



Strategic Plan 2020-2024

Clarity, compassion,
courage, confidence:
the future of the
Royal College of
Veterinary Surgeons

Strategic Plan 2020-2024

At a glance

Our vision

To be recognised as a trusted, compassionate and proactive regulator, and a supportive and ambitious Royal College, underpinning confident veterinary professionals of which the UK can be rightly proud.

See pages 4-5.

Our mission

As a regulator, we set, uphold and advance veterinary standards. As a Royal College, we promote, encourage and advance the study and practice of the art and science of veterinary surgery and medicine. We do all these things in the interests of animal health and welfare, and in the wider public interest.

Clarity

We will have clarity of purpose and ensure everyone understands our role.

Compassion

We will be a compassionate, proactive regulator and a supportive Royal College.

See pages 6-7.

Courage

We will have the courage to take a leadership role within the professions.

Confidence

We will gain confidence by having the necessary resources in place to succeed.

Our values

We will underpin all our work with our core values:

- Diverse and inclusive
- Compassionate
- Forward-looking
- Straight-talking

See page 10.

Your role in our vision

Whether you are a member of the veterinary team, a member of the public, part of the RCVS team, or from one of our many other stakeholder groups, you have an interest in veterinary standards and animal health and welfare. So, you have a part to play. Please join us in making our vision a reality by helping us to meet our strategic ambitions, for the benefit of animal health and welfare, and public health.

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

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Approved January 2020

Introduction from our CEO

Seizing our opportunities

Our vision is to be recognised as a trusted, compassionate and proactive regulator, and a supportive and ambitious Royal College, underpinning confident veterinary professionals of whom the UK can be proud. Here, our CEO **Lizzie Lockett** introduces our Strategic Plan for the next five years and explains how we will be working to achieve this vision.

Organisations spend a lot of time looking at their Risk Registers – and quite rightly. But where is the Register of Opportunities? The answer lies in the Strategic Plan, which should offer an organisation a framework to take stock of its potential and be ambitious about its future.

Our 2014-16 plan focused on the basics – enabling the RCVS to be a First-rate Regulator by improving our core functions, addressing our service agenda and strengthening our foundations. The more recent 2017-19 plan took a much broader scope and looked at the future direction of the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions, informed by the joint RCVS / British Veterinary Association Vet Futures project and the joint RCVS and British Veterinary Nursing Association VN Futures initiative. It covered issues such as learning culture, leadership, mental health, global reach and innovation, as well as continuing to be a relevant and forward-thinking regulator that strives for excellent service delivery.

Building on these two approaches, this new plan looks at the future of the RCVS as an organisation working on behalf of all its stakeholders, taking into account the future direction and needs of the professions and also the needs of the public, animal owners and, of course, animal health and welfare and public health. We address what kind of regulator and Royal College we want to be, our place in the world, and how we can continue to remain relevant and ambitious.

Successes so far

Most of the actions in the 2017-19 plan have now been completed or are ongoing, and some continue into this plan, albeit in revised form, such as some of our global ambitions (in this case we have opted for a more organic approach - to ensure that we have an international dimension to all that we do).

We have achieved a great deal over the last few years, launching and maintaining projects and initiatives that are starting to become part of the fabric of the professions, such as the Mind Matters Initiative, ViVet, RCVS Leadership and Vet Futures. In fact, our *Survey of the Veterinary Profession 2019* showed that around 90% of vets are aware of those initiatives; sadly, the figure is lower for nurses, so we have some work to do there.

We have also modernised our governance structure, with a new Legislative Reform Order, which means that we now have formal membership on RCVS Council from both veterinary nurses and lay people; and we are carrying out major overhauls of both veterinary and veterinary nursing educational frameworks – which remain ongoing.

Case studies on these and other projects can be found on pages 20-37 – many thanks to all of the organisations and individuals who have collaborated with us in achieving this success, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to help deliver our new plan.

Planning in partnership

In all of this we do not take our mandate for granted – we have a legal one, for sure, but we need to be supported in our work by both the public and the professions – so, over the last 12 months, we have undertaken research amongst the public, animal owners, members of the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions, including our overseas members, and stakeholders. The findings have informed this new plan.

Members of the professions and stakeholder organisations felt that our direction of travel was a positive one, with improvements noted by stakeholders in clarity of mission and purpose, around transparency, openness

and collaboration, and in the nature and speed of our communications, since the last such survey, in 2013.

Meanwhile, members of the professions rated us highly on professionalism, international relationships and having processes that reflect best practice, and above the mid-point on how we live up to our stated values.

This plan is therefore not a tool for revolution but a continuation of a positive course.

Strategic ambitions

In the following section, we explain the rationale behind each of our four new strategic ambitions: Clarity, Compassion, Courage and Confidence. Together, they will help us to structure a roadmap to become the RCVS we want to be – a trusted, compassionate and proactive regulator and a supportive and ambitious Royal College.

These ambitions are all underpinned by our mission, vision and culture and, on page 9, you can read more about the who, what, why, where, when and how of the RCVS as we see ourselves today, looking back on 175 years of proud history, and anticipating some challenging yet rewarding years ahead.

Finally, on pages 11-19, we set out the focus of our four strategic ambitions and, arranged under each, the actions we propose to help us meet them.

Timeframe

One thing you may notice about this plan compared with previous is that it covers a longer time-span – five years. This is to give us increased scope for flexibility within an ongoing uncertain operating environment, where the impact of factors such as EU Exit remain unclear.

Within a three-year plan the temptation is to include very specific objectives that can be ticked off, but, when the world changes rapidly around you, those actions may soon become irrelevant or have to give way to more urgent priorities.

A longer timeframe provides scope for broader objectives that can be supported by more agile operating plans. It also allows for more flexible phasing of activities, to align with any budgetary constraints or challenges. We will review the plan mid-term.

Your role in our vision

When all of these ambitions have been met, our vision is that the RCVS will be recognised as a trusted, compassionate and proactive regulator, and a supportive and ambitious Royal College, underpinning confident veterinary professionals of which the UK can be proud.

The veterinary profession remains self-regulating and all UK



This new plan looks at the future of the RCVS as an organisation working on behalf of all its stakeholders

veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses are part of the RCVS. We also have a broad range of stakeholders that we sit amongst. If you are reading this strategy – whether you are a member of the public, a member of the veterinary team, from within an organisation, government, media, or educational establishment, or part of the RCVS team or governance structure – you have an interest in veterinary standards and animal health and welfare. So, you have a part to play.

Please join us in making our vision a reality by helping us to meet our strategic ambitions, for the benefit of animal health and welfare, and public health.

Lizzie Lockett
Chief Executive, RCVS

Our strategic ambitions

Our strategic plan is built on a foundation of four key ambitions: Clarity, Compassion, Courage and Confidence. Here, we explain why these are so important

Clarity

The RCVS can be a confusing organisation, working within complex – and sometimes out-of-date laws – and regulating via a mix of Charter and legislation. This, coupled with the fact that we are the only UK regulator that is also a Royal College, means that it can sometimes be difficult to understand why we do what we do. We recognise that this can cause stress and confusion and, under this ambition of 'Clarity,' we will continue to work hard to simplify, unpick and modernise what we do, and ensure we remain relevant.

In simple terms, we aim to say what we do and do what we say.

Looking ahead, we will continue to review the legislative and regulatory landscape to ensure we not only keep pace with what is happening in other sectors, but stay ahead, aiming to anticipate the needs of both society and the vet-led team.

