
RCVS WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN



Contents

Our ambitions	5
Background	6
Purpose	7
RCVS and the three Rs	7
RCVS: our current focus	13
Workforce Summit – a springboard	16
Ambition one: Shape leaders at all levels	17
Ambition two: Confidence, culture and recognition	21
Ambition three: Greater responsibility for veterinary nurses	27
Ambition four: Welcoming a modern way of working	31
Ambition five: General practice – a chosen pathway	38
Ambition six: An attractive career for everyone, including those who have left	42
Ambition seven: Improving client interaction and communication	48
Moving forward	54
How you can get involved	56

Message from the RCVS President



When we launched our Workforce project in the autumn of 2021, there was a lot of discussion about the difficulties being faced, both in the UK, and worldwide. There was an opportunity for the RCVS to take a lead in supporting the professions, through hosting an event that created a space for people and organisations to come together and discuss possible solutions. We also recognised that, as the holders of the Registers of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, we were in an excellent position to contribute research and insight. But this was never going to be an easy problem to solve. The reasons behind the current workforce crisis are complex and multifactorial, involving both long-term trends and short-term forces beyond our control. Yet we decided that the nettle had to be grasped and that the RCVS, working collegiately with other organisations, was the organisation best placed to carry out the research, coordination and planning needed for this event.

Following our extensive preliminary research and the Workforce Summit last November, which brought together stakeholders from across the veterinary sector, we now have the pleasure of publishing this Workforce Action Plan. This plan sets out the work that's already underway, as well as the work to come, and draws from not only the RCVS, but also showcases a variety of organisations that are working hard to mitigate the impact of workforce issues.

We have been very clear from the outset that there is no big button that the RCVS or any other organisation can push to suddenly change the situation. So, these actions are broad, and they are based around culture change and commitment to act across the whole of the professions.

The plan has been driven by 'Design Thinking', an iterative, structured process of identifying problems, ideating potential fixes, and deciding on the most feasible, probable and desirable of the identified solutions. We have an open door in how we take forward these activities, which means we want to hear your ideas on how we achieve the actions – whether that's through technological solutions, new ways of thinking or instituting changes to the culture of the professions. We also feel strongly that while many of the solutions seem small scale, the cumulative impact will lead to significant changes.

There is an emphasis throughout this report on the importance of the veterinary team and the value of all the roles within it in helping to meet the workforce challenges head-on. We also recognise that there is expertise outside of the professions that can be utilised, including those who were formerly part of it and who could be encouraged to return or help mitigate future issues. There are shortages across many medical professions, and so we hope that there is learning that can be taken from these, and that we can share veterinary knowledge and experiences in return. Our ways of working have undergone huge shifts in the last few years, some concentrated due to Covid, some through natural innovation; however, it is clear that the future will be made of a workforce that needs flexibility, opportunities to innovate and recognition of their positive impact. Going forward there needs to be a willingness to explore new ways of working, provide constructive feedback and share learnings so that others might benefit.

Looking at the research, the feedback and through all our workstreams we have identified seven ambitions that we feel bring together a global view of the professions and the needs of all veterinary professionals. We have a strong focus on leadership, ensuring people can be successful and fulfilled, and also that there is recognition for the work in, and impact upon, animal health and welfare whatever the role, clinical or not. Veterinary work is broad, and there should be pride taken regardless of role or responsibility, as all are working towards the same vision of maintaining and improving animal health and public health.

To reiterate, this is not a top-down directive from the regulator. This is a suite of actions for all members of the professions to take note of and comment on and, where possible, bring into being in your workplace. It won't look the same to all veterinary workplaces, and not everything can happen all at once. No one individual or organisation can turn the situation around, but if we all commit to enabling change and creating a culture where this is embraced – whether in a small or large capacity – I am confident that we can make positive progress and see lasting change.

Dr Melissa Donald MRCVS
RCVS President

Our ambitions

Ambition one: To shape leaders at all levels

Ambition two: Confidence, culture and recognition

Ambition three: Greater responsibility for veterinary nurses

Ambition four: Welcoming a modern way of working

Ambition five: General practice – a chosen pathway

Ambition six: An attractive career for everyone, including those who have left

Ambition seven: Improving client interaction and communication

Background



In November 2021, we hosted the sector's first Workforce Summit, which brought together representatives from across the veterinary professions. The aim of the Summit was to find solutions to a question with which the veterinary sector is grappling: how do we tackle the current workforce crisis? Throughout the day, heads of practice, students, educators, government bodies, associations and veterinary charities worked together to collaborate on and develop ideas to address the key issues impacting the professions. Prior to the Summit, preliminary research had identified six key themes impacting the current workforce shortages:

- Readiness for work
- Work-life balance
- Workplace culture
- Client interactions
- Career development
- Return to work

Organised under our ViVet innovation project umbrella, the event incorporated innovative problem-solving methods into the day's discussions. This included Design Thinking, an approach that has been successfully used across healthcare and tech industries to generate solutions to everyday problems. By encouraging collaboration and framing problems as potential solutions rather than barriers, attendees used this technique to bounce ideas off one another and refine ideas that were put forward.

Purpose

The Workforce Summit was our first step towards tackling the issues contributing to workforce challenges, with the ideas generated throughout the day being used as a basis for developing actions and activities. These ideas are available to be utilised by anyone or any organisation within the professions. Both the workshop design and outputs can be found in the summary of the proceedings on our website. www.vivet.org.uk/rcvs-workforce-summit/

The aim of the following Workforce Action Plan is to share a summary of the ideas that we have started to act upon, or that will be progressed in the future.

It is important that all organisations consider their impact and ability to influence change. In terms of timelines and approaches, the activities in this plan can be grouped as follows:

- Activities that have been underway since the Workforce Summit or that were part of existing workstreams
- Activities that are entirely new and will require significant planning, investment in resources and collaboration from the industry
- Activities that have other dependencies such as decisions from government

In many cases, the activities presented in this document might fall into one or more of the above groups as they evolve or reach milestones.

RCVS and the three Rs

From the outset of the workforce project, we identified that taking a holistic approach to tackling the workforce crisis would involve focusing our efforts on the 'three Rs':

- Recruitment
- Retention
- Return

There have been workforce shortages developing in the veterinary professions, not just in the UK, but worldwide, for years. However, a myriad of different and more recent factors have impacted on the three Rs in the UK in particular. These factors include, but are not limited to, the UK's EU Exit, the Covid-19 pandemic and increased pet ownership. These have significantly affected the

number of vets and vet nurses joining and staying in the veterinary professions, as well as the demand for veterinary services. As well as exploring new activities to address the workforce crisis, we will also look to ensure that any available current and pre-existing resources are fully utilised. Although we need to acknowledge the challenges the professions have faced, there are solutions that can be implemented to begin to address and overcome the increasing demands which have been placed upon them, and prepare the professions to be more resilient in the face of future challenges. We will also look to ensure that resources that are already available to us are used as much as possible, alongside exploring new activities to address the workforce crisis.

As with all industries, there will always be movement across and within different sectors, but there are often common factors and learnings that we can take from these examples. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Good Work Index 2022 cites the reasons below as key:

- Better pay and benefits elsewhere (27%)
- Unhappy with the leadership of senior management (21%)
- Better work–life balance (20%)
- To do a different type of work (18%)

Specific to the veterinary sector, evidence from the British Veterinary Association, the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons, Veterinary Women, British Veterinary Chronic Illness Support and the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative have shown that discrimination, incivility, and unfair working environments have caused significant mental health challenges and contributed to people’s decisions to leave their roles and the professions.

Recruitment

From all the surveys and insights gathered, we know that many vets and vet nurses feel proud to have joined the professions and find their work fulfilling and engaging.

The number of vet schools, vet school places and higher education institutions delivering nurse training continue to increase, and these courses are well populated. However, despite the popularity of vet and vet nurse training we are still seeing a shortfall compared to demand for veterinary services. This is in part due to the impact of the UK leaving the EU and the decline in the number of overseas registrants, particularly from EU countries.

