



A1 standards: your route to success



“We will demystify the A1 standards and help you to assess more effectively and efficiently, as well as offering guidance on mentoring your students.”

In this issue: assessor development course, new fees, certificates and reports for centres, European practical exams, TP inspections, meet the team, exam updates, join us at BSAVA.

Route to A1 success

New course to support assessors

Are you a new assessor? Struggling with the A1 standards? Spending far too much time assessing? Then help is at hand in the shape of our new CPD course.

We know that many A1 training programmes are generic in nature and do not always help assessors to apply good assessment principles to the clinical situation in a veterinary practice. Consequently, inexperienced assessors sometimes find it hard to get to grips with the essentials of efficient (and effective) assessment techniques. As a result, they may spend many more hours than they need to bogged down in paperwork and feeling uncertain. This is demoralising for both the assessor and student(s), not to mention a poor use of valuable time.

The A1 qualification deals only with assessment, but students often need more. This is addressed by the course, as Julie Dugmore, Quality Assurance Manager for the Awarding Body, explains: "Students need support and mentorship in order to gain skills and become competent. Often the assessor also assumes the role of mentor/supervisor, but with little training in this very important and sometimes difficult role," she says.

Our new programme will run over two separate days and focus on the practicalities of helping and supporting student VNs in achieving their training

goals, including the less willing candidate. We will de-mystify the A1 standards and help you to assess more efficiently. Our approach will be "hands on" so you must be prepared to get stuck into our practical exercises and do some homework with your students. This is no "death by PowerPoint" course and you definitely can't snooze after lunch!

"Students need support and mentorship in order to gain skills and become competent."

The first course will start in July 2008. For more information and to register your interest, contact Julie Dugmore at j.dugmore@rcvs.org.uk or **020 7202 0775**.

We are also running two more of our examiner training courses, which prepare experienced assessors and internal verifiers to use the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) system.

The induction days for the courses are 12 June and 3 November, at the RCVS in London. Contact Julie for more information.

Europe calling!

Plans for European practical exams

Following the successful ACOVENE accreditation project, the RCVS has expressed an interest in assisting with a further Leonardo-funded project in Europe. The success of our examiner training programme and OSCE examination system has been noticed across the water and we are jointly bidding for funding to develop a system of practical examination for use in Europe. This will involve adapting our OSCE tests, examiner training and marking procedures for use in European schools of veterinary nursing, taking into account the agreed European practical competencies. These competencies are very similar to our own Occupational Standards, so this should be relatively straightforward.

"It is very early days yet, but we are hoping our bid will be successful," says Libby Earle, Head of the Veterinary Nursing Department. "Not only would we be key partners in helping to raise standards of practical assessment in Europe but we would also be developing and improving our own OSCE tests and systems in the process."



Watching us, watching you

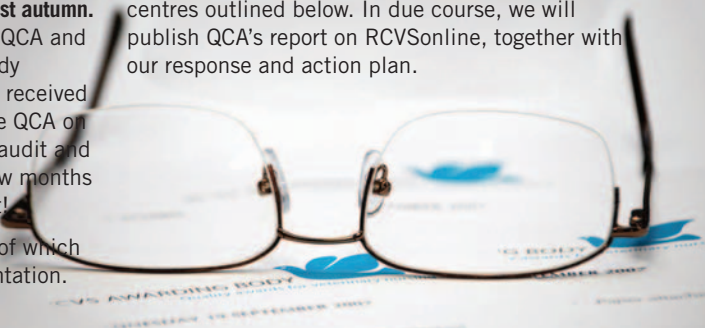
QCA audit progress

You may recall that that we were audited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority last autumn.

We have now received a draft report from QCA and are working on our response, having already addressed some of the conditions set. We received our first unconfirmed draft report from the QCA on 14 January, some three months after the audit and we do not expect the final version for a few months yet - this makes us feel relatively efficient!

We have several more things to do, some of which will lead to some changes in our documentation.

For example, the memorandum of agreement with centres outlined below. In due course, we will publish QCA's report on RCVSONline, together with our response and action plan.



New for centres

New reports, fees and certificates for centres

Annual reporting

We are introducing an annual self-assessment reporting cycle for all centres. Previously, this has applied only to centres delivering VRQ and HE awards. However, it is important that we receive a formal annual update from all centres about the delivery of RCVS awards.

The report follows the pattern of that for VRQ providers and includes student recruitment and attrition, changes to award delivery, centre governance, accommodation and staffing. It also requires an update on progress with any non-compliances noted by the previous year's EV monitoring activities. In short, it provides us with an annual synopsis of the centre's activity and resources.