Compassion

The words 'compassion' and 'regulator' may seem unusual bedfellows, but 'Compassion' is one of our four themes and forms part of our new vision statement.

Why is compassion so important? We recognise that being part of a regulated profession can be demanding and that there is stress and anxiety attached to the complaints process, in particular. Equally, for those members of the public who have cause to raise a concern, this is usually as a consequence of an incident that has been difficult and often emotionally upsetting, and potentially resulted in poor animal health or welfare.

There is clearly value in reducing stress for all parties through a more compassionate approach. So, while we will work, through our Clarity stream, to improve the mechanics of our processes, it is also important that all of our services are delivered with compassion. One might ask how it's possible to run a robust regulatory framework in a compassionate

fashion? This does not mean being 'soft' or 'letting people off'. It means treating everyone as individuals, communicating promptly, explaining appropriately, and being fair.

In our surveys of the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions, 'compassion' was the value on which we scored least well (although, as with all of our other values, we scored above the mid-point - indicating the professions' agreement that we lived up to them). We have some work to do here, but are committed to continue on our journey towards change.

A compassionate approach also means looking much wider at how we support members of the veterinary team to help them work to the best of their abilities. This is true upstream regulation, aiming to help veterinary professionals better meet the standards set by their peers, and avoid issues that might give rise to professional misconduct.

Our Royal College role means we can do this in a way that some other regulators cannot, and it can only be in the interests of the public, animal owners, and animal health and welfare that we take a courageous and bold approach to becoming a compassionate regulator.

Courage

While it's impossible to predict the future, one thing is certain – life won't stay the same. In the face of changes in society, veterinary science and technology – the latter at an exponential rate – it's important for the RCVS to have the courage and energy to help take the professions forward. And as self-regulating professions, this means helping all of our members to do the same, at the level of their agency and scope.

So, under our 'Courage' ambition, we consider how we can continue to develop a veterinary team that is healthy, sustainable, inclusive, innovative and respectful – and this is where our Royal Charter role will really come into its own.

Our Royal College role means we can do this in a way that some other regulators cannot

Confidence

All of these things can only be achieved if we have the right systems, skills and capacity, including people, finance, IT and communications. Ambition is all well and good, but without these vital underpinnings, we will not have the confidence to succeed.

The actions aligned under our 'Confidence' ambition will help us continue to develop and sustain capabilities to give us expertise and edge. The current operating environment brings its challenges but we also have favourable winds: great teams, financial security, well-managed risk, modernised governance, well-respected and visible initiatives, confidence from stakeholders in the RCVS and trust from the public in the professions we lead (our 2019 survey said that 94% of members of the public asked 'completely' or 'generally' trusted veterinary surgeons). We must not squander this opportunity, but use these positives as a platform for continued and positive change.



About us: **the fundamentals**

To help understand our future direction, it's important to set out who we are, what we do, and where, when, why and how we do it. Here are some answers to these key questions.

What?

Our mission, as set out in the objects of our 2015 Royal Charter, is to set, uphold and advance veterinary standards, and to promote, encourage and advance the study and practice of the art and science of veterinary surgery and medicine, in the interests of the health and welfare of animals and in the wider public interest.

Through this, we ensure the public has high levels of confidence, because veterinary professionals are highly competent, up to date and trusted. Ultimately, we enhance society through improved animal health and welfare.

Why?

We support veterinary professionals to be the best that they can be, so that they can deliver the most appropriate outcomes for animal health and welfare and public health, and so that veterinary professionals themselves can have careers that are fulfilling and rewarding.

When?

Celebrating our 175th year in 2019, we have a proud history and respect the generations of ideas and standards that have come before us.

We will build on these to stay relevant and transformational for the generations to come, looking forward with strength in times of uncertainty and having the confidence to tackle difficult issues ahead.

How?

While what we do is critical, it is how we do it that makes a real difference. We are proud of our values and endeavour to live up to them at all times – via our staff team, Council and committee members, examiners, assessors and other groups associated with the College.

Our Surveys of the Veterinary and Veterinary Nursing Professions 2019 show that we do demonstrate commitment to these behaviours. This plan supports further improvement, by putting our values at the heart of what we do – not as an afterthought – and time and resources will go into helping our teams live up to our values (see page 10). Where this doesn't happen, we commit to listen to the views of others and strive to improve and change.

Where?

Our statutory role is UK-focused, but we have a strong global footprint in our diaspora of members and international impact. We utilise technology to the best of our ability to ensure people can engage with us at a time and place of their choosing. We reach out to all of our stakeholders and service users, wherever they are, and build face-to-face connections where possible. We aim to work out of spaces that are fit for purpose, enable us to meet our objectives and present a positive face of the UK veterinary professions to the world.

Who?

Our diverse team includes our employees, our Council and committee members and a range of individuals who act on our behalf, such as examiners and assessors. We aim to empower them to feel confident to deliver on the College's purpose with compassion, imagination and clarity. In turn, we aim to provide them with a working environment that is inclusive, supportive, challenging and respectful, and develops each individual's unique strengths.

Our values

We are proud of our values and endeavour to put them at the heart of what we do.

Here is a little more about what our values mean (and what they do not), the behaviours you can expect from members of the whole RCVS team, and the organisational culture we seek to create.

Value	Which is...	Which is not...
Diverse and inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Respectful ✓ Treating people as individuals ✓ Welcoming ✓ Accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Only listening to certain groups × Showing favouritism
Compassionate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Listening and understanding ✓ Thoughtful and supportive ✓ Empathetic ✓ Respectful and non-judgemental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Being a pushover × Being unfair × Bending the rules
Forward-looking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Innovative ✓ Curious ✓ Embracing change ✓ Remaining relevant ✓ Outward-looking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Change for its own sake × Rushing to the wrong answers × Ignoring what's good today × Diluting our purpose
Straight-talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Clear and consistent ✓ Using plain English ✓ Honest and transparent ✓ Managing expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Patronising × Rude and abrupt × Arrogant

Our strategic focus

In this section, we set out the specific actions we will take to meet our strategic ambitions





A: Clarity

Ambition: to ensure that we have clarity of purpose and that our internal and external stakeholders and service-users understand our role in the world. We will endeavour to become a proactive regulator that remains a step ahead, even in the face of constant change and uncertainty. We will listen widely, consult meaningfully, make confident decisions, then communicate with clarity, appreciating that the final outcome may not suit everyone.

We will do the following to meet our ambition:

1. Continue, via the work of the Veterinary Legislation Working Party and other groups, to review the regulatory landscape to ensure we develop world-leading, robust standards and approaches that are grounded in evidence and risk-based, in order to safeguard animal health and welfare, and public health, and maintain trust in the veterinary professions.
2. Ensure that we are addressing what matters to our stakeholders and that we horizon-scan for issues that are beyond the scope of our immediate view. For example, regulation of new technologies, regulation of practices, review of our concerns and disciplinary process, and regulation of the wider veterinary team and the environment in which they work.
3. Review whether we can take a more proactive role around breaches of the Veterinary Surgeons Act involving unqualified individuals, or courses that purport to lead to registration but do not, both through education to end-users of veterinary services, and working more actively to support those wishing to raise concerns with the relevant authorities.
4. Work with our partners overseas to ensure that the UK remains relevant in the veterinary world post-EU exit, including sharing knowledge, marketing our standards and services, and building an engaged diaspora of members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (MsRCVS) and registered veterinary nurses (RVNs). Ensure there is a global element to all that we do, and that our international members feel engaged and included.
5. Build a closer relationship between the College, the professions and the public by continuing our outreach programme. Review how we gain input from stakeholders at all levels, including the development of an improved process for seeking input from members of the public.
6. Establish clarity around a data-sharing commitment, and ensure that our views, our data and our insights are shared regularly in an easy-to-search way, for example, easy-to-find FAQs on key issues, insights gained from concerns and complaints data, and self-service facts and figures about the professions. Make available accessible and anonymised versions of the data we hold to all stakeholders to enable them to generate value and insights for the sector.
7. Plan and implement a cycle of review and improvement for our educational standards and processes, to ensure we continue to take a leadership role with our international partners.
8. Ensure clarity of appeal across all the areas where we make decisions, modernising where appropriate; where appeal is not available, clearly justify why not.