Our aim is for people to feel confident about their chosen vet or vet nursing career and for them to know that there are opportunities for future training, career progression and to develop their expertise. A key part of this is working to ensure that more new joiners are aware of the amount of support that is available to them throughout their career, including support available from the RCVS and numerous charities, membership bodies and training providers.

The activities that will come under this section of the Action Plan include:

- Providing more support and learning materials for overseas-qualified veterinary professionals to help introduce them to working in the UK
- Raising awareness of career pathways available to all clinical and non-clinical roles, vets and vet nurses
- The RCVS Veterinary Graduate Development Programme (VetGDP) and how this can establish successful careers, and create a supportive learning environment from day one
- Updated vet school accreditation standards that embed expectations, for example, equality, diversity and inclusion, wellbeing, and leadership
- Communicating the role of the RCVS and our remit and expectations
- Showcasing RCVS-led work and signposting great work from other organisations

Retention:

The number of vets and vet nurses leaving the professions every year is unsustainably high. The reasons for people leaving are varied but some recurring themes are lack of flexible working, being unsatisfied with pay, poor work/life balance and cultural issues, such as lack of support and working in a high-stress environment.

We want people to feel that they can have a long and fulfilling career in the veterinary professions, where they are empowered and respected, and can see strong, everyday leadership across all areas.

This will mean ensuring that people working across the veterinary professions have an understanding of the breadth of veterinary roles available, that there is access to training (with clinical and non-clinical training equally valued), and that training is financially accessible, can fit around work commitments and offer opportunities for frequent continuing professional development (CPD).

This also extends to ensuring that people know how to access support for personal matters that may impact on their professional life, such as mental health, neurodiversity and chronic health challenges. Additionally, we want to create a positive approach to delegation, which incorporates the whole veterinary team and upskills everyone to become leaders.

The VetGDP Adviser training includes sections on behaviour and motivation, creating a positive learning culture and so on. All of these elements combine to create a supportive learning culture – one that does not promote blame, but uses mistakes as learning opportunities. It is hoped that once new graduates go through the VetGDP, they will continue to use this approach in all aspects of their careers.

Another reason cited for people leaving the professions was a lack of flexibility in working hours, resulting in people having little ability to meet both their working and personal needs. We want to encourage an open approach to ‘jigsaw’ or flexible working, which lets people work in ways that can fit around commitments outside of work.

The activities that will come under this section of the Action Plan include:

- Clear identification of opportunities for vets, vet nurses, other members of the vet-led team
- Creation of specific career pathways within general practice, and protection of the Veterinary Nurse title
- Leadership and training opportunities through the RCVS Academy initiative that support the professions’ mental health and wellbeing, and create inclusive working environments
- Promoting the variety of CPD that can be undertaken and continuing to promote the VetGDP and VetGDP Adviser training
- Working with key stakeholders to ensure that progress, innovation and ethics are all addressed
- Highlighting the benefits of being part of the vet-led team and supporting positive relationships with paraprofessionals

- Exploring how to widen access to veterinary work, for example, opportunities for people with disabilities, including those who have become disabled or chronically ill post qualification
- Continuing to work with practices accredited under the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme to raise standards, including key areas such as mental health and wellbeing support, professional and career development, and sustainability
- Working with RCVS Knowledge, our charity partner, to ensure that the latest evidence is being utilised to improve and advance veterinary medicine

Return

It is estimated that, regardless of sector, 57% of male and 74% of female millennials* will be taking career breaks, and 'returnships' are increasingly being offered by multinational organisations to bring people back into the workforce.

Many vets and vet nurses do not return to the professions after a career break, a change of role, or taking time out for family or other caring responsibilities. This Action Plan will explore the ways that veterinary professionals could be encouraged to return to the workforce in a supported way.

The skills developed while taking a break from the veterinary professions, especially in other sectors or non-veterinary roles, can be beneficial when returning, as can the additional life experience. Despite there being a clear process for returning to the profession after an extended break – for example, via the VetGDP for vets and the Period of Supervised Practice for vet nurses – we understand that it can still be daunting to return to practice after a significant amount of time away from the role.

We want people to have an easy return to their profession, no matter how long their break from veterinary work has been, and for them to know that they will be supported in their new role. We also want employers to know that they can facilitate the return of qualified professionals with guidance from the RCVS that they can tailor to their working environment.

*Anyone born between 1981 and 1996

The activities that will come under this section of the Action Plan include:

- Utilising the VetGDP principles for returners, with dedicated marketing and promotion of the VetGDP programme as a resource for both employers and vets
- Clearer signposting of free resources for employers and those on a career break, including initiatives such as the Leadership Library, Edward Jenner Leadership MOOC, the RCVS Academy and the Mind Matters Initiative
- Using the ViVet innovation project to develop and support trialling of flexible and innovative working methods to encourage people who have previously left their profession to return
- Reviewing the Period of Supervised Practice for veterinary nurses



“We want people to have an easy return to their profession, no matter how long their break from veterinary work has been, and for them to know that they will be supported in their new role”

RCVS: our current focus

Existing activities

We currently have a number of ongoing projects that aim to improve the wellbeing of veterinary professionals and initiatives that offer opportunities for people to develop skills, expertise and champion diversity and inclusion. As well as providing resources and support for the professions, it's hoped that the outcomes of these initiatives will have an impact on the recruitment, retention and return of the workforce over the longer term.

Our current initiatives cover a range of clinical and non-clinical areas, some of which are below.

RCVS Knowledge: The charity partner of the RCVS, the knowledge hub for veterinary professionals will continue to provide free training, tools, and resources. www.knowledge.rcvs.org.uk

Mind Matters Initiative (MMI): Our mental health and wellbeing initiative that runs workshops, training and campaigns to improve the professions' mental wellbeing and understanding of mental health. www.vetmindmatters.org

RCVS Leadership Initiative: Free Leadership CPD, Edward Jenner Leadership Programme MOOC (massive open online course) and the Leadership Library, an online resource centre launched in January 2022, to help everyone in the professions, regardless of career stage, to learn key leadership and delegation skills. www.rcvs.org.uk/leadership

ViVet: Our innovation programme that runs online workshops to help teach the professions how to adopt innovative problem-solving techniques into their day-to-day work. www.vivet.org.uk

Education: We provide several educational initiatives to support the professions including the Veterinary Graduate Development Programme (VetGDP) and the 1CPD app that helps individuals plan, record and reflect on their CPD. Our Education Team is committed to undertaking a review of Advanced Practitioner status, to improve member satisfaction and enhanced career pathways. www.rcvs.org.uk/lifelong-learning

The Diversity and Inclusion Group: A working party set up to address the lack of diversity within the professions, which also helps to create inclusive and welcoming environments across the sector. www.rcvs.org.uk/diversity

Vet Nursing: Looking at the holistic role of the VN, from education and training through to VN Futures including the Nursing Progress Log, 1CPD and CertAVN. Ambitions to protect the VN role and increasing opportunities for progression. www.vnfutures.org.uk

RCVS Academy: Digital learning and development to support veterinary professionals in meeting the RCVS standards. www.rcvs.org.uk/academy

Practice Standards Scheme (PSS): Promoting and maintaining high standards in veterinary settings, including new areas to promote inclusion and sustainability. www.rcvs.org.uk/pss

While each of these initiatives won't be included in every one of the Action Plan's ambitions, we will ensure to use the resources that are already available to us as much as possible, alongside exploring new activities to address the workforce crisis.

Working together/working with others

There are many organisations that have responded to workforce shortages, as well as the broader issues within the veterinary sector, such as communication, human factors, and diversity and inclusion that all have an impact. These organisations, often supported by volunteers, have already seen tough topics starting to be discussed, encouraging open questioning on their ability to achieve change, and offering allyship to lesser heard voices. We will continue to support collaborations through our workstreams and continue to invite representative groups to provide input, but most importantly we will continue to consult with the professions so that all can share their views.

Over the last six months we have continued to have regular stakeholder meetings with government departments, the Veterinary Schools Council, the representative bodies such as the British Veterinary Association (BVA), affinity groups including British Veterinary Chronic Illness Society (BVCIS) and British Veterinary LGBT+ (BVLGBT+), Major Employers Group and species divisions. In addition, there are ambitions to protect and enhance the veterinary nursing role in the veterinary team, and to increase opportunities for progression for veterinary nurses. There are high levels of engagement with these groups – their insight and willingness to share and collaborate is vital to achieving success across the ambitions.