The annual self-assessment report should be submitted by 1 August. We appreciate that centres will not be able to provide complete information about candidate award outcomes for the current academic year. The last year for which complete candidate information is expected will be 2006-7.

A revised agreement

One of the observations made by our QCA auditors concerned our Memorandum of Agreement with centres. We, and our centres, are obliged to permit reasonable access by the regulatory authorities (QCA in England and the equivalents in Northern Ireland and Wales) to our premises and records. Our current Memorandum is not clear on this point and we have been asked to revise it. We shall be

sending out the revised version for signature by Heads of Centre shortly.

When we say 'Centre,' this is taken to include its affiliated training practices, so please check that you have a current Memorandum of Agreement with all TPs which allows for reasonable access to premises and records by the RCVS and QCA.

Annual centre fee

An annual centre fee of £500, regardless of the number of candidates a centre has, will be payable to the RCVS from 2008. The fee, which will be due by 1 August 2008, is to ensure that the basic costs of quality assurance (two EV visits per year) are always covered. This is not always the case and we cannot continue to subsidise smaller centres with low candidate numbers via our candidate registration income from larger institutions.

Annual certificates

From this year, we will be issuing annual centre approval certificates, on receipt of the self-assessment report and centre fee. However, the new certificates will not mean more frequent site re-approval visits. We will continue to conduct full re-approval visits every five years, unless there is a significant change to a centre's governance, premises or programme delivery. The new annual certificates will list the RCVS awards a centre is approved to deliver (NVQs and/or VRQs) in accordance with the appropriate regulator's requirements.

Meet the Awarding Body team



Alex Gould

What's your role?
VN Centres Officer

What's your background?
After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree, I worked in sales and marketing. Since I moved to the UK, I have been working in public sector administration and joined the RCVS team in 2007.

What do you do?

I help plan and co-ordinate VNAC, Course Provider and Training Practice approval and ongoing monitoring visits for training providers in co-ordination with the external verifiers and centres. I maintain VNAC, Course Provider and Training Practice records on our database and the visit-monitoring database.

I also process new TP applications and provide administrative support for the Awarding Body Quality Assurance Manager and EVs. Plus it's my responsibility to maintain the Veterinary Nursing pages of the RCVS website.

I organise the annual Heads of Centres meeting and the RCVS IV CPD events, which run throughout the year, keeping records up to date and monitoring attendance. Along with the rest of the Awarding Body staff team, I take many phone enquiries from members of the public and from centres on a range of VN issues.

What's been your biggest challenge?

So far, it's been learning all the VN jargon and abbreviations.

Surprise us....

I am not from Australia, I'm from New Zealand!

Home and away

Advice about off-shore TPs and ex-students from Ireland

One of the observations of our recent QCA audit concerned our centres that have off-shore training practices. A few lucky VNs manage to train in places such as the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, but such locations raise a few eyebrows with the Regulator, as do English training practices that are linked to a Scottish centre and vice versa.

In order to stay in line with the regulations, we shall be asking centres that have such situations to place the relevant TPs under a different centre number so that cross-border and off-shore delivery can be clearly identified. This should be a centre record-keeping alteration and will not have any effect on the training practices. If your centre has such affiliated practices, please contact Alex Gould on **020 7202 0712**, or your EV, for advice.

Trainees in Ireland

Some centres or TPs may find themselves approached by ex-trainees from the Republic of Ireland seeking to complete their training. We have already received

several enquiries, precipitated by the Irish 2005 Veterinary Act and the new statutory regulation of VNs in Ireland. From July 2008, it will be illegal in the Republic of Ireland for an unqualified nurse to undertake a fairly wide range of veterinary work. Such nurses have a limited time in which to join the provisional Register in Ireland and subsequently achieve an acceptable qualification.

The RCVS ceased to offer training in the Republic of Ireland in 2002 as we do not approve NVQ centres outside the UK. All of the students previously enrolled with us have now "lapsed". Should any of them come to you for advice, please contact your EV or the Veterinary Nursing Department. It may be possible for some of them to complete training relatively easily; in other cases (especially those out of RCVS training for five years or more) it may be more difficult. In all cases such students would need to undertake a period of secondment in a UK training practice in order to complete their practical assessment.

Greater compliance required

TPs and the Practice Standards Scheme

In 2005, a number of training practices joined the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme under special arrangements that took into account their TP status.

During the past few months these practices have been undergoing their first PSS inspections and we are delighted to say that most of them demonstrated very good standards of compliance with the Scheme. Unfortunately, not everyone has come up to scratch and the inspectors have been providing advice to some practices. In most cases, the problems will be easily resolved, but in others there are more serious shortcomings that place in question the TP's ability to train and support student veterinary nurses.

