



## All washed up?

*Hand hygiene will soon be incorporated into the OSCE tasks. Do your students know the correct method? Many don't...*



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**In this issue:** PEPAS project update, change to qualifications framework, deadline reminder, e-portfolio, meet the team, feedback on theory and practical exams, using witnesses, come and see us soon, vote!

# Training the trainers

## PEPAS project bears fruit

**I**n the December issue, we announced the launch of a project that aims to develop a Pan-European Practical Assessment System (PEPAS) for veterinary nurses. The project, for which our VN team secured Leonardo da Vinci funding, involves eight countries and will produce standards for Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) across Europe.

The exams will be based upon the UK model and two of our team – Julie Dugmore, Awarding Body Quality Assurance Manager, and Vicky Hedges, VN Exam and Higher Education Quality Manager – recently commenced a series of ‘train the trainer’ sessions. The first round was at Hansenberg School in Kolding, Denmark, where Julie and Vicky spent four days training teaching staff from Italy, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

*“The students were great and really enjoyed the opportunity to complete practical tasks.”*

Part of the training concentrated on writing new exam tasks, of which four are now completed and a further five are to be researched, written and trialled. “One of our objectives was to develop new tasks that could be added to the UK bank,” explains Julie. “We videoed the four new tasks being carried out and it is hoped that we will be able to trial them during our next UK examiner training sessions and at the next PEPAS training, scheduled for Dublin in April.



“All in all the first round of training went really well,” she adds. “We discussed the RCVS OSCE system and how it can be adapted for, and implemented in, a European context, trying to take into account the many varied differences of each country involved. Feedback has been very positive from the delegates who took part. The students were great and really enjoyed the opportunity to complete practical tasks, some even requested to do more!”

A further training session will take place in Slovenia later in the year.

# Ringling the changes

## New framework for awards

**O**ur Awarding Body will be working with the Sector Skills Council Lantra in the spring to transfer the VN awards into the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) that is being rolled out by Government. We don't envisage any changes to the content but the new units will follow the QCF format and will, for the first time, include credits in the same way that university modules do. You can read more about the new framework at [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk).

This work will be followed later in the year by Lantra's review of the National Occupational Standards for veterinary nurses. These are reviewed every three years to ensure they remain fit for purpose. The re-accreditation of the RCVS VN awards will follow on in 2010. Lantra is already collecting the details of those who wish to get involved in the review. If you would like to have your say, please send your details to Lantra Connect on **0845 707 8007** or [connect@lantra.co.uk](mailto:connect@lantra.co.uk).

# Missing the boat...

## Don't forget the deadlines

**C**entres missing the boat on registration deadlines means students miss the exams. Sadly, it's that simple.

Unfortunately, we will again be unable to accept a number of candidates for the summer MCQ examinations because centres are failing to administer effectively. The NVQ and VRQ regulations require student veterinary nurses to be registered for these awards for at least four calendar months before they can enter an examination. This means that Level 2 candidates must be enrolled with the RCVS, and registered by their college for their Certificate in Veterinary Nursing Theory VRQ award, at least four months before the relevant exam closing date. Level 3 candidates must have achieved their Level 2 NVQ and VRQ certificates, and be registered by their college for their Level 3 VRQ award.

In January, we received a significant number of late or invalid applications to register candidates. Some centres appeared to have forgotten to register candidates and others have attempted to register candidates without the requisite entry qualifications, mainly absent Level 2 NVQ certificates.

"We are extremely disappointed and concerned to see this," says Libby Earle, Head of Veterinary Nursing. "Centres are aware of the award regulations and receive timely reminders from us to register their candidates for the relevant exam cycle.

"Missing an exam cycle is very significant for candidates, especially those at Level 3 who may suffer a delay to their qualification as a VN as a consequence. It is also a serious matter in terms of

centre quality and this is being addressed with the centres concerned."

Missing deadlines is a problem that has been highlighted in the past (*VN News* issues 22 and 23). All centres are strongly advised to review their administrative procedures to ensure:

- Award registration and examination entry spreadsheets sent to us are complete and properly checked - we cannot accept late applications and come under considerable pressure to do so when centres make errors;
- Level 2 award certificates have been applied for in good time\* and, if they fail to arrive from the RCVS within four weeks of application, a system is in place at the centre to follow this up;
- Enrolment applications have been made in good time<sup>†</sup>; and,
- Centre systems work whether or not key staff are off sick or on holiday.

