

RCVS REVIEW

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS: PART 1

2008



RCVS REVIEW 2008

1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008

Patron: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

President's Introduction



Education

The Professional Development Phase became compulsory for new graduates from 2007. Karen Hurst discusses her experiences during her first year of practice.



Veterinary Nursing

We introduced the Register for Veterinary Nurses in September 2007. Kerry Skinner tells us why she was keen to join up and become accountable.



Registrar's Overview



RCVS Trust

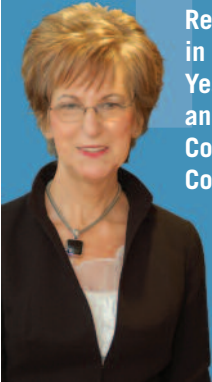
The RCVS Trust is 50 years old in 2008 and is awarding £1million in grants. Paul Freeman outlines how he successfully applied for a grant to support his practice-based Diploma.





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This year we overhauled our complaints procedures to streamline decision-making. Jane Ramsey explains the critical role played by Lay Observers to the PIC.



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Are we hiding our light under a bushel? David Watson, veterinary surgeon and journalist, casts a critical eye over our communications efforts.



RCVS Facts

This is Part I of our reporting on RCVS activities in 2008. For everything from the number of UK veterinary students, through the distribution of vets and VNs across the country, to our accounts, see Part II: *RCVS Facts* (www.rcvs.org.uk/facts)

Openness and transparency

During my year as President, I have continued the efforts begun by my predecessors to improve RCVS communications. I have tried to show the friendly face of the College and to increase the openness and transparency of College business to the profession and public alike.

This year, we have held four Meet the RCVS Days, when we take a small group around Belgravia House to meet the staff. I always enjoy these sessions and welcome the opportunity to meet members and others in person. Feedback suggests that these are very useful days, providing an insight into the responsibilities of the

RCVS and the huge amount of work that goes on, unseen by the majority of our profession.



If you can't come to us, we come to you. Our programme of Regional Question Times has continued, and we have visited Dunblane, Nottingham, Tunbridge Wells and my hometown, Ilminster. Hot topics this year have included the future of 24-hour cover, the College's response to the EFRA Committee's review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act and veterinary nurse regulation. We do listen to what is said and take account of views where we can. So if you have not attended a

***"If you can't come to us,
we come to you."***

Question Time, I would encourage you to do so, it's your opportunity to put your questions to the Officers of the College.

Another opportunity the President has to meet new faces is during the round of final-year student talks held at the veterinary schools. The Professional Development Phase (PDP) was the subject of much discussion this year, as it was made compulsory for all those graduating from 2007. The PDP sets new veterinary surgeons off on a pathway of lifelong learning that I hope will, in due course, include enrolment on the new modular Certificate, also launched this year.

The new-style Certificate was designed to be more accessible than the old, and transparency and accessibility have been watchwords this year. For example, the Disciplinary Committee (DC) now provides a much fuller explanation of its findings and the reasons behind its decisions. These, together with new guidance for the DC, are also published on RCVSonline. We hope these new

publications will help maintain public confidence in our regulation of the profession.

Also during this year we have revised the process and protocols for the Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) in an attempt to shorten the time-scale for dealing with complaints. Obviously, the actual details of any complaint have to remain confidential (unless it reaches a disciplinary hearing), but the publication of the protocols means that the processes by which a complaint is dealt with are now widely available online.

I hope you will all have noticed the recent changes in *RCVS News* and its sister publication *RCVS News Extra*. In recognition of the synergy within the veterinary team and the launch of the new Register for Veterinary Nurses, we have extended *RCVS News* readership to veterinary nurses and have also introduced a new publication, *VN Standard*, to cover veterinary nurse training issues. Response to the new publications has been very positive.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as President, a year during which many positive new developments have taken place. I hope this *Annual Review* will give you a flavour of the quantity, quality and variety of work carried out by the College during the year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Moore'.