B: Compassion

Ambition: to be a compassionate upstream regulator and a supportive Royal College by ensuring that high standards continue to be met while working in an empathetic way that respects all of our stakeholders and service-users as individuals. We will recognise that a compassionate approach involves helping members of the veterinary team build the skills and knowledge they need to meet our standards, which is ultimately in the interests of animal health and welfare.

We will do the following to meet our ambition:

1. Endeavour to ensure that the College is seen as approachable, helpful, fair and accessible to all.
2. Enable our teams to deliver compassionate regulation by providing structures, training and support to ensure they can help vets and nurses meet the standards required in a compassionate way, and take ownership and communicate clearly when things don't go to plan. Recognising that, in order to achieve this, our team members must also feel well supported and that they are compassionately treated.
3. Review our concerns process through the eyes of each of our stakeholder and service-user groups to ensure that it is fair, forward-thinking and compassionate, and set out a programme of quality improvement.
4. Help our regulated professionals to meet the standards expected of them by their peers, the public and society at large by launching the RCVS Academy, which will house a range of online educational tools to help veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and other potential associates of the College understand what is expected of them in terms of meeting standards, and to support them acquiring relevant knowledge and staying up to date in a creative, accessible and inspiring way.
5. Continue to support the mental health and wellbeing of members of the veterinary team, and our College staff, through the Mind Matters Initiative under its workstreams of 'prevent, protect and support' (see www.vetmindmatters.org), and also help veterinary professionals to take account of the mental health of those with whom they come into contact.
6. Continue to foster a reflective learning culture amongst members of the veterinary team, so that they can continue to grow and develop in a supportive, no-blame environment.



C: Courage

Ambition: we will have the courage to take a leadership role within the professions, to ensure that the pervading culture is healthy, sustainable, inclusive, innovative and respectful; through this, we will develop confident veterinary professionals.

We will do the following to meet our ambition:

1. Continue to seek culture change within the wider professions around help-seeking behaviour to support both mental and physical health, learning culture, leadership, innovation, sustainability and diversity.
2. Celebrate the art as well as the science of veterinary medicine and ensure that wider professional skills are properly and credibly supported.
3. Work with other stakeholders to retain skills and talent within the professions, by developing return-to-work options that build confidence in those who have had a career break, for whatever reason.
4. Ensure a pathway for career progression for vets and nurses via postgraduate/post-qualification accreditations and qualifications – to meet the needs of vets and nurses at all stages of their careers
5. Develop extra-mural studies (EMS) and work experience opportunities at the College, together with more opportunities for veterinary professionals and members of the public to become engaged with the work of the regulator at first hand and gain an understanding of its complexities.
6. Create an innovation funding pot to enable the professions to help solve regulation and professional standards issues that matter to them.
7. Continue to develop the Fellowship into a learned society that reflects the varied achievements of the veterinary profession; encourages the advancement of standards; and, develops public awareness of veterinary medicine and science, for example, via the development of a Fellow on the Public Understanding of Veterinary Science.
8. Review new ways of reaching consensus and driving change within our leadership and governance structure.
9. Work with the British Veterinary Association and the British Veterinary Nursing Association to evaluate the success of the first action plans for Vet Futures and VN Futures respectively, assess whether the ambitions remain relevant, and develop new action plans accordingly. Work with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe and our European colleagues to support the delivery of Vet Futures Europe.



D: Confidence

Ambition: in order to deliver our Strategic Plan we must not only have the mandate that is secured by the Veterinary Surgeons Act and our Royal Charter, but also the confidence to succeed that will be brought by the right underpinning – the governance, people, finance, communications and IT structures that are crucial to our success.

We will do the following to meet our ambition:

1. Review the bedding-in of the 2018 Legislative Reform Order to ensure that our Council and committee structure is efficient, effective, and transparent, and provides the right level of strategic oversight coupled with skills-based input to allow the College to function to the best of its abilities.
2. Review the structure of all of our groups operating below committee level, to ensure the right mix of skills are available to tackle the tasks at hand and that each group has clear membership, purpose, principles, time-frame and sense of what success will look like.
3. Develop and embed a meaningful dashboard to help ensure that appetite for risk is clear, risk is managed and any early warning signs are addressed.
4. Collate and review our member and service-user feedback on an ongoing basis, against key performance indicators, and work with RCVS Knowledge to employ a quality improvement and innovation methodology to ensure we are providing services that meet the needs of our audiences and society at large.
5. Put in place a people strategy that develops our talent, diversity, leadership and culture, across the staff team, Council and committee members, examiners, assessors and all others who work on our behalf.
6. Ensure our financial systems are customer-focused, fraud-resistant and efficient, and improve communication and clarity over where money is spent and its impact.
7. Develop and implement a technology strategy that puts digital first, is collaborative, and focuses on simplification and convergence.
8. Purchase a new property that aims to serve the needs of the College for the next twenty years, while not putting an undue future financial commitment on our members.
9. Put in place a communications strategy that will focus on clarifying what we are, and what we are not, and be stronger about calling out those who seek to undermine the College; own our shortcomings and be clear about where and how we will change; and be bolder about celebrating our successes and our unique contribution to animal health and welfare, and public health. Empower our wider team to become communications ambassadors for the College.
10. Develop and implement a corporate social responsibility strategy that befits an organisation that works in the public interest.

What went right?

The following pages highlight some of the positive projects and activities that were achieved from the *RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-19*.



Governance review – towards a more effective and efficient organisation

Under our Leadership ambition in the *RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-2019* was the action: “Through completion of our governance review, ensure that we are an effective and efficient organisation, better able to lead the profession and serve the needs of the public, including the carrying out of training and the provision of coaching for RCVS Council members who take, or are considering taking, leadership roles.”

RCVS governance reform was originally considered in 2009 following the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report of 2008 which, amongst other issues, recommended the restructuring of Council. It was agreed by Council, however, that changes to its composition “should be for consideration in the longer term, when the new disciplinary machinery was in place and the implication of this for Council could be assessed”.

The issue came to the fore again after the First-rate Regulator report of 2013. This report made recommendations as to how reform, in particular to the size and structure of Council, could serve to improve the efficiency, transparency and accountability of decision-making at the RCVS.