*\*It takes up to four weeks to process a certificate claim or enrolment. Whilst we may be able to process more quickly, we cannot guarantee this and so advise that claims and applications should reach us at least a month before the date needed. We cannot backdate.*



# Copy cats rumbled

## Anti-plagiarism software is on the case

**M**aking sure source material is properly cited and referenced is extremely important. In some cases, poor referencing is due to a lack of proper guidance and we tried to address this in the last issue of *VN Standard*.

Sadly, sometimes there is wilful misappropriation of another's work. Although this happens rarely, it's something on which we need to take a tough line. To help, we have invested in software that can detect plagiarism in written examination submissions.

The program checks written work against a huge bank of online sources, including textbooks and academic journals. We intend to run a random 10% of written submissions through the system to check that non-original material is properly referenced. Candidates found not to have properly attributed the work of others will, at the very least, be required to resubmit their assessment. In serious instances, their award registration may be terminated.

# Paper-free portfolio saves trees

## e-portfolio in the pipeline

**H**ow exciting! A portfolio without any paper. Yes, you read that right and, of course, we mean an e-portfolio. Over the past year we have been investigating the possibilities of online portfolios and assessment. Several software companies now offer reliable, user-friendly and secure systems for building, assessing and quality-assuring NVQ portfolios and we wanted to see how this would work for veterinary nursing. In theory, it would be a great step forwards – no more lost portfolios, no postage, fewer IV miles and so on.

Two colleges have worked with different software companies. Disappointingly, one of these trials has not included VN students and assessors. However, we have been very impressed with the ongoing trial with this year's Level 3 candidates at Plumpton College. Ten candidates and their TPs were given the opportunity to undertake their Level 3 assessment using the Skillwise online portfolio. Seven candidates and assessors signed up to the trial and all are very enthusiastic about the experience, as are their assessors.

***“We have been very impressed with the ongoing trial with this year's Level 3 candidates.”***

So, what are the benefits? First and foremost, the candidate does not lose possession of the portfolio at any time for either assessment or internal verification. Assessors and internal verifiers can log into any of their portfolios at any time using a secure log-in. This factor alone has saved a huge amount of time and effort usually spent transporting and storing portfolios, and it means the candidate can keep on collecting evidence.

Communication is far quicker, as is the recording of evidence. So much so that assessors with several candidates need to time-manage carefully, otherwise their email in-box fills up with notifications to look at evidence. This, in turn, is because an e-portfolio is

extremely good at motivating candidates. Their progress is marked by colour-coding and everyone can tell at a glance how much work has been completed, how much is in progress and how much has yet to be started. Not only this, the software projects a completion date for the award and compares this with the original assessment plan and goal completion date. Slow candidates very quickly show up! Assessors can compare this information for all their candidates, and IVs have an even wider overall view.

### Evidence

Another major benefit is the ability to use a very wide range of evidence. Whilst it is easy to add written evidence (files can be attached or comments typed in directly), why do this when you can attach photographs, a video clip or an audio file? No additional equipment is needed in most cases, as students and assessors nearly all have the wherewithal in their pocket – a mobile phone.

There are, of course, some downsides. Not all practices are happy to allow staff to use the internet, which is a crucial resource for this system, and not all have a reasonably fast connection. There is also a cost to be borne, at present around £100 per candidate (£50 per NVQ). Although these cannot be discounted, the Plumpton experience indicates the savings in terms of staff time and, in the case of IVs, travel, more than offset the extra cost.

### Next steps

Where do we go from here? We are working with Skillwise to make the e-portfolio available as an option for more centres and candidates from the autumn. However, the traditional Word-based portfolio will remain in place – the online option will be just that and in no way a replacement. We shall be holding an information seminar for Heads of Centre at RCVS on 6 May. If you are interested, please encourage your centre to attend: we will keep you posted as the system develops.