Bob Moore
President

Strategy and synergy

It is my pleasure to introduce the *RCVS Review 2008*; the latest product of our continuous search for innovative and ever better ways of communicating. In previous *Annual Reports*, two recurring features have been the presentation of sets of data, so that trends can be compared over the years, and detailed reporting on what we have been doing over the past 12 months. The new approach seeks to develop these two themes.

This year there are two documents. *RCVS Facts 2008* includes all the tables that have previously appeared in the *Annual Report* (detailing, for example, numbers in the profession, students and demographic details), the summary accounts, and all of the figures and charts that have previously appeared in the narrative sections of the report. This document will be available online, so that these important data are always to hand. We will, however, also produce paper copies for those who find that medium the most convenient: you only have to ask.

To complement the *RCVS Facts*, the document you have in your hand is intended to provide a more personal account of what the College has been doing during the year. Rather than use the traditional narrative approach, the new *RCVS Review 2008* seeks to outline in more detail just a few of our major activities, through the eyes of those who have been directly involved.

The College is a public body and we should make an attempt to try to see ourselves as others do, and for that insight I would like to thank all of those who have agreed to tell their stories in the case studies. I would also like to thank all of the staff who work in Belgravia

House, and my fellow Officers, for all that they do to keep the organisation moving forward. As many who have attended a Meet the RCVS Day have observed, the College is a more complex organisation than you might think. It is part statutory regulator, part Royal College and part charitable trust. I hope that the synergy of these different functions, along with an indication of our aims and objectives, is clear from the RCVS Strategy Plan (www.rcvs.org.uk/strategyplan).

“I hope that this latest publication will speak for itself and leave you with a clear and positive image of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.”

The Strategy Plan was reviewed and updated during the course of 2007 and approved by Council in November. Compared with the original 2004 version, it now includes some indications of progress to date. The activities featured in this *Annual Review* illustrate a selection of those achievements. Some, like the Professional Development Phase and regulation of veterinary nurses, are new activities, consistent with our regulatory role; others are improvements to the way we do things, such as the overhaul of complaints handling and the disciplinary process.

The RCVS Trust deserves a special mention, as it is now 50 years old and has awarded over £1 million in Jubilee-year grants.

The final mention, appropriately, should be of communications: I hope that this latest publication will speak for itself and leave you with a clear and positive image of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.



Jane C Hern
Registrar



Easing the transition for graduates

“My practice has been really supportive, but if I did have any problems, I could always contact my RCVS Postgraduate Dean for advice. It’s like having an extra support network.”

Karen Hurst MRCVS, recent graduate



A mandatory requirement since 2007, the Professional Development Phase (PDP) enables new veterinary graduates to continue to develop their professional and clinical skills, reflect on their progress and plan their future professional development. Here, recent Liverpool graduate Karen Hurst BVSc BSc MRCVS discusses her experiences of the PDP during her first year in practice with the Mearley Veterinary Group in Clitheroe, Lancashire.

I remember someone from the College coming to talk to us about the PDP and he got quite a hostile reception! "Why do we have to do it? How much time will it take? What happens to us if we don't do it?" were some of the questions we fired at the poor guy. We were all pretty defiant!

Since then, though, my views have changed and it's nice to know that we're still classed as fully-qualified vets from day one. Although I'm not one for sitting down religiously every day to fill out the PDP (like most people, I don't have the time!), I do actually enjoy keeping a record of what I've been doing and keeping tabs on my contemporaries.

The most useful thing is being able to chart my progress. The first year in practice is pretty daunting and can be quite depressing – there's so much to learn and you think you're rubbish at everything! Take small animal euthanasia: I used to be terrified about everything from collapsing veins to emotional owners to misjudging the dose... Ten months on and not only do I no longer take the animal into the back to insert a catheter, but I also no longer even feel the need to record euthanasia cases on the PDP log. Being able to see such obvious progress is very encouraging.

The private diary section is good for getting things off your chest. When I've had a particularly difficult day, I've tended to scribble down my thoughts about what's gone wrong and why. A cathartic exercise in itself, I can also read it again a few days later and realise that I didn't kill that rabbit – it was going to die anyway!

I can keep an eye on how my contemporaries are faring too, which can be a useful bargaining tool to use with the boss. If everyone else seems to be doing more, say, bitch spays than I am, I can show him the evidence and ask for more surgery duties.

The comparison charts even help me to identify if I've missed something in a clinical diagnosis. Seeing other people's recordings of neurology cases, for example, has made me read up more on neurology to see if I should have spotted something I didn't.

It's reassuring to know you're not on your own when you leave vet school. I'm lucky in that my practice has been really supportive, but if I did have any problems, I could always contact my RCVS Postgraduate Dean for advice. It's like having an extra support network. If nothing else, the PDP could always help you realise you've joined a dodgy practice. If you're not experiencing anything like what's described on the competencies and clinical skills lists, then it's probably a good indication to find another job!

I intercalated my degree with a BSc in Veterinary Conservation Medicine, so I have friends who graduated before the PDP started. They probably feel they got away with it, but I'm pleased to have been able to participate. I could probably have signed it all off a while ago, but I still find it useful so will keep jotting things down for a while yet.

View a PDP demo at <http://pdp.rcvs.org.uk>

Other Education-related activities include:

- Accrediting new modules for the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (CertAVP), which offers a flexible route to postgraduate learning (www.rcvs.org.uk/modcerts)
- Carrying out a visitation of the University of Cambridge's Department of Clinical Veterinary Medicine, as part of our statutory responsibility to quality-assure undergraduate veterinary education
- Producing an online video to better explain the PDP to new graduates and employers (www.vetpulse.tv)
- Awarding 106 Certificates and nine Diplomas
- Publishing *The Impact of Veterinary Research* to encourage new researchers and attract funding (www.rcvs.org.uk/research)
- Leading a collaboration of six of the UK's veterinary schools and DEFRA, using funds matched by the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills, to develop new careers materials to broaden the base of applicants to veterinary school, under the theme: "Veterinary science... for all walks of life" (www.walksoflife.org.uk).



Accountability for veterinary nurses



"I strongly believe clients should feel confident that when they entrust the care of their animal to a member of the veterinary team, the animal is going to receive a high standard of care."

Kerry Skinner RVN

We opened the non-statutory Register for Veterinary Nurses in September 2007, an important step towards recognising veterinary nursing as a profession in its own right. Kerry Skinner DipAVN(Surgical) RVN, from Acorn House Veterinary Practice in Bedford, was quick to register. Here she explains why.

When the Register opened, some of our more junior VNs were set to register automatically as they had qualified since 2003. Others of us had a choice to make. We thought it was a good opportunity for all 12 of the VNs in the practice to get together and discuss the whole issue of professional accountability and what it might mean for us.

We pulled together various press cuttings and leaflets for background, ordered some pizzas, then got stuck into discussing what differences registration would bring. It basically means being accountable for our professional practice by following the *Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses* and keeping our skills up to date with compulsory Continuing Professional Development (CPD). There will also be a disciplinary system introduced in a couple of years.

Initially, there was some uncertainty among less experienced colleagues. But we soon realised that, as we were lucky to work in a very supportive practice and all work to a high standard anyway, we had nothing to fear. Besides, if there is a problem, it's much better to have it dealt with through a proper system, especially if you have done your best and are working to the RCVS guidelines.

I strongly believe clients should feel confident that when they entrust the care of their animal to a member of the veterinary team, the animal is going to receive a high standard of care and that each person providing it is accountable

for their actions. So registration seems a totally positive step for the VN profession.

We decided to adopt a united front and all signed up together. In addition, those VNs who were not already members of the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) opted to join it. The whole thing was actually a good team-building exercise too!

It was important that we made sure our veterinary colleagues knew what being an RVN meant for us. They're a good bunch and they appreciated the info packs we produced to put them in the picture. I am not sure that clients understand the difference between VNs and RVNs yet, though. That might take a little longer, although I think most of them would be surprised to find that we have not been accountable before this.

I've always been keen on professional development and completed my Surgical Diploma last year. While I was studying for that I visited hospitals, referral centres and Cambridge Veterinary School. It opened my eyes to the amount of CPD that is potentially available on your doorstep, often free of charge.