Under each ambition is a short example of other organisations' work that contributes to positive changes in the workforce. We encourage every vet and vet nurse to get involved with their representative bodies, employers and affinity groups and be part of this movement.



“Insight and willingness to share and collaborate is vital to achieving success across the ambitions”

Workforce Summit – a springboard

The RCVS Workforce Summit hosted in November 2021, was an opportunity to bring together leaders from across the professions, species divisions. Before this event we looked to the MsRCVS and RVNs to share their insight into the problems and potential solutions.

In order to understand the impact and purpose of the Design Thinking approach to workforce, you can access our pre-event and post-event reports [here](#). These have detailed figures, data and the further information on the purpose of the sessions, which need to be viewed in their entirety. Many of the ‘big pitch’ ideas suggested were focussed on specific issues. Whilst some were scalable, some ideas were outside our remit and might be better taken forward by other organisations. However they are all springboard ideas which can be refined, and ultimately use as conversation starters as to ‘how might we’ imagine a different future. You will see reference to these throughout the Ambitions.

Design Thinking is an innovation technique that, through ViVet, we have applied and used as a way to challenge the status quo and ingrained patterns of thought. There are lots of innovation techniques, so we would encourage all to consider ‘how might we’ use any of these in our roles to challenge the things that aren’t working, to trial ways that might, and then to learn from those processes to refine and further plan.



Ambition one: To shape leaders at all levels

Create opportunities for everyone to develop leadership skills and foster a culture of leadership that is for everyone, irrespective of their career stage.

Insight

The health and social care thinktank The King's Fund states: "Leadership requires leaders to work together, spanning organisational boundaries both within and between organisations, prioritising overall patient care rather than the success of their components, and working collectively to build a cooperative, integrative leadership culture – in effect [collective leadership](#)¹."

Work by our Advancement of the Professions team has established the need to embed inclusive leadership skills in every role and at all levels, with recent research into student vet nurses by MMI showing alarming rates of discriminatory and unprofessional behaviours. These findings have also been reflected in research carried out by the BVA on discrimination within the profession.

It has also shown that veterinary professionals have the willingness and enthusiasm to take on this training and learning. Training, even when free, incurs costs, for example, rota covers, travel and childcare. It is estimated that, within the NHS, leadership training takes over 20% of the national training budget. Investing in staff, especially when clinics are understaffed, can seem a conflict, but for cultural shifts to happen, increased non-clinical skills training is essential to demonstrate a desire for improvement and for supporting teams to be successful.

During an exercise at the Workforce Summit, where delegates were asked to rate various aspects of career development, those who felt they had opportunities to develop leadership skills rated their career development more highly.

Ideas for developing leadership proposed at the Summit included offering leadership training and education to veterinary teams to improve workplace culture, as well as embedding inspiring leaders throughout workplaces to encourage others to develop their leadership skills. Discussions on mandating amounts of CPD were considered but not taken forward.

¹ https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_summary/leadership-in-health-care-apr15.pdf

Actions

- Ensure that the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded at all career stages.
- Inclusive leadership should run throughout all workplaces.
- Launch more opportunities for free and accessible learning resources.
- Ensure the RCVS Fellowship is proactive and engaged.
- Identify leaders and champions with a passion for everyday leadership.

What are we doing?

We committed to a specific leadership workstream in 2017, which has since expanded and developed in close collaboration with our work on diversity and inclusion, as well as MMI. However, the overall approach to leadership is to ensure that leadership principles are embedded and encouraged in all areas of veterinary practice. The resources published are freely available and in a variety of media formats to suit learning styles and flexible working patterns. However, perhaps more work can be done to engage veterinary professionals, especially educators and employers, in understanding the value of such resources.

Our immediate next steps will be to relaunch the NHS Edward Jenner MOOC, further develop the free RCVS Leadership Library, and launch MMI training in areas such as inclusive leadership.

Across the College, leadership development features strongly in the new RCVS Academy and initiatives from the VN and Vet Futures projects, which encourage more people to seize opportunities for leadership.

All of the materials created by the Leadership workstream are for both vets and vet nurses, and can be valuable resources for the whole veterinary team.



MMI has partnered with the Veterinary Management Group (VMG) to offer mental health training for veterinary leaders and managers, which is free of charge and can be part of the VMG accreditation in leadership.

The Leadership Showcase has been relaunched as Leadership Stories to be more inclusive and broadening the examples of everyday leadership across the professions with greater diversity of roles, backgrounds and veterinary contributions.

The RCVS Fellowship will increase the number of events and knowledge transfer to support the professions and demonstrate its leadership role in advancing veterinary practice.

What are others doing?

“ In addition to the ongoing provision of leadership and management training, we have developed a specific group which is looking to provide practical tools to help individuals thrive in practice. ”



– *The Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons*



What does 'good' look like?

When this ambition has been met, there will be:

- Recognition across the professions of the need for everyday leadership for all
- Targeted leadership skills development for those in positions of influence
- Continual training and support available throughout an individual's education and career
- Encouragement of the professions to access leadership training and development, and through using our 1CPD platform, to record and reflect on their progress
- A demonstrable increase in non-clinical CPD being taken up by both vets and vet nurses at all levels, evidenced by 1CPD data
- Recognition that the updated version of Edward Jenner is viewed as a 'must' by the veterinary team and used as the foundation of leadership education

We will help to support this with activities from the RCVS Leadership team, VN Futures, RCVS Academy, RCVS Fellowship, MMI and RCVS Knowledge. Additional support will also be available from CPD providers, vet schools, major employers, SPVS and the VMG, and the value of leadership training outside of the professions will also be encouraged.

Ambition two: Confidence, culture and recognition

The College will continue to support and create resources to help members of the professions to feel more confident in their roles. We want all workplaces to embrace the vet-led team by delegating appropriately and recognising everyone's contributions.

Insight

Preliminary reports for the Workforce Summit revealed that, for both vets and vet nurses, lack of recognition or feeling valued was a significant reason for leaving the professions.

Current projects such as Vet and VN Futures have established that there are clear opportunities for initiatives that can help vets and vet nurses to learn new skills or work in different environments to achieve satisfaction. These include new qualifications, volunteering opportunities and further training. MMI research has also highlighted that pride in, and recognition of, the VN role are integral to retention, although this may not be sufficient in isolation.

During the Workforce Summit, respondents reported that a lack of confidence, concern over loss of skills and knowledge, and the level of support needed by individuals was preventing people from returning to the workplace and was a source of anxiety for those who did. Yet employers clearly considered it was important to welcome to the workplace both previous employees and new employees who had taken career breaks, and that an inclusive culture for current and future employees was desired.

For many of the participants in the virtual insight sessions, recognition, especially of 'part-time' workers' contributions, was lacking, or formed part of a culture of over-work. Our surveys have shown that for many reasons, people of all ages are choosing to work less than full-time. However there is frequent commentary that there are negative perceptions surrounding these working patterns.

If we are to have a workforce that feels confident and recognised then, regardless of gender, mental or physical health, or caring roles, there needs to be a shift in expectations of how business needs are fulfilled.

Actions

- Ensure that there is a welcoming and supportive environment for the whole veterinary team.
- Drive positive change in areas of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
- Clearly communicate the purpose of the English language requirements.
- Improve understanding of the College's role and remit.
- Continue to deliver and build upon awareness-raising and signposting to mental health support offerings.
- Increase training and support in order to develop a positive learning culture.

What are we doing?

There is a considered approach to how we can continue to support the professions to act and practise in a confident and compassionate fashion, while also seeking to advance veterinary medicine. Through supporting vets to build breadth and depth in their skillset, and supporting VNs to take on greater responsibility and increase their skillset, we envision the formation of a more satisfied veterinary team.

We will promote the use of the vet-led team model, which focuses on using everyone's expertise and experience to work efficiently and harmoniously as a practice. This should ensure that all RCVS-accredited practices embed principles of inclusion and opportunities for staff development.

