nursing; plus news of a summer seminar.

Open house

Opportunities to visit the College to find out more about what we do.

17 London calling

Pose your questions to the Officer team at our London meeting.

18 MRCVS misuse

Preliminary Investigation Committee reports on eight potential breaches of the Veterinary Surgeons Act, plus advice on communicating medicines side effects to clients.

19 DC hearings

Mr M Albring suspended for failure to make animal welfare his primary concern; judgment on sanction postponed for Mr P MacMahon, regarding failure to provide adequate professional care and insufficient regard for animal welfare; Mr J Holmes directed to be removed from Register for serious professional conduct – appeal lodged; Mr J Main directed to be removed from Register for administration of prohibited substance to racehorse and attempts to conceal actions; and, Mr T Okano suspended for dishonest certification.

22 Rest assured

Guest columnist outlines a successful food assurance scheme.

Taking the mystery out of history

Unlocking the secrets of our historic objects.

23 A word in your cell-like

Hear the latest from a Trust-funded stem cell research project.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2011

24 March

Regional Question Time – London

31 March

Member retention fees due

31 March to 3 April

See us at BSAVA Congress

1 April

Premises registration fees due

2 April

National Pet Month starts

15 April

Meet the RCVS Day

27 April

Your vote must be in by 5pm

6 May

RCVS open day

19 May

Regional Question Time – Inverness

2 June

RCVS Council meeting

1 July

RCVS Day



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