So to help us meet our Register targets, we have devised a programme of CPD drawing on in-house expertise, such as our certificate-holding vets. For example, my interests lie in theatre nursing and I have given a session on suturing. We also collaborate with other local practices. Doing what we can in-house means that more of our CPD budget can be spent on the VN students' books and courses.

People often complain that no one speaks up for VNs, but it's up to us! If we push ourselves forward, by doing things like joining the Register, I think we'll find that others will be more willing to help promote our profession, too.

Read more about the VN Register at www.rcvs.org.uk/vnregister



Other VN-related activities include:

- Publishing the *Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses* and *Continuing Professional Development Card* to support Registered Veterinary Nurses (www.rcvs.org.uk/vnregister)
- Carrying out a comprehensive survey of the VN profession (www.rcvs.org.uk/surveys)
- The election of Liz Branscombe and Jenny Thompson to VN Council.

And via the Veterinary Nursing Awarding Body:

- Extending the practical examinations to four per year, over three-day weekends, to make assessment more accessible
- Paving the way for e-assessment to be introduced from summer 2008, allowing written-paper candidates to attend one of 150 computer-based test centres
- Launching *VN Standard*, our newsletter for those involved with VN training
- Chairing a successful pilot of a pan-European accreditation system for VN qualifications (www.acovene.org.uk)
- Accrediting a new veterinary nursing foundation degree at Nottingham Trent University
- Successfully passing our Qualifications and Curriculum Authority audit.



Supporting role for Trust

“The money has really helped reduce the impact on the practice of my studying and allowed me to make the most of the excellent opportunity I have been given.”

Paul Freeman MRCVS, RCVS Trust grant holder



Working towards a Diploma whilst in practice may seem like an impossible ambition. But Paul Freeman MA VetMB Cert SAO MRCVS, from The Veterinary Practice in Braintree, Essex, explains how it can be achieved with a little help from the RCVS Trust.

I took my Certificate in Small Animal Orthopaedics in 1993. Seems like a very long time ago now, so I was more than ready for a new challenge. I am a partner in a seven-vet mainly small animal practice and I have built up a good base of orthopaedic referrals, which often touch on spinal work, so it made sense to consider neurology as the next step.

As a busy practitioner, I hadn't really thought that a Diploma was an option, until someone suggested that there were non-traditional routes. I approached Professor Nick Jeffery at Cambridge who helped me to develop a proposal for a 'non-conforming residency' leading to the Diploma examination that was subsequently approved by the European College of Veterinary Neurology – there is no RCVS Diploma in this field. Nick and I spent a long time thinking about how to approach the proposal as a practice-based Diploma was a bit of an unknown quantity.

I am based at Cambridge for five weeks of the year, commuting daily, plus there is an expectation that I will travel to international conferences, such as the European College of Veterinary Neurology Congress, which is in Rhodes this year. So one of my main worries in taking on this five-year challenge was the pressure that it would put on my colleagues, and my own finances.

That's where the RCVS Trust came in. Nick had heard of the Trust's Practice-based Diploma Programme and suggested I apply for a grant. I was really surprised to hear

about this as practice-based Diplomas are a relatively new thing. Someone at the Trust was obviously enlightened when they developed that programme.

I asked the Trust for £5,000, mainly for travel expenses and to allow the practice to use a locum to cover my study absences, and, following a very painless application process, was pleased to have been granted the full amount. The money has really helped reduce the impact on the practice of my studying and allowed me to make the most of the excellent opportunity I have been given.

As it had been a long time since I took my Certificate, some of my study skills were a bit rusty, but I have found the University very supportive, in particular Professor Jeffery and Clinical Neurologist Nicolas Grainger. I was also able to attend a course at the Cambridge Infectious Diseases Consortium Outreach Programme, which helps practice-based vets to develop their research skills.

When I complete my Diploma, I am not yet sure if I will go on to apply for RCVS Recognised Specialist status. In fact, I am not yet sure if I will manage to complete the Diploma! But even if I don't stay the course, I will have gained a huge amount from the learning process and, hopefully, been able to contribute to the profession's knowledge base through publications. I have also been able to build valuable links between Cambridge University and my own practice.