We will continue to promote the use of the VetGDP to help support the development of both newly-qualified veterinary professionals and those returning to practice. We will launch materials for employers who wish to support vets returning into practice, and encourage conversations about career breaks to be had earlier with demonstrable commitment to welcoming people back.

We will continue to set out the behaviours, responsibilities, and expectations for all members of the veterinary team, for example through the *Codes of Professional Conduct* and our English language requirements. We will ensure there is a greater emphasis on identifying leaders and champions with a passion for creating positive working culture.

We will utilise the MMI training programme and research to champion mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. In addition to this, we will also raise the profile of existing free and accessible professional development tools, including the RCVS Knowledge resources such as the QI Boxset and the Farm Champions programme.

We will create more leadership activities and resources including expanding the learning materials available in the RCVS Leadership Library, and develop a diverse and interactive Leadership Showcase comprising case studies and interviews with inspiring leaders.

We will create more opportunities for development and engagement for vet nurses through the VN Futures initiative and its activities such as the VN School Ambassador Programme.

We will ensure that we are represented not just at industry events, but also in the wider veterinary sphere, by running more talks and interactive sessions for the professions and students.

What are others doing?

“ Encouraging new graduates to seek the career that suits them best. In collaboration with Vets: Stay Go Diversify! and VetYou, AVS is hosting a range of talks such as negotiating contracts, promotions, leadership roles and CV writing, aimed towards a positive recruitment experience for veterinary students where possible, with potential for increased retention as a result. ”



– *The Association of Veterinary Students*

“ For community and career development, we are providing an array of diverse and representative role models for veterinary careers globally through a range of media, ie Q&A sessions, mentorship, online career profiles, live discussions and workshops. We are creating a safe space to talk about career challenges and opportunities through user generated content, and helping people find their strengths through the creation of online career resources and career and business coaching. We are collaborating with other organisations to platform other available support and solutions and encouraging values-driven recruitment through highlighting a variety of employers, fostering salary and working benefits transparency, and aiding candidate development. This is done via the VSGD Careers Facebook group, which provides opportunities for veterinary professionals to meet potential employers. ”



– *Vets: Stay, Go Diversify (VSDG)*

“ Work to raise awareness of discrimination, microaggressions and the importance of having equality, diversity and inclusion champions in the workplace, via activities including blogs, posters, social graphics, Facebook Live sessions, webinars and in-person workshops, as well as linked media activity. We also recently gave evidence to Efra Committee on rural mental health alongside Vetlife. ”



– *British Veterinary Association*

“ Our annual conferences have been student-led on topics including EMS for students in non-clinical settings, and sustainability. VPHA sponsors or recruits undergraduate students’ sponsors for these conferences. There has been an increased student interest evident year on year. The VPHA Ambassador roles are mandated to promote (within the student community and wider) VPH/ One Health and broader aspects of veterinary contribution to wider society. VSC facilitates & promotes, at postgraduate level, teaching and research to address appropriately the aspect of VPH and One Health & multidisciplinary work, looking at opportunities to establish further training. ”



– *Veterinary Public Health Association & Veterinary Schools Council*

“ We are working with veterinary employers, including corporate practices, to encourage uptake of BSAVA resources that support vets in practice. These include our mental health courses and the BSAVA Library resources. ”



What does ‘good’ look like?

When this ambition has been met, there will be:

- Legislation that updates the Veterinary Surgeons Act and enables innovation within practice, including updates for veterinary nurses
- Improved clarification on veterinary roles amongst members of the public, to help to ensure that the public has confidence in the professions and how veterinary-related services are regulated
- Positive recognition of the changes in culture within the profession and levels of support from the College, evidenced by means of regular surveys of the professions
- A better understanding of the reasons why people leave the professions, via data from exit surveys, so that we and the professions can learn how to continually improve working practices
- Improved engagement with our resources, measured by, for example, training course attendance
- Clear pathways for feedback from members of the professions on the materials developed so that they can be improved and new needs addressed

This will be an ongoing piece of work with regular reviews of engagement provided by the our PSS team, the VetGDP, data on graduate outcomes reports and Leadership QI courses, and regular surveys. As with previous surveys and studies, we will share the data and insight with the professions where possible.

Ambition three: Greater responsibility for veterinary nurses

Veterinary nurses need to be given opportunities to use their full range of skills and be provided with options for consistent training and career progression.

Insight

Reports from the VN Futures Initiative have made it clear that more needs to be done to elevate the value of the VN role to help increase retention and recruitment into the VN profession.

The Workforce Summit preliminary report revealed that pay (77%), not feeling valued (60%), poor work-life balance (46%) and dissatisfaction with career opportunities (40%) were some of the key reasons that people wanted to leave the VN profession.

During the Workforce Summit, ideas were given to help improve opportunities for increased VN responsibility, including using legislative reform to develop more career pathways and placing more emphasis on non-clinical roles and communication skills. The intention would be to support VNs to develop a wider range of skills. Data from the joint RCVS/BVNA 2020-2021 Covid survey has shown that 60% of VNs stated they had to take on additional responsibilities, 74% had to alter their working patterns, and 66% were experiencing conflict between their personal wellbeing and their professional role.

Actions

- Demonstrate the capabilities of the veterinary nursing role.
- Continued RCVS support for VNs through the VN Futures project.
- Ensure there are clear career pathways for veterinary nurses.
- Encourage VNs to utilise their full skillset.
- Continue to make progress in changing veterinary legislation.

What are we doing?

Key developments in our push for legislative change, including to Schedule 3, have the potential to have a significant impact on the veterinary nurse role, including protection of the vet nurse title. Alongside the legislative work, there are actions that the College, employers and schools can put in place to introduce greater responsibility for VNs.

The first cohort of Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing (CertAVN) students graduated in 2021, gaining a qualification that was introduced to expand the professional development of VNs. We will continue to promote this qualification and work with schools to expand the number of qualification providers and the variety of certificates available.

We will expand our promotion of the new Day One Competences, Skills and Professional Behaviours to employers, to drive greater understanding of the full role of the VN in both clinical and non-clinical settings.

We will encourage VNs to take on leadership roles, support the professional development and promotion of nurses, and help to foster increased interaction between student vets and student vet nurses.

We will also continue to embed VN specific content throughout the RCVS Academy, Leadership Library, ViVet training, diversity & inclusion work and MMI workstreams.

We will focus activities on ensuring understanding of current delegation regulations, including creating materials to support vets, nurses and other practice staff.

What are others doing?

“ Widening accessibility and visibility of the veterinary nursing profession, empowering veterinary nurses (VNs), and supporting employers and VNs in leadership roles to start conversations. We have created and launched a Chronic Illness Toolkit and have a Pay Toolkit in development. Ocean Update – We continue to celebrate the Veterinary Nursing Awareness Month (VNAM) campaign and have launched a Diversity, Inclusivity and Widening Participation working group campaign. ”



– *British Veterinary Nursing Association*

“ Developing the Good Workplaces campaign and linked resources to help create supportive working environments for veterinary professionals of all ages and career stages. As part of this, workplaces can sign up to our Good Veterinary Workplaces code. ”



– *British Veterinary Association*

What does good look like?

When this ambition has been met, there will be:

- Changes to the levels of responsibility given to vet nurses, which will be continually monitored, and impact measured via surveys
- Changes to the upper bounds of veterinary nursing, and protection of the vet nurse title due to the work by the RCVS, the VN Futures project, VN Council, BVNA and BVA
- Increased in 'intention to stay in the profession', evidenced by data gathered by the College and reduced churn rate in the workplace
- Improvement in the number of nurses taking the CertAVN qualification
- A VN School Ambassador programme that has a sustainable number of volunteers and is well used
- An increase in the number of providers of vet nurse training, and in numbers of overall places for vet nursing across the UK
- A better acknowledgement from the public and the veterinary profession of the key role that veterinary nurses take and their role in animal health and welfare



Ambition four: Welcoming a modern way of working

We need to develop processes to support the professions to test and trial new ways of working, that enable efficiencies, enjoyment and more positive interactions with clients.