The challenge

In subsequent discussion, RCVS Council identified the following pressing reasons for reform:

- The Royal Charter (2015) made the RCVS the regulator of veterinary nurses, but veterinary nurses did not have a formal seat at the Council table
- Lay representation was a critical part of being a regulator and permanent lay representation on Council could serve to increase public confidence in the work of the RCVS
- The impact of new veterinary schools needed to be addressed – with each new school two new positions for its appointees were created on Council
- Term limits were an important aspect of good governance

- Research demonstrated that large governing bodies were not conducive to effective decision making and smaller groups were able to communicate more effectively, reach decisions more quickly, and work as a team rather than group of individuals

Bringing about reform created two significant challenges: developing proposals that addressed the above issues but also recognised the unique role of the RCVS as a Royal College that regulates; and that the size and composition of RCVS Council is determined by the Veterinary Surgeons Act, thus change required government support and legislation.

What we did

In March 2016, following almost two years’ work including the formation of a Council Panel on Governance, the development of detailed proposals for reform and a formal Government consultation with the profession, Council gave the green-light to seek the required legislation for reform.

Whilst the proposals for reform were endorsed at every stage, they had a turbulent journey through the legislative and parliamentary process, spanning as they did the 2016 Referendum and subsequent 2017 General Election.

On 1 May 2018, a Legislative Order was signed by Defra Minister Lord Gardiner following its successful passage through Parliament. This heralded the start of a three-year transition process towards more modern, agile and efficient governance structures.

The impact

The reforms will lead to an overall reduction from 42 to 24 Council members by 2021, ultimately comprising:

- 13 elected veterinary surgeons to ensure an overall majority of elected members;



- six lay people, appointed by an independent panel;
- three members collectively representing UK veterinary schools;
- two veterinary nurses appointed by VN Council, ensuring nurses have a say in the governance of their regulator.

The new structures also introduced term limits and a mechanism to remove Council members on the basis of poor conduct or behaviour.

However, reform has not stopped with new Council structures and procedures. In 2018 a decision was made to increase the number of Council meetings to six per year in 2018-19 and eight in 2019-20. With more frequent Council meetings it was also possible to disband the Operational Board, further strengthening Council’s decision-making role.

In 2018, two new committees were also formed: Finance and Resources Committee (established in July 2019), which has a remit to cover budgets, IT, human resources and the College estate; and, meeting for the first time in 2018, the Advancement

of the Professions Committee (APC), with responsibility for activities that advance the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions, including: Mind Matters Initiative, the RCVS Fellowship, ViVet, RCVS Leadership, VN Futures and Vet Futures.

The combination of these reform makes us more agile and better able to make strategic decisions in an open, transparent and accountable fashion.

The future

As we continue to move towards a smaller Council, consideration will be given as to how to widen the pool of experience and expertise available to our committees by co-opting individuals from the professions at large. We will also review the training and coaching we provide to Council and committee members to ensure they are prepared for the leadership roles they fulfil. A project will also shortly commence to look at the structure and function of the many working parties, subcommittees and groups that operate below committee level.

ViVet – stimulating innovation

The RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-2019 had an ambition “to become a Royal College with leadership and innovation at its heart, and support this creatively and with determination.”

This was supported by a strategic aim to: “Develop a biennial Innovation Symposium, to showcase new technologies, educational and business models etc from within veterinary and related fields, and encourage a culture of innovation.”

Strongly related to this were two further actions focusing on our regulatory role, to:

“Review the regulatory framework surrounding new technologies, to ensure it is proportionate, enforceable and encourages innovation, while maintaining high standards of animal health and welfare” and;

“Collaborate with other competent authorities, associations, educational bodies and the commercial sector to establish a framework for the management of the impact of new technologies, such that animal health and welfare remains centre stage, regardless of from where veterinary services are being delivered into the UK and beyond.”

The challenge

Vet Futures research highlighted concerns that “vets could miss out on developments in technology... if they fail to be proactive about grasping the opportunities” and identified a pressing need for the veterinary professions to be proactive and demonstrate they “not only welcome, but are driving, innovation in animal health”.

Furthermore, it had become clear that technology was developing exponentially and new business models for the delivery of animal care were emerging. There was risk that the role of the veterinary professional could be diminished

and this could have a detrimental impact on animal health and welfare. Moreover, if we did not take a proactive regulatory approach to innovation, change would occur regardless, potentially leaving consumers unprotected whilst we caught up.

What we did

To take the first step in addressing the aim to “review the regulatory framework surrounding new technologies”, in early 2017 our Standards Committee launched a “Review of Telemedicine within veterinary practice”, asking for the views of the veterinary professions, animal owners, and stakeholders on the use of telemedicine in veterinary clinical practice. After detailed exploration of the implications of new technologies, including telemedicine, for both animal health and welfare and veterinary regulation, in 2019 we announced we would be conducting a wide-ranging review of our guidance on ‘under care’ and out-of-hours emergency cover. This remains ongoing.

Meanwhile, it became clear that achieving the other aims and seizing the wider opportunities innovation presented could not be achieved through a biennial symposium alone and that a more joined-up strategic initiative was required. For this reason at the first symposium in October 2017, we launched ViVet, an ambitious and wide-ranging programme to support and foster innovation in the veterinary sector. ViVet is driven by the mission of “enabling creative veterinary solutions for the good of animal health and welfare”.

The programme has four strategic aims, to:

1. Foster innovation in the sector and encourage innovators to think about the veterinary profession, so as to put vets and vet nurses at the centre of innovations in animal health
2. Help incumbents and new-entrants navigate the regulatory landscape, ensuring that high standards of animal health and welfare continue to be maintained
3. Showcase innovative products and business models to the



professions, thus helping the professions to better serve existing clients and access new ones.

4. Provide market intelligence and prepare the professions for the impact of innovation, whilst at the same time allowing us to reflect on the future relevance of its regulations

The impact

Building on the inaugural Symposium, in the first year ViVet focused on showcasing innovation to help veterinary professionals to horizon-scan, and understand the impact of innovation, how the market is evolving and the opportunities innovation could provide.

The second year saw ViVet start to provide practical support to help veterinary professionals drive innovation. This features online resources and in-person events, including a series of innovation workshops hosted in Cambridge and an innovation evening at the University of Edinburgh’s Easter Bush Campus. The year concluded with the second Innovation Symposium, this time focusing on Precision Veterinary Medicine and the move to a new age of data-driven practice.

Since its launch, ViVet has published over 20 expert blogs and case studies from thought-leaders, been invited to contribute to numerous national and international conferences and publications, grown a significant following and influence on social media, and met with innovators from



within and outwith the profession, seeking guidance on how to develop their ideas, maximise their impact, and comply with regulation.

The forward-thinking programme has been applauded by veterinary regulators globally and has expanded our reach and influence, leading to wider conversations about how regulators could manage innovation on a global level. The programme has also led to engagement beyond the veterinary profession, including with NHS Innovation.

ViVet has had more tangible benefits too, helping veterinary professionals to launch new businesses and those outside to engage with the profession to refine the products and services they are developing, so as to better serve the needs of the profession and animal health.

The future

We will conclude our under care and out-of-hours emergency cover review, seeking, if required, to publish new future-proof guidance by the end of 2020. Meanwhile, the ViVet programme will continue to support the veterinary professions to maximise opportunities to improve animal health and welfare as the sector goes through a period of profound technological change. ViVet will also expand into new areas offering support to the delivery of new strategic aims around sustainability and quality improvement.

Everyday leadership – the Edward Jenner Leadership Programme

An ambition included in the *RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-2019* was ‘to become a Royal College with leadership and innovation at its heart, and support this creatively and with determination.’