I would recommend those looking for a new challenge to consider a practice-based Diploma. You certainly need to find a supportive supervisor, but it's not beyond the grasp of a practitioner. And, of course, a helping hand from the RCVS Trust does not go amiss!

Read more about available grants at www.rcvstrust.org.uk



Other Trust-related activities include:

- Doubling the 2008 grant awards programme to pass the £1m mark, funding 59 separate projects including two £¼m Golden Jubilee Awards
- Coordinating a comprehensive events fundraising programme including a Golf Day, a sponsored Herriot-Way walk, a sponsored sky-dive and four runners in the British 10K London Run
- Hosting a first Author's Evening in the Trust Library, with Professor Don Broom discussing the latest edition of his book and the future of animal welfare science
- Consolidating support of postgraduate veterinary education, with additional Library services and new Trust grants
- Funding ten projects from other like-minded animal health and welfare organisations
- Developing "Chapter One" – a support and learning network for Graduate Trainee Librarians
- Doubling the number and availability of Travel Scholarships
- Strategic development of income generation with new investment in planned giving.



Critical observations

“I think we provide a valuable external perspective that helps to make the system more objective for all concerned.”

Jane Ramsey, PIC Lay Observer



The Preliminary Investigation Committee is the statutory committee that considers whether a complaint should be put before the Disciplinary Committee. It comprises six veterinary surgeon members of Council. In 1999, we decided that greater lay involvement was appropriate and three lay observers now sit with the Committee. Jane Ramsey, appointed as lay observer in 2007, explains her role.

As a lawyer, I know how easy it is to get absorbed in the detail of an issue rather than see it from the client's perspective. All of the vets serving on the Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) have very high personal and professional standards: the lay observers complement this by being able to step back from a complaint and look at it from the public's point of view.

For five years I was chairman of an Inner-London Primary Care Trust and, as such, a member of a committee that dealt with complaints against local GPs, dentists and opticians. Among other roles, I am also a lay member of the Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and sit on the Department of Health's Audit Committee, so I have a good appreciation of different professions' regulatory systems.

I was keen to work with the College as I felt I had relevant transferable knowledge and skills, although my prior experience of the profession was limited to visits to the local vet with Thistle, my daughter's rabbit!

It's great that the RCVS has voluntarily included lay people within its disciplinary mechanisms. I find that the advice of the lay observers on PIC is always listened to - I think we really do make a difference. One good example is the recent review of the complaints process. When I joined the Committee in July, a major overhaul of the whole process was underway. I became involved as the lay person on the working party and helped

shape the proposals that went to Council in November 2007 and, following some further refinement, were then implemented in March.

The aim was to make complaints handling more efficient and streamlined. For example, we have added the flexibility that a case can be closed where appropriate on the basis of a case examination (carried out by a lay person and a vet) without it waiting to be heard by the PIC in full. This has cut down the time taken for many cases to be closed. Although the outcomes will not have changed, the speedier process is likely to reduce stress for both parties.

I think the new process stands up very well against those of other regulatory bodies. It's fair and effective. It will take a while to bed in, but early indications are that although the system has lost none of its fairness, there is a significant reduction in cases needing to be considered by the full committee.

Another area where the College is a step ahead is in the paper-free approach to meetings. I feel very sorry for my postman as he drags piles of paper to my door in preparation for other regulatory body meetings. But with the RCVS, I receive a password-protected memory stick and that's that. It has replaced several pounds of paper and I can easily work on the documents anywhere at any time. I wish some of the other bodies would adopt something similar!

Vets are more individualistic than I expected, and the range of practice they carry out more diverse. But those I have worked with all share a huge commitment to the welfare of animals. We lay observers don't agree with the vets, or indeed each other, on every issue. I think we provide a valuable external perspective that helps to make the system more objective for all concerned.