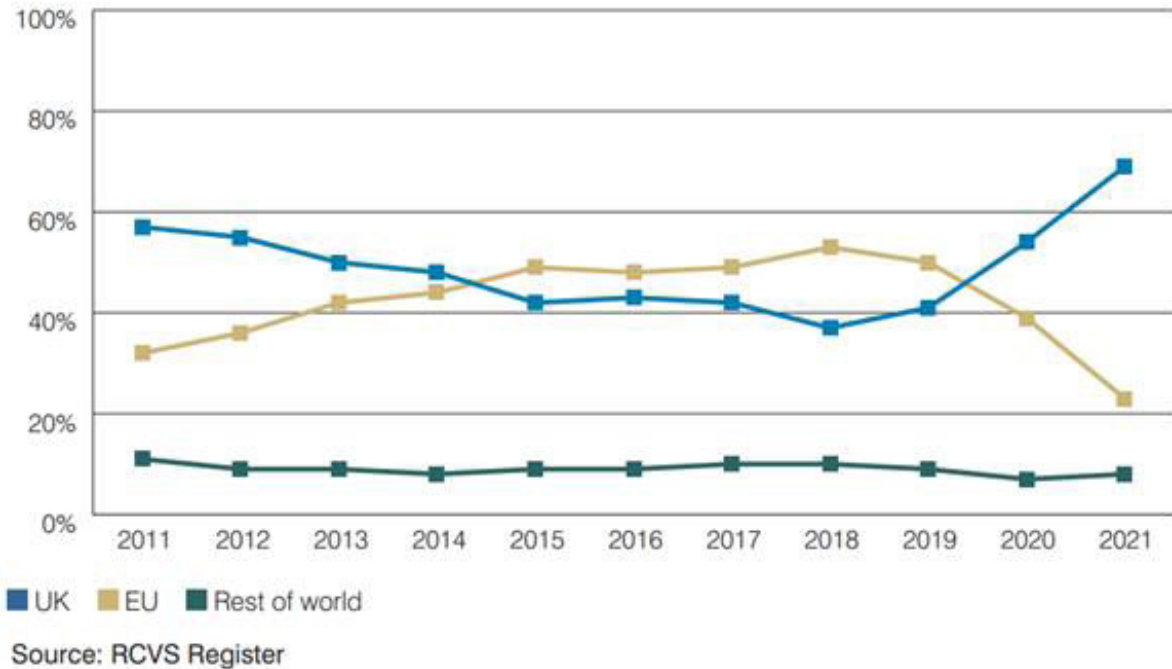
Insight

Global events from the last few years, including EU Exit and the Covid-19 pandemic, have altered the ways that the professions recruit and retain staff. New ways of working are urgently required to address the workforce challenges the professions face.

There are increasing numbers of vet schools, vet school places and higher education institutions delivering nurse training, and places on these courses fill up every year. The number of students rose from 5,402 students in the 2018-2019 academic year to 7,634 students in the 2020-2021 academic year. However, despite the popularity of vet and vet nurse training, there is a significant deficit in the number of vets and nurses currently working full time compared to the demand for clinical services. Although the number of practising veterinary professionals has risen over the past few years, (March 2019: 25,870 vets and 17,168 vet nurses vs September 2022: 28,522 vets and 21,979 vet nurses) the feedback we gathered from the professions via our Brexit and Covid surveys indicated that the veterinary profession was still struggling with an increased workload.

Between 2019 and 2022, the number of vets joining the Register per annum fell from 2,782 to 2,020, and the proportion of new registrants who qualified in the EU fell from 53% in 2018 to 23% in 2022. The proportion of leavers who qualified in EU countries has been steadily increasing, from less than a third (30%) of leavers in 2012 to 40% in 2022. While leavers who qualified in the EU (46%) overtook the proportion of leavers who are UK-qualified (42%) in 2021, the proportion of UK-qualified leavers rose to 49% in 2022.

New UK-Practising registrants, by region of qualification 2011-2021



New registrations to the VN Register have been generally increasing over the past decade, from 737 new additions to the VN Register in 2011, to 1,250 in 2022. There was, however, a temporary fall in the number of new registrations in 2020, when intake dropped by over 40%. In 2022, the VN register has 21,979 registered members and over 96% of these members are female nurses.

Evidence gathered by the College and others has demonstrated that many veterinary professionals, particularly those with other caring responsibilities, are interested in new and more flexible ways of working. King’s College London has undertaken [research on](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl/assets/New-ways-of-working.pdf)³ “New Ways of Working,” which covers a variety of sectors, and has demonstrated that over 48% of working mothers have feared caring responsibilities will negatively impact their career. The research found that, even when companies have policies in place to support flexible working and caring arrangements, managers were not always well-versed on how these work operationally. Of the companies surveyed, there was a mixed opinion about clear plans to support the workforce which, when viewed from an innovation and ‘design thinking’ approach, demonstrates an opportunity to reflect on each individual organisation’s needs and create a model that works.

³ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl/assets/New-ways-of-working.pdf>

Actions

- Continue to strengthen the relationship with overseas regulators and professional organisations.
- Explore modelling on how teams can work smarter.
- Encourage practices to apply innovation tools and techniques.
- Be bold in how we review and react to innovation.
- Promote the return-to-work options for both clinical and non-clinical roles.
- Undertake a longitudinal study of veterinary cohorts on their views of the profession.
- Challenge employer groups to drive better culture.
- Encourage better plans for growth focusing on skills, innovation and technology.
- Lead by example by using innovation to tackle major challenges.
- Regulatory advice direct to those involved in bringing new services or products to market, ensuring we are on the front foot.
- Continue our workforce modelling project to provide forecasts of the future supply of vets and vet nurses over the coming decade.

Hybrid working is not always the answer as, for many veterinary roles, it is practically not possible. However, by looking at the requirements of team members, client needs and exploring flexible working options, it might be possible to create solutions such as term-time working, consultation or surgery-only roles, remote triaging and evening clinics, all of which are currently used by some organisations already.



What are we doing?

The Covid-19 pandemic presented opportunities to work in new ways. One of the key pieces of work that takes these learnings and will underpin how the modern vet team works is the under-care consultation and review. The outcomes and implementation of the review are likely to have implications for the future of certain aspects of veterinary practice, including remote prescribing.

If the proposals of the RCVS Legislation Working Party are taken up by government, this will also have implications for how a modern veterinary workplace operates, including potential for the expansion of the vet nurse role, adjustments made for veterinary professionals with disabilities and increases in the vet-led team approach.

Following the Summit and Virtual Insights, ViVet has identified key areas to focus on as it continues its programme of innovation training. ViVet will use a variety of innovation tools in workshops and webinars to help identify solutions and enable the adoption of problem-solving skills, both in the workplace and other veterinary settings.

A workforce modelling project is due to launch with the aim of providing forecasts of the future likely supply of vets and vet nurses, on the basis of trends in retirements and other losses from the professions, and in the supply pipeline to the professions, over the coming decade. We will also undertake a longitudinal study that combines data from existing areas but will also seek to ask specific questions of veterinary cohorts regarding their views of the profession and career trajectories, as well as investigating how these attitudes change over time.

Furthermore, we will also continue to promote our Practice Standards Scheme and ensure we are reviewing the standards to include up-to-date measures such as sustainability and equality requirements. We will also look at other industries we can learn from, including human health and international regulators.

As well as reviewing professional standards and legislation, these activities will also look at the more holistic parts of veterinary working life, including decision-making and flexible working opportunities.

What are others doing?

“ Aiming to improve retention and recruitment by putting in place a pay supplement for Official Veterinarians (meat officials controls staff) to help compete with market prices, enhancing training programmes and role enrichment opportunities, and providing independent assurance of in-house training. ”



– Food Standards Scotland

“ We aim to increase opportunities for home working for vets internally and increase pay and financial support for CPD for all employees and invest in improving breakout areas. ”



– Blue Cross

“ We are aiming to improve vet capacity through a range of options including development of own neutering clinics if feasible. We will gain insights through consultation with members of the vet profession and use results to inform future approach to aid in vet capacity issues. ”



– Cats Protection

What does good look like?