# Meet the Awarding Body team



**Annette Amato**  
Deputy Head of the  
Veterinary Nursing  
Department,  
Awarding Body Board  
Secretary

## What's your background?

After graduating with a BSc in Zoology from the University of London, I did a postgraduate

diploma covering management and administration and then started working at the RCVS as the Secretary to the Animal Nursing Auxiliaries Committee.

This post involved all the administration of the VN training scheme, including enrolments, registrations and examinations. After a few years, I moved on to other roles within the RCVS and followed by a few years' maternity break, returned to the RCVS, again to the Veterinary Nursing section, in 1991.

## What do you do?

I am the Committee Secretary to the Veterinary Nurses Council and the Awarding Body Board, and to their various Subcommittees. I am also involved in the administration of the examinations and provide general support to other colleagues in the department.

## What's been your biggest challenge?

In recent years, the changes in the examinations, particularly the maintenance and changes to the examination question bank, have been a challenge. Also, in the days when the practical examinations took place over a whole week, finding sufficient examiners was a problem: it turned my hair quite white!

## Surprise us....

I lived above a veterinary surgery until I was seven – my father is a vet.

## Elective procedure

### Don't forget to cast your vote

**It's election time again – your opportunity to choose two of the veterinary nurses who sit on VN Council. If you have an interest in the future of veterinary nurse training and regulation, it's your chance to have a say in who makes the decisions.**

This year one of the two retiring VNs, current Chairman Andrea Jeffery, is standing for re-election, plus there are three new faces to choose from: Louise Glysen, Caroline Williams and Cheryl Ives.

Ballot papers have been sent to VNs eligible to vote. If you are a registered or listed VN and have not received your papers, contact us for a duplicate: **020 7202 0713** or [a.amato@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:a.amato@rcvs.org.uk).

Candidate biographies and manifestos have also been posted and are available online at [www.rcvs.org.uk/vncouncil09](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/vncouncil09). Plus, if you want to

probe the candidates more deeply on topics that matter to you, we have set up a special election area on [www.vetnurse.co.uk](http://www.vetnurse.co.uk) where you can grill them directly (good luck ladies...!).

You can vote by phone, post or online – so there's no excuse not to place your vote, by 5pm on 1 May 2009.



## Increase in student VNs

Contrary to popular belief in practice, enrolment figures for student VNs are on the increase. Enrolments rose by nearly nine per cent last year, at 1,131, compared with 1,039 in 2007. There has also been a slight increase in signed-up Training Practices, from 1,536 in 2007, to 1,547 in 2008.

# Theoretically speaking

## Developments in the theory exams

**B**y the time you read this, the electronic version of the RCVS Veterinary Nursing VRQ (theory) examinations will have run three times. The majority of students are finding the new system easy to work with and are very positive about it. However, we still receive a small number of calls from students with problems. These are largely down to not reading the guidance notes that accompany the exam application form (students try to book an appointment before the booking window opens) or not providing a valid email address. If you have students about to sit the exam, please remind them to provide the right email address and to hang on to their exam guidance notes for reference.

***“Knowledge of the legal system and regulation of veterinary nurses is poor.”***

At the beginning of 2009, we installed a new examination database. The questions haven't changed, just the way that they are stored. The old system had become unwieldy and cumbersome with the increased number of examination papers that now need to be set. The new system allows us to develop the examination papers and view them in exactly the same format that will be presented on the Pearson VUE centre computers. It also means we can make far greater use of images and photographs than we could with the old system. Ultimately, we will be able to set case-based questions with each scenario being linked to four or five MCQs. This will allow us to examine applied knowledge of nursing more effectively than is possible with simple MCQs. We will, of course, publish examples of this type of question before they come into use, so watch this space!

### How did they do?

While most students and lecturers are congratulating themselves on good examination results in 2008, it should be noted that the pass-mark is usually in the region of 65%. Whilst many candidates score over 80% (we have even seen 100%), many more are unable to answer a third of the questions in each paper.

The e-exam system means we can evaluate candidate performance across syllabus areas more readily

than before. Here is what we found from the two exam sessions held in 2008.

Knowledge of the legal system and regulation of veterinary nurses (VNT1.6) is poor; fewer than 50% of candidates were able to answer questions on this subject.