This vision was distilled into a leadership strategy with three distinctive aims – the first being Leadership for Everyone, which sought to:

“Promote the importance of self-reflection and the development of leadership skills as key aspects of veterinary professionals’ continuing education and to provide the resources to help support such development.”

The challenge

A key message from Vet Futures was that the veterinary professions had given leadership insufficient focus. Specifically, the report highlighted a shortage of vets and veterinary nurses stepping forward into leadership roles, raising the concern that the professions did not have sufficient leadership capacity, and neither was there strong-enough evidence that such a capability was being developed for the future.

The damaging consequences of not having well-developed leaders are numerous, but it is at the everyday level that its effects can be most keenly felt. Veterinary professionals make difficult clinical judgements based on imperfect information and face emotive issues with clients and colleagues. If insufficient focus is given to the development of their interpersonal skills, which can offer protection against the uncertainty and messy realities of daily life in practice, feelings of failure can grow and, if left unchecked, this can lead to a sense of disillusionment with the profession.

When seeking to engage people on this topic other, more hidden, challenges arise too, such as the emphasis the

profession places on technical and clinical skills development at the expense of non-technical skills such as those associated with leadership.

What we did

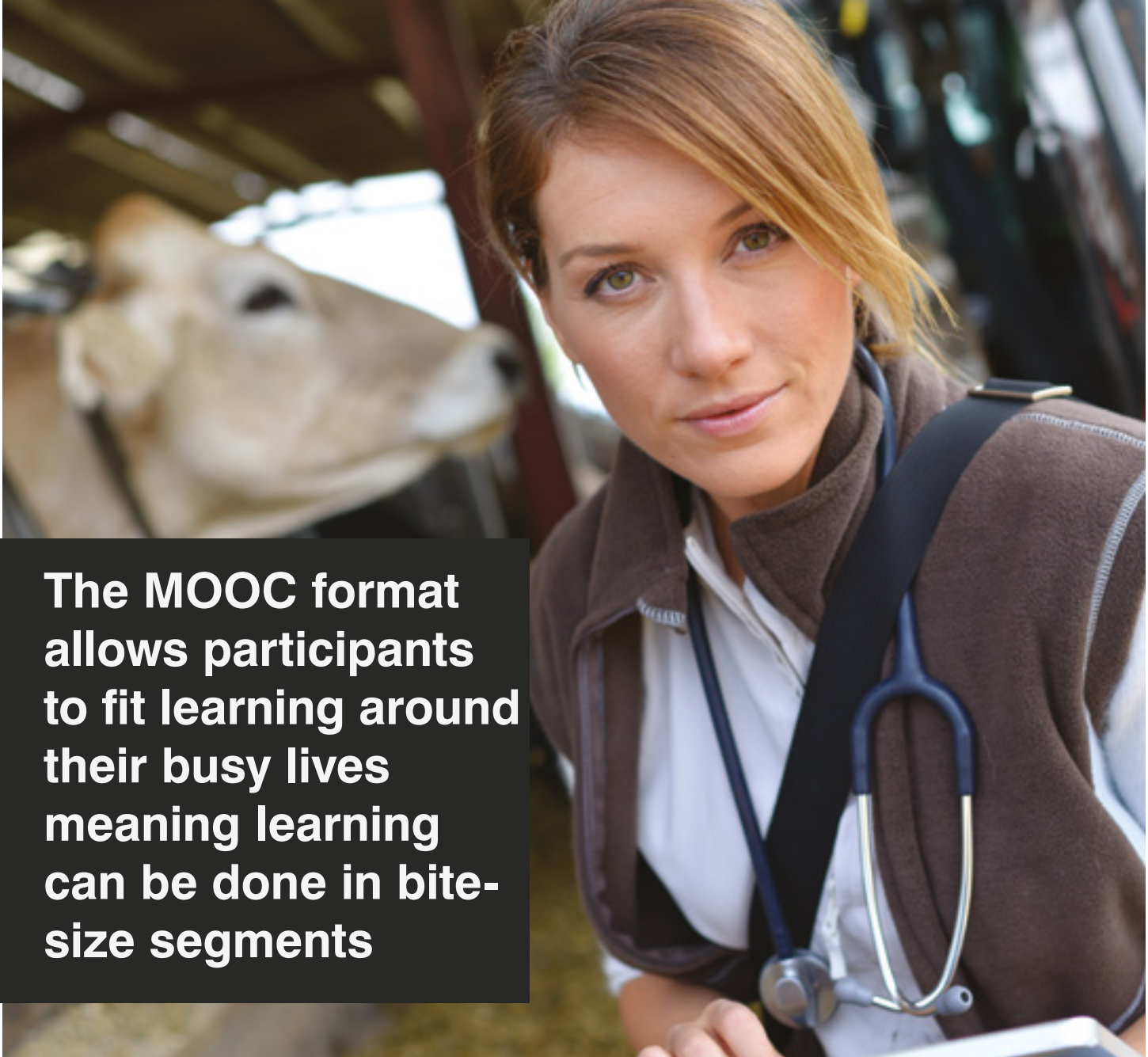
Leadership is a combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours. It is not possible to give people leadership skills; they need to develop them by applying learning theory in practice.

Accordingly, in 2017 we approached the NHS Leadership Academy to explore the potential for adapting one part of its training offer – the Edward Jenner programme – to make it appropriate for those working in a veterinary setting. After several months of development, a fully tailored veterinary leadership programme was created, and piloted in the summer of 2018.

The Edward Jenner Veterinary Professionals programme combines the tried and tested with a unique approach. To the former, it used the highly successful Edward Jenner programme and award-winning FutureLearn platform. To the latter, it introduced highly innovative and tailored content such as the audio drama *Glenvern* to engage learners.

The programme comprises two MOOCs (massive open online courses) and a final assessment. Both courses include articles, videos, discussion sections and an audio drama series. The first course introduces the concept of leadership, elaborating on why it matters and the types of issues faced by leaders, as well as exploring the leadership skills we may already possess – sometimes without knowing. This goes to the heart of the view that all veterinary professionals are leaders.

The second of the two courses helps learners develop the foundations of their leadership practice through understanding more about themselves and the impact they have on others. After completing the two courses, learners are able to



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progress to the last stage of the programme: a final assessment. This sees learners create a portfolio consisting of four reflective blogs designed to evidence understanding of leadership through the impact they can demonstrate in practice. Completion of this stage of the course leads to professional accreditation in the form of an NHS Leadership Academy Award in Leadership Foundations.

The MOOC format allows participants to fit learning around their busy lives, meaning learning can be done in bite-size segments, on the go and at a pace that suits them.

The impact

In addition to the initial pilot, two runs of the programme have been successfully held. In total there have been over 7,000 enrolments across the programme’s modules, with participants drawn from 130 different countries. A survey of those who have completed the programme has found that:

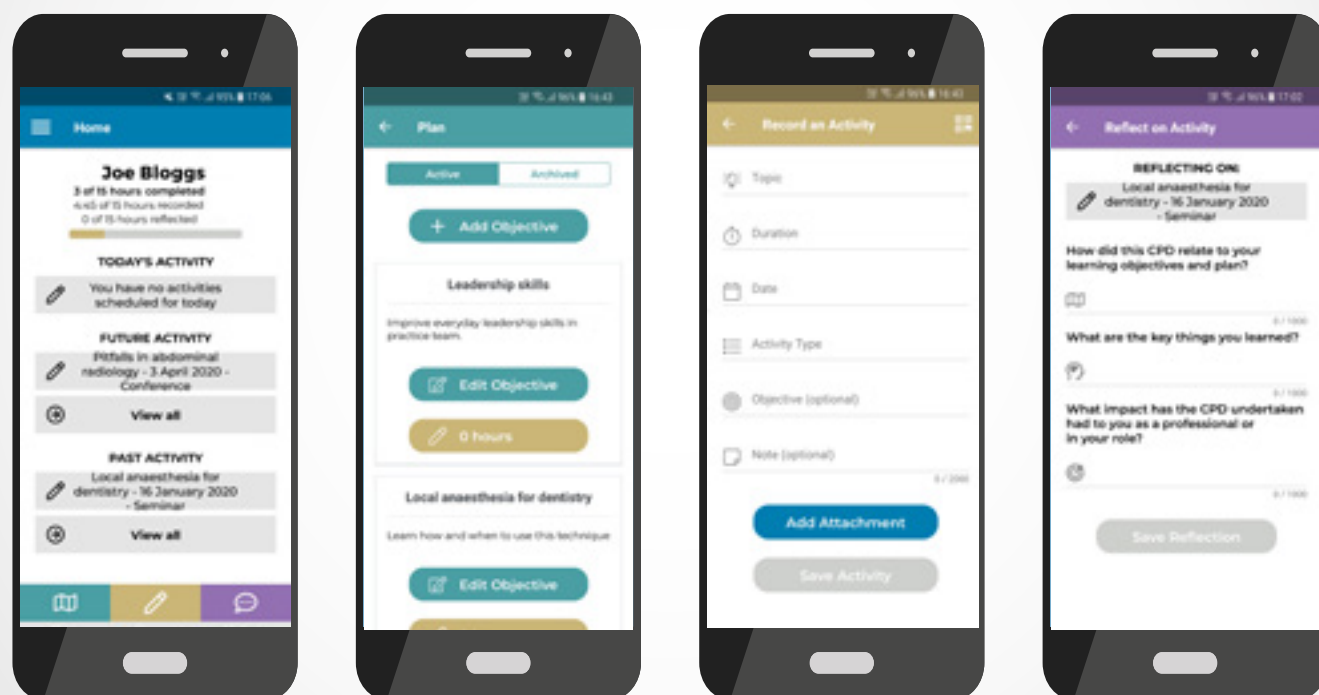
80 per cent of responders perceived the programme to have given them new knowledge or skills; 70 per cent felt they were applying their new learning; whilst over 60 per cent had shared their learning with colleagues.

Describing their experience of the programme and the impact it had had on them, one participant wrote: “I do have the ability to lead and I have been leading for some time but now I have the confidence and new skills to make a bigger difference.”

The future

There is an ambition for the Jenner programme to be a starting point for veterinary professionals’ lifelong leadership development. It should fit within a wider framework of learning opportunities that allow for the development of appropriate skills, attitudes and behaviours wherever the individual is on their career pathway.

A Reflective approach to CPD



Quotes from volunteers piloting the 1CPD platform:

“I find filling out my CPD really easy and is now a joy to do rather than feeling like a chore. I really like that I can record future CPD events in the app. I quite like the reflection section so I can discuss things that were highlighted to me and to think of ways I can bring that back into practice”.
(VN working in practice)

“I love this app - it has made recording my CPD in a day-to-day manner so easy!”
(academic vet working in a vet school)

“So far I have found the app to be logically designed and easy to use with useful prompts in the “reflect” section to help me understand how to organise my thought processes.”
(veterinary surgeon working in practice)



To “Consult upon, and implement as appropriate, an outcomes-based approach to continuing professional development” was one of the actions within the *RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-2019*, under Ambition A: Learning Culture.

The challenge

There is strong evidence that adopting an outcomes-based approach to continuing professional development (CPD) is more likely to result in a positive impact on an individual’s learning, professional development and professional practice. The main features of an outcomes-based approach are represented by the cycle of “Plan”, “Do”, “Record” and “Reflect”. CPD activities are planned based on an identified learning / development need, ensuring relevance and increasing engagement with the activity, and after the CPD activity has taken place the individual should reflect on the outcomes, ie what has been learned, whether further gaps in knowledge / skills need to be addressed, and how their future practice may change as a result

(if required). A reflection that further learning is needed following a CPD activity would see the outcomes-based cycle returning to “plan”

There is a common misconception that reflection is time consuming and unnecessary. However, the benefits are proven and reflection does not have to be onerous. Although a detailed reflective account may be useful, reflection can take the form of concise bullet points, a recorded discussion, or short note detailing the outcomes and / or impact. This misconception is widespread and not limited to the veterinary profession, therefore effective communication and guidance around the outcomes-based CPD approach, in addition to making the recording of CPD and reflections as easy as possible for veterinary professionals, was identified as a priority.

A further misconception – which potentially adds to concerns around this being an additional burden to members – is that only ‘formal’ CPD such as attending conferences, lectures

or reading journals is relevant. As such, we are actively promoting other types of CPD, such as discussing significant events with the practice team, or running a clinical audit.

What we did

The outcomes-based approach was piloted with a number of volunteers from the profession, which provided us with important feedback, including the need for a more effective online platform to record CPD. Consequently, the pilot was extended to a wider range of members, to ensure that we could consider the feedback in the final approach proposed. The evaluation of these pilots demonstrated that there was support for the outcomes-based CPD model, and the feedback allowed us to develop an implementation plan which focused on clear policy, flexibility, a clear communications plan and the development of a bespoke, new online platform that could be used easily by members to plan, record and reflect on CPD activities.

RCVS Council agreed the proposals, and that the new

approach should be implemented for all members on a voluntary basis from January 2020, becoming mandatory in January 2022.

Work began on the development of the 1CPD app, the development of detailed guidance, and a detailed communications plan including case studies and filmed interviews addressing FAQs, such as ‘how to reflect’.

The impact

More than 200 individuals (vets and vet nurses) responded to an open call for volunteers to pilot the 1CPD app as part of its development, and feedback was highly positive. Development of the 1CPD platform continues, with more useful features being added.

The future

The new policy and app were launched in January 2020, and feedback will continue to be reviewed so that it can be developed and improved.

Graduate Outcomes – developing vets for tomorrow



To “Review outcomes for graduates, with consideration of the likely requirements from the profession and the public of the vets of tomorrow” was identified as a major initiative within the Vet Futures Action Plan, and consequently this became a key area within the *RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-2019*, under Ambition C: Continuing to be a First-rate Regulator.

The challenge

The review needed to ensure that new veterinary graduates were fully prepared for their roles as a veterinary surgeons, with the right knowledge and skills, and felt supported during their transition into work. Consequently, this ambitious project included a review of the RCVS Day One Competences (D1C), undergraduate clinical education and extra-mural studies (EMS), and the Professional Development Phase (PDP) for new graduates.

What we did

RCVS Day One Competences

RCVS accreditation of undergraduate veterinary programmes requires demonstration that all of the RCVS D1C are met upon graduation. Therefore, in order to ensure that new graduates are prepared for their future role, these were reviewed to identify any gaps, and / or emerging priorities.

In addition to identifying new relevant competences, such as the development of resilience, we also developed a new conceptual model (see right) for the D1C to demonstrate how the different domains of competence contribute to becoming a well-rounded, confident and competent veterinary professional.

The new proposals were put to the profession for consideration as part of the Graduate Outcomes consultation exercise. There was support for the additional competences, and for the conceptual model.

Undergraduate Clinical Education, EMS and ‘Tracking’

These aspects of undergraduate veterinary education were considered together, recognising the complexities and potential co-dependencies involved. With regard to clinical education, previous research indicated that graduates didn’t always feel prepared for their role in terms of their clinical skills, and lacked confidence, and consequently there were concerns that this could be contributing to high attrition rates within the profession. Most of the long-established vet schools in the UK had a curriculum reflecting the presence of a veterinary hospital / referral centre on-campus. Such facilities present opportunities for students to see the more unusual and challenging cases. However, a significant majority of new graduates enter the profession in general practice, and there were concerns about the balance of clinical education for students in this area being appropriate to adequately prepare them for their role. The Graduate Outcomes consultation explored which areas of the veterinary curriculum were considered to be taught most effectively in a range of settings, including general practice, charity clinics and university settings.

‘Tracking’ within the veterinary curriculum, ie the ability for students to elect clinical placements within a particular area of practice such as companion animals, farm animals or equine, is already permitted within the RCVS Standards of Accreditation as long as all students achieve the D1C. However, in reality, very few veterinary schools choose to provide tracking options to the extent that is permitted. The Graduate Outcomes Working Party debated allowing a larger degree of Tracking, leading to limited licensure, but this was considered not to be viable at this time. However, it was agreed that increased ‘Tracking’ options could be advantageous, presenting more options for students. The Graduate Outcomes consultation explored the advantages / disadvantages associated with increased ‘Tracking’ within veterinary programmes, and whether they were supportive of this.

EMS is a requirement of undergraduate veterinary education that involves students spending a minimum number of weeks on work experience, with the aim of consolidating the skills they have been taught within the curriculum, and practising them within the workplace context. Concerns have existed about EMS for a number of years, primarily due to the highly variable quality of experiences encountered by students, and the increasing challenges encountered by students in accessing and financing EMS placements.

We developed a number of options to present to the profession within the consultation, including parallel Animal Husbandry EMS and Clinical EMS, a block placement at the end of the veterinary programme (which could transition into a redeveloped PDP), early clinical exposure and formalisation into externships. The consultation explored how effective the profession felt each option would be, and invited further options for consideration.

The results of the consultation were less clear in the above areas. There was a clear mandate for the majority of clinical education to take place in a general practice setting, but recognition that other settings can also be useful. There was support for EMS as a concept, and the need for us to be clear about our requirements, but no clear steer as to what the future model should look like. Similarly, opinions around ‘Tracking’ were varied.

Postgraduate Development Phase (PDP)

The aim of the PDP is to support new graduates in their transition into work. However, previous research we commissioned confirmed members’ feedback that although there was a great deal of support for the concept of the PDP, the current format was not achieving this aim and was considered to be a ‘tick-box exercise’. The PDP needed to be structured differently, and to provide genuine support to new

graduates as they move beyond D1C into being capable, independent practitioners.

The consultation explored how this could be achieved, and the types of initiatives the profession felt would result in the aims being met, with graduates feeling empowered and supported. The profession supported the development of a new programme with less of a tick-box approach, and the introduction of personal mentors that could provide feedback to graduates on their progress, and support them through their journey. There was also agreement that we should accredit and quality assure practices taking on new graduates within the new programme.

The impact

As a result of the consultation, which, with 1,963 full responses and 3,825 partial responses, received one of the largest responses to any RCVS consultation, clear plans are in place for the revision of the RCVS D1C, including the conceptual model. In addition, detailed proposals have been agreed for the development of a new programme for graduates to replace the current PDP. In this respect the profession supported radical change, and we are excited about developing a supportive programme that helps graduates develop into capable, independent practitioners.

The future

It was clear following the consultation that the future of undergraduate clinical education, ‘Tracking’ and EMS need further consideration and we have already started this through workshops with key stakeholders. There is agreement that future plans need to address the concerns and problems identified, whilst retaining flexibility such that all vet schools – whatever their particular curriculum model – can implement the approach and that quality improvement / innovation is not compromised.

RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing

Action 7 of the joint RCVS/British Veterinary Nursing Association VN Futures project, was to “Establish a working party through the RCVS to further canvas opinion on the scope, level and delivery of post-qualification awards for veterinary nurses”, and action 8 aimed to “Develop advanced practitioner qualifications and/or status”. Both of these fell under the VN Futures ambition to develop structured and rewarding career paths for veterinary nurses, and the *RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-2019* committed to support the delivery of VN Futures, working collaboratively where appropriate.

The challenge

Until now, the RCVS Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing (Dip AVN) has been the only post-qualification veterinary nursing professional award made by the RCVS under our Royal Charter.

The award, which has been running for 13 years, was set within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) at Level 5 and required achievement of a minimum of 120 credits (each credit equating to a notional 10 hours of learning) delivered and assessed by a Higher Education Institution (HEI). In addition, a final integrative assessment, which has traditionally been assessed by the HEI, also needed to be achieved.

The Dip AVN was modular in style, incorporating both core and optional modules, accredited by the RCVS, and could be studied both independently or as a whole qualification (Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing Surgical and Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing Medical).

There are two higher education institutions offering the Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing. To date, of the

17,000 veterinary nurses on the Register, 577 have achieved the Dip AVN, with a further 41 enrolled on to a Dip AVN programme. Of the 577 Dip AVN holders, 26 qualified via the vocational route.

There were many challenges that came with Dip AVN:

- Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs) were required to have been on the Register for a minimum of 12 months prior to enrolling
- Only two institutions were accredited to deliver Dip AVN programmes therefore, offering limited recruitment opportunities
- The RCVS accredited modules with set learning outcomes and assessment criteria
- Only broad subject areas were available (surgical and medical)
- 120 credits took approximately five years to complete on a part-time basis
- It was a Level 5 qualification

Throughout a series VN Futures roadshow meetings, the appetite for further post-registration qualifications that were accessible (regardless of the route to registration), flexible and cost-effective was strongly expressed. In addition to specialist clinical pathways, other areas for post-registration awards, such as leadership and management, advanced first-opinion and advanced practitioner nursing, were also identified as necessary to provide career progression for all veterinary nurses, regardless of their training route.

What we did

The VN Futures Post-Registration Group canvassed opinion on the scope, level and delivery of the Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing, reviewed the Certificate in Advanced Practitioner that we award to veterinary surgeons and considered post-registration qualification frameworks offered



by other healthcare providers.

The resultant new Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing (Cert AVN) framework is more accessible, flexible and affordable thus appealing to both students and providers. It incorporates the requirements set out by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and permits us to maintain a level of post-registration professional standards.

Universities are free to set their credit value and levels, learning outcomes and assessment criteria in line with market demands. To achieve the RCVS Cert AVN, candidates must achieve a minimum of 60 credits, 40 of which must be at FHEQ level 6 or Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 9. The focused field of study within these qualifications must amount to a minimum of 40 credits of subject specific content at level 6.

The main components of the new framework are:

- Open to all RVNs regardless of time spent on the Register, or their route to qualification
- 60 credits; 40 of which must be a minimum of Level 6 and specific to the field of focus
- No prescribed learning outcomes and/or assessment criteria
- Offered at both Level 6 and Level 7, encouraging progression for all
- No final integrative assessment

The impact

Since approval by VN Council in May 2019, we have accredited eight programmes with one university, scheduled three university accreditation events and are in discussion with a further three organisations wishing to deliver the Cert AVN.