When this ambition has been met, there will be:

- A shift away from vets and vet nurses leaving their Registers, in favour of taking on flexible working options, especially on a part-time basis
- Professional workspans will increase
- An increased awareness of the impact of innovation techniques and how they can positively impact the workforce, including case studies via ViVet, which will create a positive narrative around change
- A change to the reasons cited via College exit interview for people leaving the profession away from lack of flexible or family-friendly work being a key driver
- An increase in those re-joining the register, or re-joining from the non-practising register
- Growth in the number of veterinary leaders talking about flexible workforce and offering packages that showcase the possibilities of working flexibly, or non-traditional working patterns

The activities to develop modern ways of working will be ongoing within our ViVet and PSS teams. However, modernising ways of working will also be incorporated into any veterinary legislation and the under care consultation outcomes. ViVet events, workshops and engagement will continue to be the main metrics for success. ViVet will be hosting the next Innovation Symposium in 2023, at which innovation in the workplace will be a core theme.

Ambition five: General practice – a chosen pathway

General practice needs to be showcased as a chosen career path that has opportunities to be satisfying and rewarding for vets and vet nurses.

Insight

Throughout the Workforce Summit's 'Readiness for Work' insight session, delegates considered what could be done to make the GP role more aspirational and enjoyable rather than it just being seen as a default for vets and vet nurses. Through the RCVS Fellowship it has long been noted that general practice is integral to supporting the whole sphere of veterinary medicine, but also as the foundation of successful careers for all. The Royal College of General Practitioners has rolled out a number of campaigns and activities since 2017 that look at the role of the GP in medicine, encouraging new graduates into GP work, supporting those returning to practice after career breaks, leadership training, mentorships and peer support networks. Clear recognition of both the role of the GP and the value of primary care, are invaluable to recruiting vets into general practice, and retaining them once they are there.

Since 2018, work has been underway by our Education Committee to review the Advanced Practitioner (AP) status and the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (CertAVP). There is confusion within the profession regarding the difference between a certificate and AP status, as well as the need for clarity around the role of an AP. Furthermore, there are opportunities to consider how this work can align with recognising general practice as a speciality, or specialisms within general practice as a way to enhance the recognition, satisfaction and reward for those in general practice and primary care.

The need for students to develop a broader set of skills during their education, including training in client communication and teamwork, will be strengthened within the Day One Competences, which would help new graduates to be better prepared for life in general practice.

Scope for a project that rebrands the GP role to showcase its benefits and attributes was identified as being key to the success of this ambition.

Actions

- Encourage confidence in pursuing a career in general practice and the opportunities it offers.
- Encourage an element of shared training between veterinary and veterinary nursing students at undergraduate level.
- Learn from and model against other professions, such as the medical profession.

What are we doing?

Creation of a workstream alongside that of the Advanced Practitioner work that will look at the role of the generalist and the career pathways available. This will look at terminology and recognition within the profession. There will be a stakeholder event looking at Advanced Practitioner status in late 2022, with work continuing into 2023.

Increasing promotion across all projects of the general practitioner, ensuring that they are viewed equally and are recognised for their role in education of the public, public health service, recruiting undergraduate vets, training the next generation, and demonstrating everyday leadership.

Through the introduction of our new accreditation standards in 2023, ensuring that general practice forms the backbone of undergraduate training so that students are well equipped to work in general practice and informed about the GP role.

Increasing the levels of interaction between student vets and student vet nurses (SVN) to reduce hierarchical human factors issues from the outset, this will be through joint training by MMI, Leadership and diversity & inclusion projects.

What are others doing?

“ We are committing to providing tools, policies and practical support to practices to embed the BVA Good Workplace code. We have made a number of commitments around health and wellbeing including flexible working, rewards and benefits. We will also increase retention through an extension of clinical education provision to build clinical capability and targeting recruitment through refreshed campaigns, international recruitment and improved social media attraction campaigns. We will also increase our commitment to EDI through the launch of ‘Diversity & Inclusion commitments’ and improve retention and colleague wellbeing as our two key business priorities. ”



– *Pets at Home Vet Group*

“ A focus on careers advice, producing a wide range of activity to engage with schoolchildren and people from underrepresented backgrounds to encourage them to follow a veterinary career. Work has recently included a mythbusting guide about applying to vet school, targeted at parents, teachers and careers advisers, and a “Vetastic Adventures” project aimed at primary and secondary schoolchildren, developed jointly with the Scottish SPCA. ”



– *British Veterinary Association*

“ BSAVA provides new grads with accessible resources to support them in clinical decision making. We have a resource planned and we are also working with VETbytes which provides access to evidence-based information at the point of care to aid decision making. ”



BSAVA
BRITISH SMALL ANIMAL VETERINARY ASSOCIATION

– *British Small Animal
Veterinary Association*

What does good look like?

When this ambition has been met, there will be:

- An event looking at the role of the GP, Advanced Practitioner and Specialist, out of which workstreams will develop
- A workforce model that enables organisations and businesses to plan their future needs
- Longitudinal work that has begun to create a data set to utilise in the coming years, contributing to evidence-based decision making
- An increase in job satisfaction for GP vets and a reduction in vets leaving this arm of the profession
- Mechanisms to gain ongoing insights in the specific needs and challenges within general practice, to help the RCVS and other organisations continue to develop and improving support and innovative activities

Ambition six: An attractive career for everyone, including those who have left

We need to make the veterinary professions more attractive and welcoming, including for those who have left the sector and want to return, and overseas vets who wish to work in the UK. As well as supporting those currently in the workplace to get the most out of their role, we should also be helping those on career breaks and those who have left veterinary work to return to the profession in a capacity that suits them.

Insight

The Workforce Summit emphasised the need to encourage people who have left the veterinary professions for an extended period of time, to return. Reasons for moving to the Non-Practising category of the Register or leaving the Register completely can vary. Many vets and vet nurses do not supply reasons for changing their registration status, or leaving. However, from smaller surveys, it has been noticed that this is frequently for child caring. Wider data from Women in STEM shows that 60% of mothers who return to the workplace feel either 'less confident or not confident in their workplace [contribution](#)'⁴. Furthermore, only a third of women in the [Deloitte](#)⁵ Women at Work 2022 study said that their employer was able to offer flexible working patterns, and 93% of women were concerned that speaking up about negative behaviours within the workplace would negatively affect their career.

This includes encouraging those who have temporarily left because of childcare, parental leave, travel or study, as well as encouraging vets and nurses who have left the industry completely and moved into a different area of work, to return to a veterinary role.

The Workforce Summit recognised that more needs to be done to develop a flexible return-to-work programme, with packages of support for returners and greater opportunities for flexible working.

⁴ <https://www.womeninstem.co.uk/breaking-stereotypes/returners-programmes-encourage-women/>

⁵ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/deloitte-women-at-work-2022-a-global-outlook.pdf>

Actions

- Ensure that employers have an understanding of, and are confident, in recognising that the people they employ will have career expectations and lifestyle needs.
- Continue to promote direct RCVS accreditation of overseas veterinary degrees.
- Create a desirable and welcoming environment for overseas vets.
- Seek ways to maintain contact with those taking a break from the professions or Register.
- To review and create an Extra-Mural Studies (EMS) policy that leads to a more consistent high-quality experience for students and providers.
- Promote the variety and breadth of roles that vets and VNs do.
- Ensure that vets know that there are pathways for all career types, clear understanding of how to leave and re-enter the professions.
- Ensure employers understand the re-entry process, and the importance of welcoming people back after career breaks.
- Encourage the take up of public health and production animal roles in areas with the most limited veterinary cover.
- Open opportunities for receiving incentives and funding across underserved areas for students.

What are we doing?

Creation of specific materials for employers, those currently on a career break, and early career vets on the supported VetGDP programme for returning vets. Currently, completion of this programme is only mandatory for those who have been out of practice for more than five years; however, the underlying principles of support and reflective practice are applicable to all who have had breaks and have been highlighted as a need by the profession.

VetGDP will continue to support new graduates and vets new to the UK to ensure that their UK career starts in a positive fashion.

Reviewing the VN Period of Supervised Practice to increase understanding and ease of access, for both VNs and employers.

VN Futures has committed to a number of actions that encompass workplace satisfaction and retention – flexible working, diversity, chronic ill-health support, and active promotion of performance reviews. Develop closer working relationships with Animal Care Assistants, and auxiliary staff and their role in supporting VNs.

Supporting VN clinical supervisors – increasing the knowledge and training through the creation of materials such as the RCVS Academy Clinical Supervisor course which covers how to supervise and support student veterinary nurses, enabling the development of Day One Skills and Professional Behaviours.

What are others doing?

“ We are helping support recruitment, retention and returning by putting evidence-based processes in place, to allow individuals to perform their roles more efficiently and confidently. This focuses on ‘the right thing to do’, and Quality Improvement (QI), which can improve outcomes and team efficiency. These initiatives complement each other and help the professions “to do the right things, right.” We provide free tools, resources and education to support veterinary professionals to deliver high-quality evidence-based medicine, through access to veterinary research and Quality Improvement resources, to help teams prioritise, become more confident in decision making, reduce errors and complaints, and free up time. As a part of this, carrying out clinical audits to provide evidence into practice performance, identify gaps in support, focus change management where most needed, and provide specific goals for practice teams. All this fosters a learning culture, unites teams, creates an environment in which people want to work in and remain, and gives returning practitioners the confidence to return. ”



– RCVS Knowledge

“ We will soon be launching a suite of resources around flexible working, and we continue to have a strong focus on veterinary wellbeing and issues such as stress, burn-out and long working hours. ”



– *British Veterinary Association*

“ We have the framework of a new course outlined focusing on returning to work and hope to roll this out in 2023 following the new Head of Education (HoE) taking up their position in November. ”



– *British Small Animal Veterinary Association*



“Employers that are confident to encourage returners to the workplace following a career break, and also that those in their early career understand that they too can be supported to return after a career break in the future”

What does good look like?

When this ambition has been met, there will be:

- Great engagement from employers and vets with the Returners VetGDP, who subsequently complete the programme, with vets returning to the UK-practising Register, ultimately increasing numbers
- Case studies and other resources showcasing the stories of those returners who have started and completed VetGDP to inspire others who wish to return
- Employers that are confident to encourage returners following a career break, and those in their early career understand that this is a supported programme available to all
- An increase in the numbers of VNs who undertake the PSP, and then stay on the Register
- Increased collaboration between employers, species divisions and affinity groups to support those who have or are thinking about taking career breaks
- Positive regard towards all who have working patterns that do not fit the current view of ‘full time’. This could be through media representation and coverage, research, feedback from exit survey and state of the profession surveys

Ambition seven: Improving client interaction and communication

We need to have improved interactions and communications with clients and increase their understanding of veterinary work and roles.

Insight

During the Workforce Summit's 'Workplace Culture' Insight Session, some of the key factors that were identified as contributors to issues in some workplaces' culture, were poor communication and a lack of shared beliefs and values throughout the practice team. Communication was also raised across different topics and demographics, with the virtual insights research suggesting that there is work to be done on all areas of communication, regardless of workplace.

A recent study [by McDermott et al](#)⁶ (2015) states that 98% of responders felt that communication skills were as important as clinical skills in veterinary medicine. Yet [Enlund](#)⁷ (2021) describes that a 'paternalistic approach is still common in veterinary medical encounters with pet owners'. The new Day One Competences for graduate vets cements the value of collaborative communications within the 'reflective relationships' theme, as it is recognised that these professional skills are vital in combination with clinical skills.

Recent campaigns from MMI have looked at civility in the workplace and supporting psychological safety within the veterinary teams. Furthermore, RCVS Knowledge has long been championing the consideration of human factors in relation to patient safety and improving clinical outcomes.

Ideas identified at the Summit to improve workplace culture and, as a result, to improve clients interactions, were to develop compulsory CPD for personal and interpersonal development. This could also cover compulsory CPD in client interactions, as is currently part of the CertAVP. However, mandating CPD does not fit with the RCVS approach to how vets and vet nurses should undertake their professional development, which is based around individual members of the professions having the choice to carry out the CPD that is most relevant to their individual learning needs. We would encourage the whole team to consider how civility, communication skills and psychological safety factor into their CPD. These are important topics and skills that must be cultivated for all members of the team.

⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26315212/>

⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34901252/>

We regularly attend public events such as pet shows, and country and agricultural shows, and respond to consumer media enquiries, to raise awareness and understanding of our regulatory role, but most importantly the role and remit of vets and vet nurses. Now that Covid restrictions have eased, attendance at in-person public events will be restarted, and we will collaborate with other organisations where possible.

A good resource available to veterinary professionals when communication breaks down and support is needed to resolve complaints or disputes is the Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS). This is a service that neither investigates nor adjudicates complaints, but looks to find resolution. Recent VCMS data shows that communication and human factors are often the underlying cause of a complaint and can lead to a breakdown of trust between the client and the vet. Communication skills are often cited as a route to resolution, and recently through the RCVS Leadership activities, a new and free 'Leadership Library' has been created, which includes resources on handling difficult conversations and other interpersonal skills. There has also been an increase in the types of training and CPD available across the board that tackle areas such as communication, feedback and leadership, demonstrating that these skills are recognised by professionals as essential and should be given the time for development.

Enhancements to the RCVS website will be made to provide clear and supportive information on what animal owners or keepers can expect from an interaction with their veterinary surgeon to help manage the expectations on the service or care provided.

Actions

- Elevate and drive the status of communication and other interpersonal skills within the professions.
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive and easily accessible directory of EMS opportunities.
- Work with schools and employers to improve the richness of the EMS offering available for students to allow them to develop a greater range of clinical and non-clinical skills.
- Clearer and easily accessible explanation of the veterinary role and the scope of the vet and veterinary nurse role to the general public.

What are we doing?

We will continue to fund and support the VCMS, while at the same time embedding core values around strong communication skills within the veterinary team and when communicating with owners and members of the public. The VCMS is free to use and can be instigated by either the client or the veterinary practice.

Develop and maintain a comprehensive and easily accessible database of EMS opportunities, to support students to find and book available placements that are accessible for them to allow them to develop a greater range of clinical and non-clinical skills.

Key to the success of this ambition is to embed the importance of communication skills at undergraduate level. This is assessed as part of the new accreditation standards for vet schools both in the UK and internationally to ensure that they meet the Day One Competences in communication.

We will raise awareness that communication skills training count as CPD and should be encouraged as part of the VetGDP.

The RCVS Fellowship has recently undertaken a series of webinars focusing on 'quality of life', and the impact of impact of client expectations, moral injury and end-of-life care on veterinary professionals. This has highlighted the complexity of the issues, and has demonstrated that there is a need for more events of this nature. More will be planned.

The Fellowship also runs an annual competition for 'Fellows of the Future' aimed at encouraging students to present their research at Fellowship Day, and building their confidence in speaking with an external professional audience.

We have introduced initiatives that will help the professions to develop their communication skills in different ways, such as the VN School Ambassador Project, which gives VNs the resources and training to go into schools and inspire school children to find out more about the VN profession.

We will continue to expand on our Leadership Library, to offer free resources on communication skills and difficult conversations and reinforce the value of communication skills throughout RCVS Knowledge resources, all of which can count as CPD.

Psychological safety in the working environment is also an important element that, when done right, can open up communication, and we will continue to demonstrate support for this key factor through the MMI, Leadership Library, Diversity & Inclusion work and throughout the accreditation standards and the *RCVS Code of Conduct*.

What are others doing?

“ We are focussing on improving communication with vets, creating clearer partnerships, and increasing support for vets to improve job satisfaction. We frequently gather and evaluate data from vet conferences to inform ongoing strategy and work alongside other charitable organisations to make sure vets feel supported to take pragmatic and appropriate decisions to reduce moral hazard and stress. ”



– RSPCA

“ Awareness raising of the impact of client intimidation on vets and their teams via the public-facing Respect Your Vet campaign. ”



– British Veterinary Association



What does good look like?