Read about the new complaints procedures at www.rcvs.org.uk/complaints



Other PIC-related activities include:

- Revising our complaints procedures to make more transparent the decision-making processes during the Assessment, Case-Examination and PIC stages of complaints-handling (www.rcvs.org.uk/complaints)
- Initiating 96 separate investigations into complaints against veterinary surgeons at the PIC's request (see *RCVS Facts* www.rcvs.org.uk/facts)
- Handling 680 complaints made against veterinary surgeons during the year under review (see *RCVS Facts*)
- Seeking to separate the investigation and adjudication roles of the PIC by recruiting non-PIC veterinary surgeons to carry out visits to veterinary practices
- Increasing lay involvement in the earlier stages of the complaints-handling process
- Publishing Lay Observer Annual Reports and indexed archives of PIC Reports to Council on RCVSonline (www.rcvs.org.uk/pic)
- Working with BVA's VETS.TV to help explain the complaints process (www.vets.tv)
- Publishing a well-received issue of *RCVS News Extra* on ten common areas of complaint (www.rcvs.org.uk/publications).



Seeking the truth

“Throughout, I was kept informed about progress, and when I eventually attended the hearing at the College I was well looked after.”

Heather Mills, complainant to the RCVS



We often read in the veterinary press about those who have been the subject of a complaint to the RCVS, but what about the complainant's story? Heather Mills, a national journalist who writes for *Private Eye*, recounts her experiences.

As a campaigning journalist who feels passionately about injustice of all kinds, I naturally wanted to put things right when I realised I had been mis-sold my horse, Noah.

When matters could not be resolved amicably, I successfully sued the vendors and I complained about their veterinary surgeon who had furnished them with a false certificate about the horse's health. Until then, I had always had a very positive view and experience of the veterinary profession, and I was both shocked and disappointed by the veterinary surgeon's actions.

Acting on requests from the vendors, the veterinary surgeon had falsely certified that Noah had not suffered back-related lameness during a specified period. This was used by the vendors to argue that an insurance restriction could be lifted. The false certificate was also passed to me. I purchased Noah taking that information in good faith, but in fact he had suffered further back problems less than five months before I bought him. Unfortunately, he has turned out to be unrideable and is now an expensive but much loved pet.

I initially called the RCVS for advice and subsequently submitted a formal complaint. After a hiccup at the first screening phase, I found the staff and legal team at the College helpful, professional and diligent. I appreciated being consulted and was able to comment on anomalies in the explanation given by the veterinary surgeon. I know from experience that other professional bodies, such as the Law Society, do not operate this way.

I first complained to the College in March 2006 and my case was heard in June 2007. Throughout, I was kept informed about progress, and when I eventually attended the hearing at the College I was well looked after. My experience as a court journalist meant I knew what to expect and wasn't too daunted by the prospect of being a witness.

The investigators and lawyers for the RCVS had worked hard to put together the case. They had gathered important evidence and documentation from the veterinary surgeon's practice and elsewhere which I had not been able to obtain through disclosure in my own civil case, so I chose to sit through the entire disciplinary proceedings to get to the truth of matter. In fact, if the veterinary surgeon in question had agreed to meet me at the outset, apologise and give a full and truthful account of what happened, I may well have left it there and not made a formal complaint.

At the end of the day, I would rather not have had to go through this experience. It was a lot more time-consuming and stressful than I anticipated.

However, the vet received a two-month suspension and I feel this outcome was about right. Ultimately, my view of the veterinary profession has not changed. I am still confident of the level of care I receive from my own practice. They had carried out a pre-purchase examination of Noah and, like me, relied on assurances about his history. My own vet was crucial to and totally supportive of the civil proceedings. I am sure the majority of veterinary surgeons are professional and conscientious. I would recommend anyone who feels otherwise should take their complaint to the College with confidence that it will be thoroughly investigated.

Read about Disciplinary Hearings at www.rcvs.org.uk/disciplinary



Other DC-related activities include:

- Publishing comprehensive guidance on the DC's purpose and function, decision-making, indicative outcomes and sanctions and reasons for decisions and procedures (www.rcvs.org.uk/dcguidance)
- 14 separate cases heard by the DC during the 12 months under review (see *RCVS Facts* www.rcvs.org.uk/facts)
- Providing DC members with additional training in witness assessment, recent case law, the Legal Assessor's role and the new DC guidance
- Appointing a dedicated Clerk to the Committee to coordinate all DC administration and act as a single point of contact for all involved in hearings
- Producing an online video to better explain the DC's role, procedures and functions (www.vetpulse.tv)
- Improving the layout of the hearing room and installing new amplification equipment to facilitate dialogue and communication for all involved.



Communications from the front

“The College makes great play of the fact that it is looking carefully at what ‘the other professions’ are doing to ensure that regulation is fit for purpose into the next decade and beyond.”

David Watson MRCVS, journalist



We spend a lot of time and resources telling people about what the College does. But is the message getting through? As both a veterinary surgeon and journalist, David Watson BVetMed MRCVS, editor of *Veterinary Review*, is in a unique position to tell us.

I come to the party wearing two hats – that of a common-or-garden vet and that of a cynical old hack. Some would say there is little difference!

Where to begin on a subject as broad and contentious as communication and the RCVS? Up until a few years ago, traditional wisdom would have had it that the words 'RCVS' and 'communication' constituted an oxymoron, a bit like 'military intelligence' or 'friendly fire'. However, that is certainly no longer the case.

When I first qualified, towards the end of the classical James Herriot era of practice, RCVS communication consisted of absolute silence, punctuated once a year by the arrival of a buff-coloured Register, sometimes accompanied by a buff, or occasionally coffee-brown, *Annual Report* – close-typed and smelling of fustiness and old socks.

The past few years have seen the evolution of a clean-cut, business-like website, the development of an award-winning newsletter and a tactile *Annual Report* that manages to be pleasing to the eye and yet present a wealth of interesting information in a highly digestible format. Added to this have been the 'Meet the RCVS' open days and the well-organised – and invariably well-attended – Regional Question Times. All designed to underpin the fact that the College is "listening and learning". But is this enough?

One of the great difficulties faced by the College in its communication strategy, and indeed the British Veterinary Association too, is that although we as vets are aware of the niceties of the differences between these two organisations, as far as clients, the public and

the Government are concerned, we are one profession and they are not interested in these differences. The fallout, in communication terms, is that the College spends a disproportionate amount of its time talking about what it does not do.

The College makes great play of the fact that it is looking carefully at what 'the other professions' are doing to ensure that regulation is fit for purpose into the next decade and beyond. It is good for the College to be in the vanguard of initiatives such as mandatory CPD and practice standards, yet it needs to communicate the benefits of these measures to the humblest of practices, and to the public, in a sensitive and supportive fashion. Yet it will do well to remember that even the greatest military generals, who lead from the front, need to take an occasional look over their shoulders to make sure that the troops are still there, keeping up with them!

And what about the troops? Vets are a motley bunch with a natural tendency to challenge authority. Not an easy group upon which to impose change. But the troops need a sharp reminder that communication is a two-way process. None of the 18,000 members who did not bother to cast a vote in the Council election has any right to complain about the direction in which the College is currently travelling.

In summary, I see a College that of all the veterinary organisations has the very best communication infrastructure and professional approach to communication. I see an organisation that has good intentions. But I also see a College that needs to realise that just communicating messages does not mean that the recipients have necessarily understood or accepted their content. And herein lies its greatest challenge.

Like to join a Meet the RCVS Day?
Email f.clark@rcvs.org.uk



Other Communications-related activities include:

- Winning the MemCom (Membership Communications) Best Newsletter award for our revamped *RCVS News*
- Working with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe to keep abreast of activities and developments on the European veterinary scene
- Hosting four Regional Question Times, four Meet the RCVS Days, three parliamentary functions, six student meetings and RCVS Day
- Developing a new stand for BSAVA Congress and attending BVNA, AVS and VPMA Congresses
- Working with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to develop proposals to hold the Register of Veterinary Practices on its behalf
- Publishing 111 items of Latest News (www.rcvs.org.uk/latestnews)
- Giving evidence to the EFRA Committee's inquiry into the need for a new Veterinary Surgeons Act
- Responding to seven consultations
- Advertising in pet- and horse-owner press to promote the Practice Standards Scheme, and carrying out research amongst non-members to help direct future changes.



COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

6 JULY 2007 – 4 JULY 2008

RCVS Council comprises 24 elected Members, two appointees from each of six UK veterinary schools and four persons appointed by the Privy Council - as specified in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966.

Elected Members	Attendance	University Appointed Members	Attendance
Christopher Chesney MRCVS	2/3	Alistair Barr MRCVS (B)	3/3
Beverley Cottrell MRCVS	2/2	Alison Bruce (G)	2/3
Sheila Crispin FRCVS	3/3	Caroline Freedman MRPharmS (E)	3/3
Jerry Davies MRCVS	3/3	Michael Hertridge MRCVS (C)	2/3
Roger Eddy FRCVS	3/3	Duncan Maskell (C)	3/3
Mark Elliott MRCVS	2/2	Stephen May FRCVS (Ln)	3/3
Neil Gorman FRCVS	2/3	Quintin McKellar MRCVS (Ln)	2/3
David Harding MRCVS	0/3	Stuart Reid MRCVS (G)	3/3
Wendy Harrison MRCVS	2/3	Frank Taylor MRCVS (B)	2/3
Lynne Hill MRCVS	2/3	Sandy Trees MRCVS (Lv)	3/3
Peter Jinman MRCVS	3/3	Elaine Watson FRCVS (E)	1/3
Barry Johnson MRCVS	3/3	Agnes Winter MRCVS (Lv)	2/2
David McDowell MRCVS	3/3		
Jacqui Molyneux MRCVS	3/3	Privy Council Appointed Members	
Bob Moore MRCVS	3/3	Brian Jennings	2/3
Jill Nute MRCVS	3/3	Martyn Jones MP	3/3
Bob Partridge MRCVS	3/3	Debby Reynolds MRCVS ¹	0/3
Christine Shield MRCVS	3/3	Barbara Saunders	3/3
Geoffrey Skerritt FRCVS	2/3		
Neil Smith MRCVS	3/3		
Nigel Swayne MRCVS	2/3		
Clare Tapsfield-Wright MRCVS	3/3		
Bradley Viner MRCVS	3/3		
Stephen Ware MRCVS	3/3		

Note: Universities: B = Bristol, C = Cambridge, E = Edinburgh, G = Glasgow, Lv = Liverpool, Ln = London.
3/3 = attendance at Council meetings during the year under review, ie. 01/04/07 – 31/03/08 (denominator indicates total number of possible meetings for each Council Member).

STAFF LIST

AS AT 31 MARCH 2008

Annette Amato	Richard Holford
Freda Andrews	Ian Holloway
Duncan Ash	Judith Hylton
Emma Baxter	Christine James
Dorothy Brereton	Anne Jermey
Melanie Brown	Lo Kei Kwok
Paulette Brown	Lizzie Lockett
Mike Byrne	Rupa Makwana
Viv Carbines	Corrie McCann
Fiona Clark	Gerri McHugh
John Collins	Christopher Murdoch
Ashley Doorly	Ben Myring
Myai Du	Susan Newham
Julie Dugmore	Jordan Nicholls
Libby Earle	Jenny Orme
Janet Etheridge	Pippa Otley
Lesley Evans	Marilyn Pablo
Lucy Evans	Nicola Page
Eleanor Ferguson	Vivienne Pankhurst
Bonnie Fernley	Stephanie Platt
Christine Fraser	Thelma Rees
Jeff Gill	Alison Rengert
Janet Gordon-Jones	Joanne Till
Alexandra Gould	Liz Troman
Andrew Grainger	Emma Tyler
Pam Greening	Danielle van den Berg
Jenny Harris	Martyn Webster
Victoria Hedges	Sue Whall
Michael Hepper	Dawn Wiggins
Jane Hern	Tom Winters
Gordon Hockey	

Special thanks to all those who agreed to be featured in this *Annual Review*, for giving up their time and for their patience; thank you also to those who allowed us to take photographs on their premises. Photography Ian Holloway, RCVS, except photograph of President Bob Moore, for which many thanks to David Watson.

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