There are 18 students enrolled on the Cert AVN in anaesthesia and three students on the Cert AVN in oncology.

With nurses better utilised in practice within their developed ‘niche’ areas, we hope to see increased retention within the veterinary nursing profession.

The future

Our long-term vision is to create a clear career development path to motivate RVNs into studying their desired field of focus, encouraging and increasing sources of evidence-based veterinary nursing medicine and providing ambassadors to inspire the next generation.

We envisage that these new pathways could be used to promote recognition of knowledge, skills, competency and experience in a specialised field in the form of an ‘Advanced Practitioner’ status, with currency being ensured through compulsory revalidation.

We now need to look at widening participation and offering these qualifications to our overseas colleagues.

Veterinary Client Mediation Service: an alternative approach to complaint-handling

Under the ambition of developing a learning culture, while reducing a blame culture, the *RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-2019* set out an action to introduce an Alternative Dispute Resolution Service, if that was seen as appropriate following the completion of trials. This was also picked up under our ambition of Continuing to be a First-rate Regulator, which included a review of our concerns-handling and disciplinary processes.

The challenge

In terms of legislation, the powers of the RCVS are limited by reference to 'serious professional misconduct'. This is a high threshold. Historically, it meant that there were situations, commonly around poor service / consumer disputes, that were not resolved through practices' internal practice complaints processes, but where clients had valid issues; however, as these could never reach the high threshold required, we had no jurisdiction to deal with such matters. Inevitably, as the RCVS was not able to do anything in relation to these cases, there was dissatisfaction from the public.

This did not, however, stop these cases coming to the RCVS as formal complaints, since for all practical purposes they, quite simply, had nowhere else to go. (The costs involved to take court proceedings would have been prohibitive in the vast majority of cases.) With more complaints also came an increase in 'fear' within the professions, where contact with the regulator in any complaint situation can be stressful.

This, then, was the picture in 2015/2016, with increasing consumer awareness and expectations boosting the number of complaints received year on year, which reached a 'high' of just shy of 1,000 in 2016.

What we did

There had been a desire for some time within the RCVS to find an alternative route to resolve low-level disputes and a voluntary scheme trialled via Ombudsman Services was started in autumn 2014. This was not, however, a true alternative, as complaints had firstly to have gone through the RCVS complaints process; it was a paper-based adjudication system and, while it was free for those participating, it was perceived as slow, uptake was low and dissatisfaction high. While lessons were learned it was not seen as a workable solution.

The focus then shifted to a telephone mediation service operating as a true alternative to, and independent from, our complaints process. Participation was voluntary and by direct access; it was at no cost to those taking part with a 'triaging' system of 'Enquiries' put in place at the RCVS to signpost complainants to the most appropriate route. The new Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS) was born and operated in the first instance as a trial.

The impact

The impact of these measures was a significant reduction in the numbers of formal complaints registered with us - now in the region of 600 per year. Fewer cases has meant less stress for veterinary professionals but, importantly, benefits for consumers, able to access a meaningful route for redress. At the same time, we are able to concentrate on the cases that we need to consider more seriously. Fears within the profession that the scheme would amount to 'no fault compensation' by the back door have not materialised and feedback from both the public and the profession has been very positive, and participation high.



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The future

Since the early days of the trial, the number of enquiries / cases going through the VCMS has increased dramatically, perhaps not surprisingly as awareness of its existence has increased to the point where it is well known and indeed promoted by practices themselves.

Numbers appear to be stabilising but it provides a hugely important service and is accepted as an integral part of our overall concerns process, operating to the benefit of all concerned. We will maintain the service under review to ensure it continues to meet the needs of both the public and the profession.

Mind Matters Initiative – supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the veterinary team

The RCVS Strategic Plan 2017-2019 committed to support our Mind Matters Initiative, launched in 2015.

The challenge

For some time, it has been recognised that veterinary surgeons in the UK are three to four times more likely to die by suicide than members of the general public. There are high levels of stress, anxiety and depression within the veterinary team (including veterinary nurses and practice managers), and also issues around help-seeking behaviour and stigma.

Although there are good sources of help and support, such as Vetlife Helpline and Vetlife Health Support, either members of the veterinary team didn't know about the help, or didn't recognise they needed it, or the stigma was such that they didn't feel able to seek help (or seek help early enough).

What we did

So, in early 2015 we launched the Mind Matters Initiative (MMI), a five-year, £1M project to address issues of mental health and wellbeing of all those in the veterinary team. Although we fund and run MMI, collaboration has been key to its success so far, and a taskforce, that comprises individuals from various representative bodies (students, nurses, managers, practice owners, vet schools etc), has been instrumental in driving results.

We offer mental health awareness training and try to break down the stigma associated with mental ill-health. We also develop and support resources and courses to help students,

vets, nurses and practice managers to flourish, and, when needed, to get back on form.

Our programme is divided into three streams of activity:

Prevent – proactively looking at systemic issues within the veterinary profession to help minimise the chance of people becoming unwell in the first place. Our anti-stigma campaign, &Me, which we run with the Doctors' Support Network, also falls under this stream of activity.

Protect – a programme of communications and training designed to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to stay well, even when working under challenging conditions.

Support – financial and other support for existing independent services, such as Vet Support NI, Vetlife Helpline and Vetlife Health Support, together with an investigation into what more may be required to support those in need, and catalysing the development of those services.

The impact

During our first five years, some of the activities undertaken include:

- Running around 60 mental health awareness courses, many with the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)
- Online courses with the Webinar Vet, including two mindfulness courses, the second reaching nearly 2,500 delegates across five countries, and an online sleep series with nearly 500 delegates in 13 countries
- A pilot of the Schwartz Rounds reflective process with seven practices
- A pilot of four resilience courses, which have led to a year-



- long series of events with BSAVA
- Distribution of mental health awareness resources, including publishing 'A guide to enhancing wellbeing and managing work'
- Funding the set up of Vet Support NI, a peer-support service
- 'Medical Mind Matters' conference with members of the veterinary, pharmaceutical, dental and human medical professions
- Support of Vetlife (providing over £110k per year in financial support) - calls to Vetlife Helpline have gone up 500% in the last five years and we have heard many positive stories around help-seeking
- Four years of the Vet Wellbeing Awards, run in partnership with the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS)
- A series of wellbeing in practice roadshows, run in partnership with the Veterinary Management Group (VMG) and SPVS; and a series of mental health for managers courses, also with VMG
- Support for a range of student-led activities, including the Association of Veterinary Students (AVS) Vetkind Online Wellbeing day, and a Veterinary Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Roundtable
- Established the Sarah Brown Mental Health Research

Grant, in honour of an RCVS Council member who tragically passed away in 2017.

The future

In September 2018, RCVS Council committed to support Mind Matters beyond its initial five-year term, on a rolling three-year basis. We will continue to address the mental health and wellbeing of the veterinary team under our core workstreams, working to principles of being innovative, accessible, evidence-based, collaborative, destigmatising and outward-looking.

We are currently adding mental health standards to the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme, which covers nearly 70% of practices in the UK.

Meanwhile, mental health issues affect the veterinary team across the world, it's not just a UK situation. In recognition of the importance of supporting the veterinary family wherever it may be, we are starting to work internationally, and were delighted to sign a memorandum of understanding with the American Veterinary Medical Association in 2018. We will continue to support veterinary individuals and organisations both at home and internationally in making the veterinary profession rewarding, safe and sustainable.

Strategic Plan

2020-2024