The most usual problems have been with basic health and safety compliance. Out-of-date procedures, lack of key equipment service-records (such as anaesthetic machines and autoclaves) and Ionising Radiation Regulations (IRR) irregularities have all featured in a number of reports.

Absent or dirty surgical preparation areas, poor or illegal storage of medicinal products and seriously deficient hospitalisation facilities have also been noted. We are very concerned that such premises have been approved for VN training as students in these practices may have real difficulty learning to work to an acceptable standard.

The Practice Standards Scheme Review Group and RCVS Awarding Body have established good channels of communication and can exchange relevant information where a practice is accredited under PSS and is a TP. Generally, this does not happen unless a practice is seen to have numerous and/or serious deficiencies with a potential to affect VN training. We may then discuss relevant problems with the practice's approved centre so that these can be monitored, and appropriate action taken in relation to the experience being offered to student veterinary nurses.

Forms of simplification

New TP approval forms on the way

The improved interface that we are developing between the Awarding Body and the Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) means that we have been reviewing the approval criteria and application forms for training practices.

There are two main reasons for this: the first is to keep the criteria current and relevant and the application form easy to use. For this reason we have now included a practice dispensary as one of the facilities necessary to support training. We have also rationalised the application, placing all requirements relating to facilities and premises in a discrete section, thus making it easier for PSS Tier 2 or 3 practices to complete. We hope that the new forms, due out in April, will be a great deal easier to follow and complete.

One of the new features will be an expectation that all TPs must comply with the minimum legal and professional requirements for the operation of a veterinary business. These minimum requirements are set out in Tier 1 of the PSS. Whilst TPs do not have to be inspected or belong to the Scheme, they must be able to provide a safe and suitable working

environment for VN trainees. An undertaking to comply with the Tier 1 standards is accordingly included in the new TP approval form. The requirement for a TP to comply with legal requirements isn't new, but the inclusion of this in the approval criteria will serve as a useful reminder. We shall not expect centres to audit compliance in detail. However, they will be expected to address with the practice any obvious deficiency that impacts on student VNs or their training.



Read-e, stead-e, go!

E-assessments on course for summer

While you're reading *VN Standard* some of your lucky colleagues (or maybe even you) will be about to sit the pilot test for the new computer-based MCQ exams. Our centres have the opportunity to send one delegate through the new system, from exam application to receiving a result.

“Booking online will be quick and free – and is likely to be the best option for most candidates.”

The application process remains very similar – candidates still have to complete an application form, pay a fee to the RCVS and submit the application via their centre (college). The college then sends a collated file of applications, plus the fees, to the RCVS by the published closing date. From then on, everything is very different. Once all the applications are in, we will send an electronic file of eligible candidates to e-assessment providers Pearson VUE, who will send an authorisation email to each candidate telling them how to book an

exam appointment (either online or by telephone) at one of the many Pearson VUE test centres. We assume that most candidates will want to sit both papers together and get the exam over and done with quickly. However, they can book two separate appointments (one for each paper) if they wish. Normally this service is a little more expensive but we have decided not to charge extra for this. If we find that a large number of candidates elect to sit papers at separate appointments, we may need to adjust the entry fees next year.

Booking online will be quick and free – and is likely to be the best option for most candidates. Candidates can visit the booking site at www.pearsonvue.com/rcvs already and find the nearest centre to their homes, although they will not be able to book an appointment until they receive their authorisation emails. Booking by telephone is also available, however, calls will cost 5p per minute.

More information about the new system, including a guided tour of a Pearson VUE exam centre and a practice exam paper (which you can complete on your computer as in the real exam) will be on RCVSONline in early April.



Apply in time!

If you are an assessor or a student veterinary nurse, you need to note an important change in exam application procedures. Applications (both written and practical exams) are submitted via candidates' approved centres. The separation of written and practical exam applications means that level 3 candidates can pace themselves better, sitting each exam when ready. However, this does mean taking note of the different examination closing dates and getting the relevant applications to the correct centre in time!

Applications for VRQ written exams (both level 2 and level 3) are made via a candidate's course provider (college) whilst application for the NVQ level 3 practical exam is made through the candidate's NVQ centre (VNAC). It is important to get this right and to make the applications in plenty of time. The applications must reach the RCVS by the relevant closing date, so allow plenty of time and please check with your centre regarding their procedures. Applications sent to the wrong centre or directly to the RCVS will be returned to the candidate.

How will we know it's you? Important information for exam candidates about ID.