When this ambition has been met, there will be:

- A continued emphasis on communication skills as part of the lecture set for the majority of CPD events, at all levels, and the benefits of good communications skills are widely accepted
- RCVS, RCVS Knowledge, and MMI resources on communications skills, human factors and psychological safety that are highly utilised and receive constructive and positive feedback on their content and relevance in everyday practice
- Evidence of best practice with communication skills training within educational establishments, which will be recognised through the accreditation process and promoted to share with other institutions
- An increase in collaborative research, campaigns and knowledge transfer by all the major veterinary organisations, and that this will be further recognised by other professions as best practice
- A continued effort from the RCVS and others to refine resources, policy and insight through feedback and knowledge sharing with case studies, reports and updates
- The RCVS Fellowship will have increased its knowledge transfer activities and provide opportunities for two-way interaction between the Fellowship and the professions

Opportunities and ways to take things forward

The following are suggestions that have been taken from the Workforce Summit and refined into actionable steps. When reviewing these ideas, keep in mind that we are looking to offer toolkits, learning opportunities and resources to support progress in the areas.

Stakeholder Collaboration Groups	<p>The stakeholders for the collaboration group include delegates from the Summit and participants from the Focus Groups research, including those who work in practice, students, employers, veterinary schools and veterinary representation groups.</p> <p>Stakeholders will have different levels of engagement and influence across each project, and we will establish the roles and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders. The group will be required to work together, produce impactful and meaningful outcomes and feedback on their progress.</p>
Submissions and proposals	<p>Where we do not have lines of communication with a particular audience, we will invite proposals from organisations or support networks to help us reach groups that we are not engaged with. This will be particularly key in the area of 'return to work' where the audience is not currently working in the veterinary professions.</p>
Further research opportunities	<p>The Workforce Summit outlined many of the key challenges in day-to-day practice life. However, there were some areas where further research was needed, either through insight sessions or surveys of practice staff, employers, government and education providers. This will be applied to areas that were outside the scope of the delegates' discussions at the Workforce Summit, for example, wider legislative changes.</p>

<p>Stakeholders to take forward</p>	<p>When an action is best driven by an organisation, such as a change in organisational structure, there is the potential to share the research and insights needed for ideation and planning to other stakeholders. With these actions, we will continue to review, share progress and learning and encourage open innovation with the profession. Some of the proposed changes will span areas such as policy, education, behaviour, organisational structure and regulation.</p>
<p>Review and reassess</p>	<p>We have already made headway or taken steps to address, research or plan some of the proposed actions. We will review what went well, what can be improved, where we can collaborate, what has been successful and what can we learn from other workforces or ongoing initiatives, like VN Futures and Vet Futures.</p>
<p>External factors</p>	<p>Some of the larger, out of scope, or beyond the control of the RCVS challenges may have been identified long before the Workforce Summit, and are being addressed in the way best suited to lobby or make change.</p>



How you can get involved

At its very inception, our Workforce project has had collaboration at its heart. No one organisation has all the answers and there is no single activity, policy or regulation to fix all the problems facing the professions, nor is any one voice more important than others. This is why we have made sure to reach out to individuals through our Insight Sessions, as well as representative groups and employers, but this is only the start.

Looking forward, we want to continue this process of collaboration and constructive feedback in relation to each 'ambition'. This plan is not an instruction on 'how to', but it gives some shape to the solutions and the ethos needed to achieve change, and we now want the help of you, the professions, in development and delivery of this change. Ultimately, we all want the same thing – to maintain and enhance the veterinary professions and support vets and vet nurses in their vital work for animal health and welfare, and public health.

Over the coming months, we will be delivering a series called 'Ambitions Explored' a combination of presentations and panel discussions focusing on each of the seven ambitions in turn. This will be an opportunity for all who work in animal health to consider each ambition in more detail. There will also be resource lists published alongside, for those who would like more information on these topics.

There is also the opportunity to interact with the College at industry events and Regional Question Time sessions where members can hear the latest updates on projects and offer questions to Officers.

In the meantime, if you have any feedback about this document and its contents, or suggestions for other initiatives that could help mitigate the impact of the workforce crisis, we want to hear from you. Please email the Advancement of the Professions team, at advancement@rcvs.org.uk with your thoughts.

Next steps

Many of the actions and ambitions are linked to the push for legislative reform, which is a long-term project dependent on many external factors. However, there are other actions and activities that we have much greater control over and which we can start to plan alongside existing workstreams sooner.

Over the next few months, there will be work focussing on creating materials and promotion of the return to work VetGDP, ensuring that employers have an understanding of this framework to bring people back into the workplace after a career break, and raising awareness amongst those on the non-practising Register, and those no longer on any Register. This has been prioritised due to the significant amount of feedback received from across the professions.

ViVet will continue to offer specific workshops and sessions for the whole veterinary team for free, covering topics that were raised in the virtual insights and the Workforce Summit.

In response to the specific themes, there will be webinars featuring leaders from within the professions on each ambition and what this means to them. These will be an opportunity to develop ideas as to how these can be translated into the breadth of veterinary work, and feature useful resources to enable teams to plan for how these could be adapted in their specific organisations.

Over the last few years, research has been undertaken looking at the nomenclature of the various statuses and qualifications offered by the RCVS, and what this means to owners. This project has already started, but will have general practice woven into it, with a stakeholder event planned, this need is a pressing one for all in general practice. It is hoped that this will shape specific actions for the coming years.

Other priority areas will be the ongoing work of the Focused/Limited Licensure Working Group which is looking at how to increase access to the veterinary professions for people with disabilities, and our public affairs work reaching out to stakeholders and policymakers on the need to enact our legislative reform proposals. Many of these proposals for fresh veterinary legislation align with the objectives of the Workforce project.

In the meantime, we will also be running a series of blogs looking at how various aspects of the College's work are helping to mitigate the workforce issues – these can be found at www.rcvs.org.uk/blogs.

Conclusion

Throughout this document there are great opportunities for change, the need to reflect on what is working well, and pathways for innovation. Accelerated by Covid, the adoption of more modern or digital ways of working has meant veterinary professionals were able to continue to deliver services safely. Moving forward can only happen if we understand what has worked well, and what gaps currently exist. For many, it may seem as though these gaps can only be filled by the big organisations or legislation, and while these are vital, incremental improvements are the foundation.

Whether your role is clinical, non-clinical, education, research or policy, there is time for each person to reflect on their impact. For some, this may seem easier to quantify than others – the number of vaccinations delivered, or the number of animal health certificates issued, for example. However, take the time to remember that we do not function in isolation. There may be immediate results in some areas, whereas change could take years in others. It is important to recognise the contributions of colleagues and peers, and celebrate the variety of veterinary roles that do bring immense satisfaction and deliver huge value to pet owners and the wider public.

There is a huge sense of personal satisfaction with veterinary work – this resonates in all the surveys and events that we run. For progress to happen, we must allow for retention of that satisfaction or rekindle that satisfaction where it has been lost.

A sense of agency has been highlighted as important throughout the research, under areas such as flexible working, recognition and reward, feeling welcome and included. It is extremely important that all professionals continue to have agency. In this document, there are frequent reference to surveys and insight gathering, which is vital in helping us and others to understand current issues and needs. However, we are not alone in wanting that interaction. Representative bodies, species divisions, affinity groups and others all seek input from individual vets and vet nurses, from organisations large and small. If you have the time, do respond to those requests where possible, as it will help shape policy, create targeted resources, and allow longer-term planning against the issues that affect us all. Our commitment in turn is that we share these insights, the data, and the findings of research so that all can benefit and use this.

There has been an overwhelming sense of willingness to support modernising ways of working, from equity and inclusion through to flexible working and career development. None of these topics is small and they can mean something different to each person depending on their career stage and life experience. We must continue to seek out those voices who challenge, the voices who offer up innovative solutions or pathways, and those who haven't always been empowered to share. It can be uncomfortable and alarming but, as we have seen with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, and student vet nurses, in recent projects, their courage and compassion enables pathways to be formed that refine and reshape expectations and behaviours.

Communication is key. We will continue to update with engagement opportunities, resources, training, innovations and regulatory change. Our hope is that this will be collaborative and forward looking as we work together on shaping solutions.

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