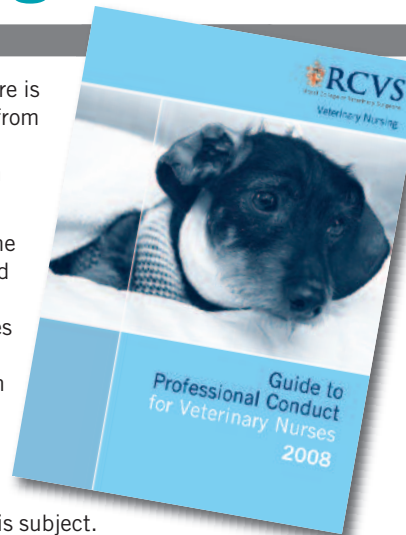
Over half of these were unaware of the purpose of the *Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses* and even fewer (38%) demonstrated knowledge of the Animal Welfare Act. Possibly students may feel these areas are less relevant than clinical nursing, but they are soon to enter the Register as accountable professionals and need to be prepared for this.

### Ethical issues

Similarly, students should give more consideration to ethical issues (VNT1.7). All questions asked in this area were poorly answered; fewer than half gave correct responses. When questioned on Health and Safety (VNT2), 60% were unaware of the contents of a health and safety policy. The same amount were unable to recognise a warning symbol that is displayed on many substances within practice.

Knowledge of anatomy and physiology (VNT3) has improved since the content of the syllabus was condensed to the essentials. Areas where understanding could be improved include the anatomical boundaries of the body cavities; 47% were unaware of the contents of the peritoneal cavity. Another weak area is in relation to the glands associated with skin and hair. A majority believe that sweat glands and sebaceous glands are the same thing.

Appropriate nutrition (VNT4) is an essential consideration when planning and undertaking nursing care. It is therefore surprising that knowledge in this area is so weak. Candidates were



# Mythic proportions

## We debunk some exam myths

unaware of the nutrients contained in basic ingredients. They also demonstrate a lack of awareness of feeding regimes used in patients with special considerations. The most worrying factor is the lack of knowledge of the types of food to be fed to animals during illness. This may reflect the widespread use of fixed-formula commercial diets. It is clear that nurses do not understand the components of these diets or why they are using them in relation to the patient's physiological needs. For example, a majority of candidates felt that a patient with chronic renal failure should be fed a diet high in protein or one reduced in calcium. Others felt that an increase in sodium would be of benefit or that carbohydrates should be restricted. Only 40% gave the correct answer.

Further feedback, including that for Level 3, will be given in the next edition.

## VETERINARY NURSING VRQ (THEORY) EXAMINATION RESULTS 2008

	July	November
	Pass rate (%)	
<b>Level 2 Small Animal</b>		
All candidates	88	87
First-attempt candidates	91	92
Subsequent-attempt candidates	68	69
<b>Level 2 Equine</b>		
All candidates (all first-attempt)	83	33
<b>Level 3 Small Animal</b>		
All candidates	93	90
First-attempt candidates	94	95
Subsequent-attempt candidates	84	68
<b>Level 3 Equine</b>		
All candidates (all first-attempt)	100	-

**W**e hear some interesting myths on the grapevine that arise from the OSCE examinations. Some of these are quite worrying because they have no basis either in real-life good practice or the exam-marking criteria. We thought we'd introduce a regular slot to dispel some of the more extreme ones – here's a couple of our favourites.

### Fluid therapy

**Myth:** if candidates allow any fluid to run out of the giving set when filling the fluid line, this should be collected in a sterile kidney bowl, measured, and injected back into the bag of fluid.

**Fact:** candidates are expected to do as they would in practice. Bubbles in the line can be avoided by closing the regulator gate before connecting the giving set to the fluid bag and then squeezing the drip chamber (1/3 to 1/2 full) before opening the gate and slowly filling the line. If a candidate forgets to do this and generates significant bubbles in the line, it will be necessary to run out a small amount of fluid until they are cleared. This wasted fluid is usually an insignificant amount. In fact, many students fail this task because they leave a significant air bubble at the end of the giving set whilst trying not to waste a drop.

### Laboratory

**Myth:** when handling laboratory samples, if any of the biological sample is spilt onto gloved hands the candidate will not achieve a mark for 'Gloves worn and no contamination of self'.

**Fact:** the gloves are worn to protect the candidate. If bare hands are contaminated then the student will not achieve the mark. If gloved hands are contaminated the marks will be awarded.

Watch this space for more examination myths – and please send us any you have come across!

# Have you washed your hands?

OSCE task reveals lack of knowledge of this basic routine

***“It is not revolutionary, it is not new, but the best way to prevent infection around patients is to wash your hands.” Fearon (2008)***

**T**he World Health Organisation (WHO, 2005) reports that, when performed correctly, hand hygiene is the single most important action that can be undertaken to prevent cross-contamination in the healthcare professions. However, whenever hand hygiene is mentioned in the veterinary press, it is usually linked to the prevention of the spread of Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). Little consideration is given to other reasons why hand hygiene is important.

The simple act of washing hands with soap or rubbing with an alcohol-based gel should be carried out frequently in veterinary practice. So frequently, in fact, you should be able to do it blind-fold.

According to WHO, hand hygiene should be performed:

- Before and after contact with each patient;
- After removing gloves;
- Before handling equipment;
- After contact with bodily fluids or excretions (urine faeces, blood, mucous etc);

- In-between handling infected and non-infected areas of the same patient; and,
- Before and after food preparation.

If we add up all these occasions, it is likely that our hands will have been cleaned numerous times each day. Yet when we trialled a new OSCE task involving hand hygiene, we were astonished to find that none of the volunteer students being examined was aware of the method recommended by WHO. In fact, it's very unlikely that the random methods demonstrated by most students would have cleaned their hands. After being shown the pictorial instructions for the WHO method, several students indicated that this method was indeed displayed above the sinks in their practice!

By the time students have completed work-based assessments, they are likely to have been assessed applying nursing care to a minimum of 20 patients. Hand hygiene features as a scope in the Lantra National Occupational Standards in Elements VetN6.1 and VetN7.2 and within the RCVS Veterinary Nursing Professional Syllabus in Level 2

## The recommended six-step approach to hand-washing

Before undertaking hand hygiene all rings, watches and bracelets should be removed. Artificial nails and nail varnish should also be avoided, because these harbour bacteria, and nails should be kept short.



### Step 1

Using either alcohol gel hand-rub or an antimicrobial soap with water, apply sufficient to cover the surfaces of the hands. Rub hands palm to palm for at least three strokes.



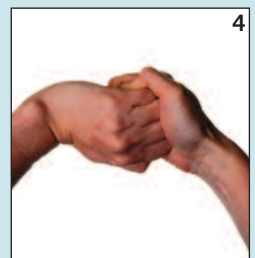
### Step 2

Rub right palm over the back of the left hand for at least three strokes. Repeat this, rubbing the left palm over the back of the right hand.



### Step 3

Interlace fingers and rub palms together for at least three strokes.



### Step 4

Rub backs of fingers with opposing palms for at least three strokes.



(VNT2). Are these students actually being observed or is it assumed that they know what they are doing? Do those who assess them know how to carry out this most fundamental aspect of infection control?

Hand hygiene will, in future, be incorporated into a number of OSCE tasks. In each case, the EN1500 standard will provide the basis of assessment. This method involves six steps that are carried out for a minimum of 30 seconds (see below). The tasks will either use alcohol rub or antimicrobial soap. The new OSCE tasks will start to be published online over the next few months in preparation for future examinations. Please ensure that your students learn how to clean their hands effectively, not just to pass their practical exam but, far more importantly, to provide one of the most basic essentials of infection control in a veterinary practice. We shouldn't need to say this, but we strongly recommended that students arrive at their examination without rings, bracelets, watches, artificial fingernails or nail varnish. This will give them a head start in any task involving hand hygiene.

#### References

- World Health Organisation (2005): *WHO guidelines on hand hygiene in health care (advanced draft): a summary*, WHO, Geneva.
- Fearon, R (2008): 'Providing splendid foundation to battle against MRSA Menace', *Veterinary Times*, 38 (46), pp 8-9.

**The choice of antimicrobial product is up to the individual but soap and water should always be used where hands are visibly soiled.**



#### Step 5

Rotationally rub the left thumb with the right palm for at least three strokes. Repeat this by rotationally rubbing the right thumb with the left palm.



#### Step 6

Rotationally rub the left palm with the fingers of the right hand for at least three strokes. Repeat this by rotationally rubbing the right palm with the fingers of the left hand. If using soap and water, rinse and dry. If using alcohol gel, air dry.

# Preparation time

## Some tips to beat exam nerves

**D**oes the very idea of practical exams give your students the collywobbles? Exam nerves can hit anyone at any time, and may have an effect on exam performance. When you are required to be calm, dextrous and focused, as in a practical exam, a case of the nerves can be very bad news.

So how to nip the jitters in the bud? Here are some tips for your students.

With all things in life, practice makes perfect, and the practical exam is no exception. The best way to be calm on the day is to be so well prepared that it feels like a good opportunity to show the examiner your skills, not a cross-examination.

***“Take some advice from good text books and your tutors, then practice as much as you can, but ideally not with another student VN.”***

The OSCE tasks are all downloadable from RCVSONline, so you should spend plenty of time familiarising yourself with them. Take some advice from good text books and your tutors, then practice as much as you can, but ideally not with another student VN, as you run the risk of reinforcing bad habits. Find a qualified veterinary nurse who has time to watch you and give constructive feedback. It's also worth videoing yourself on a camera or mobile phone so you can take some time to look critically at what you have done and work out how to improve.

Finally, make sure you leave yourself plenty of time to get to the examination venue and are clear on the location. There's no point undoing all of your good preparatory work by rushing red-faced and stressed into the exam, just because you didn't leave enough time for the journey.



# Isn't that the assessor's job?

## Getting the best out of witnesses

**“But it's the assessor's job!” – that's what some practice staff say about student VN portfolios. Actually that's not quite true. Assessors are uniquely qualified to make judgements about a candidate's competence and 'sign off' assessment. However, assessors can look at all kinds of evidence in order to reach a decision, not just narratives written by the candidate!**

This is where witnesses come in. Anyone can provide witness evidence about a candidate provided the responsible assessor is satisfied that they are credible, have expertise in the area being assessed and will communicate effectively about the candidate's performance they have seen. Encouraging members of the practice team to get involved as witnesses is therefore a sensible thing to do. As well as helping to engage the whole practice in training, it's cost-effective, allows a much wider evaluation of student VNs, confirms competence over time and in different situations and – very importantly - means that evidence collection can carry on when the assessor is on leave.

### Top tips

So, how do you make the best use of witnesses? Here are some pointers:

- Plan ahead. The candidate's assessment plan will highlight the evidence needed. Could a witness work with the candidate and provide some evidence? If so, who and when?
- Discuss what's needed with the witness and work out how the evidence will be recorded. Remember cameras, video clips (almost everyone has a camera phone now) and voice recorders as well as written statements: they can all go in a portfolio.
- Written confirmation in some form will be needed; either a statement in the witness's own words, recording what they have observed the candidate do, or a reflective narrative written by the candidate with witness feedback confirming what was observed. Either needs to be signed and dated by the witness.
- If a recorded witness statement has been provided, all that is needed is a very brief accompanying statement of authenticity signed by the witness.
- Explain the relevant area of the Occupational Standards the candidate is working on and give the

witness a copy for reference. It will help to ensure the relevant skills and knowledge are noted.

- Remember it is the assessor who decides the candidate's competence to achieve units and elements. A good, well-informed, witness can provide valuable evidence towards these decisions.
- Don't forget record-keeping. Record the witness's signature in the portfolio authentication sheet and remember to include a note of discussion between the assessor and witness about the candidate's performance and/or discussion with the candidate, and the witness statement itself, whether this is written or recorded.

### Start slowly

If your practice team abandons 'the portfolio' to assessors and hides in the X-ray room at the thought of NVQs, it's time to act! The way to start is gently, with an area in which someone is expert. For example, your practice receptionist may be the ideal person

to feed back on your candidate's communication with clients. He/she will be comfortable with this area of the Standards and you could record a statement, if this is easier than providing a written one. Most people are only too willing to share their expertise: as an assessor you need to make this work for you and your candidates!



# Essaying to write

## Tips for the communication case study

**G**ood communication skills are essential for veterinary nurses. Consequently, the need to learn about the dynamics of communication has been recognised in the *Professional Syllabus* for a number of years. Assessing this knowledge is hard to do within an MCQ exam, which is why a communication case study is included in Unit VNT1 of the Level 2 Certificate in Veterinary Nursing Theory. The broad aim of this assessment is to test students' ability to recognise and/or apply the theoretical dynamics of communication in practice. However, it is clear from some of the assignments we see that many students don't understand how to achieve this. We hope the following tips will guide students along the right lines: please pass them on!

### Understand the assignment brief

The brief is very important: read it several times to ensure you understand it. Look at what you are being asked to do, the important concepts, knowledge and skills you should include to satisfy the criteria. A lot of students (and tutors?) seem to concentrate on the grading criteria and not the learning outcomes.

Key words:

- Identify – to establish the identity of; to prove to be the same as something described or asserted
- Evaluate – make a judgement regarding the importance of something
- Describe – give an account

### Structure

It's important to have a clear, organised structure for your work:

- Introduction – introduces the issues and gives background information
- Body – remember, you are not just narrating a story, but evaluating the situation and presenting evidence (from your background reading) to support your point of view
- Conclusion – this is where you summarise the main findings of your experience/research

Often, you will have far too much material to include in the assignment and so you will need to 'prune'. Think about the following:

- Is all the source material you have collected relevant or can you discard some?
- Read your draft critically. Could some of it be

removed or condensed without detracting from the work as a whole?

Your assignment should demonstrate research into communication issues – looking at issues such as modes, models and their application in practical situations. There should be a good selection of quality sources that add strength to your comments/findings. It is not adequate to rely solely on your lecture notes or one textbook.

### Referencing

A recognised format for citation and referencing must be used. If you are in any doubt of the format to use, ask your course tutor (or see *VN Standard*, December 2008). Your college library will also be able to help and will almost certainly have a useful handout.

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism means copying someone else's work without proper acknowledgement, ie passing someone else's ideas off as your own. It is viewed very seriously and, if detected, may result in you failing an assessment (see page 3).

When you use material from books or articles to support your work, you must either quote it word for word (a referencing guide will show you how to do this) or paraphrase it. You must also include a citation and reference. If you feel tempted to 'jigsaw' together your assignment from articles you have collected, it probably means you have not done sufficient background work and have not yet a sufficient understanding of your subject to write confidently in your own words.



# Where to find us!

## Meet the team at one of our upcoming events

**D**o you have a question for us, or want to know more about RCVS activities? Over the next few months there are several opportunities to catch up with the Awarding Body team and members of the VN Department:

- 2-5 April, BSAVA Congress: visit us on stand 918 in the NEC, the team will be there to answer your questions.
- 9 June, Meet the RCVS Day: would you like to know more about what goes on behind the scenes at the College? Join one of our open days, we even pay for your travel expenses. Contact Fiona Harcourt on [f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk) or **020 7202 0773**.
- 18 June, Regional Question Time, Kingsley Village, Fraddon, Cornwall: meet the RCVS Officer team and members of VN Council at this lively evening question and answer session, includes buffet supper. Contact Fiona Harcourt, as above.



### Written examinations (e-assessment)

#### Summer 2009

Closing date for entries	8 May
Appointment booking window	8 June - 3 July
Exam week	6 - 18 July
Results published	27 August

#### Winter 2009

Closing date for entries	11 September
Appointment booking window	19 October - 13 November
Exam week	16 - 21 November
Results published	7 January 2010

### Practical examinations

#### Summer 2009

Closing date for entries	15 May
Exam weekend	19 - 21 June
Results published	28 July

#### Autumn 2009

Closing date for entries	14 August
Exam weekend	18 - 20 September
Results published	22 October

#### Winter 2009

Closing date for entries	6 November
Exam weekend	11 - 13 December
Results published	21 January 2010

**CONTACTING US | T: 0207 202 0788 | F: 0207 222 004 | E: [vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk](mailto: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*

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