The staff at the Pearson VUE test centres will need to ensure that students attending exams are *bona fide* candidates. It is therefore essential that candidates take with them two documents:

- A copy of their authorisation email from Pearson VUE
- Official photo identification in the form of either a valid passport or photo driving licence

No other form of ID (such as student cards, 'Over 18' cards or travel cards) will be acceptable. We anticipate that the majority of student VNs will have either a driving licence (full or provisional) or a passport, as official photo ID is now so often required. For those who don't, the most expedient option will be to obtain a provisional driving licence. This takes around four weeks and so it is important for candidates planning to sit the exams this summer to check that they have the required documents and apply for these if not. Candidates who attend an exam without acceptable identification will not be admitted and will forfeit their examination attempt.

Practical exams – a tight squeeze in September?

Portfolio-completion rules have changed application patterns

As we go to press the first 'weekend' practical exams will be taking place at Myerscough College. We were a little disappointed with only 60 applications for the March examination; we had expected more as there were 150 potential re-sit candidates from the 2006 NVQ awards alone. This may mean quite a lot of candidates have been sitting practical exams with portfolios far from completed in the past (the requirement changed last year to 100% portfolio completion before taking the exam). We look forward to their applications for the June session!

Planning for the new examination system is quite difficult as we do not know when candidates will present themselves. The March examination has already surprised us and, although we always anticipated a large number of candidates in

September, we now think the numbers aiming for this examination may be even larger. This may present a problem as we cannot service an unlimited number of exam centres (we have a finite number of examiners) and do not want to be in the position of having to defer excess candidates until December.

We shall shortly be asking centres to send us their predictions for practical exam entrants to assist with planning. If you have level 3 candidates, or you are a level 3 student, remember that we now deliver four practical exams per year (March, June, September and December). The September exam is likely to be very busy and may even be over-subscribed so please explore the possibility of another slot if you can.

Come and see us at BSAVA!

Join us on stand 918 at BSAVA, where we will be pleased to talk to you about any of the Awarding Body's many initiatives and innovations this year. What have we been up to? Here are some reminders:



- E-testing for the written exams
- Weekend practical exams
- CPD programmes for assessors and examiners
- Return to Practice programme development

Please bring your questions on any issue – we'll be there to help (and there are always chocolates on the stand!).

Survey results

Be first to hear the results of the Survey of the VN Profession. On Friday 4 April, we will be hosting a special session to reveal the headline results of our recent VN survey. We asked VNs about issues such as their training experiences and how long they remained in their TP post-qualification, so the results should prove interesting. Come along to Hall 6 of the ICC at 11.10am.

Look out for the RCVS flyer in your delegate pack (see above) – hand it in to the stand (918) or at our Survey session and you could win a £50 high street gift voucher.

Certificates – solution in sight

For all the centres and candidates who have been experiencing delays in the award certification process, we offer our ongoing apologies and some good news.

We have been having serious problems for over six months now with the generation of award certificates. This is normally an automated process that draws on “tables” of information held on our central database. Since transfer of the data to an intranet-based system last year we have had serious problems in extracting the required information and consequently the majority of certifications have required manual intervention. This has caused serious delays from which, regrettably, some of you have suffered.

However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. We have now cleared most of the backlog and our IT consultants are testing a re-build of the system which (fingers very tightly crossed) should not only solve the problem but improve on the system.

In the meantime, if a candidate is required to notify a third party, such as an employer, about their eligibility to receive a certificate, they should contact us for advice.

RCVS List and Register 2008

This year the *VN List* will incorporate the new Register of Veterinary Nurses. The 2008 edition, which will be available during April, will be broken into four sections: the Register for small animal and equine VNs and the non-regulated List for small animal and equine VNs.

The publication will be mailed to all listed and registered veterinary nurses and VNACs. Anyone else wishing to receive a copy should contact us on the details below.

CONTACTING US | T: 020 7202 0788 | F: 020 7222 2004 | E: vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk

Who does what...

Libby Earle

Head of Veterinary Nursing

Annette Amato

*Deputy Head of Department,
Awarding Body Management
Board Secretary*

Julie Dugmore

Quality assurance and EV liaison

Vicky Hedges

*Examinations and higher
education quality assurance*

Alex Gould

Centre approvals and monitoring

Christine James

Student enrolments, careers advice

Jenny Orme

*Award certificates, registration for
newly qualified nurses*

Ben Myring

Examinations



PEFC/16-33-240

Printed by an ISO 14001-accredited printer using 100% vegetable-based inks on a totally chlorine-free PEFC-accredited stock
www.sterlingsolutions.co.uk

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons,
Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road,
London SW1P 2AF | www.rcvs.org.uk



RCVS
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons