



Green light for e-exams in driving test centres

“Major modernisation for written exams will bring greater flexibility and accessibility. Plus, more frequent practical exam opportunities mean students can enter when they are ready to be assessed.”

In this issue: What's the *VN Standard*? QCA audit, Accreditation of Prior Learning, new fees, admissions policies, meet the team, new exams explained, 2008 exam dates.

Raising the standard

What's the VN Standard all about?



Welcome to the first issue of *VN Standard*, the new publication from the RCVS Awarding Body for all those involved in veterinary nurse training.

This new publication comes out of a recent review of how the College communicates with veterinary nurses and those involved with training.

“All news relating to VN training will be in this new publication, the VN Standard.”

RCVS News now includes VN issues as well as those affecting veterinary surgeons; it addresses the professional veterinary team. This makes sense as the advent of the new VN Register means that issues such as continuing professional development, guidance and disciplinary matters are of interest to veterinary nurses and veterinary surgeons alike.

It also helps for both groups to understand what the others are up to!

Although *RCVS Veterinary Nursing News* is no more, in order to help differentiate the work of the Awarding Body from the regulatory activities of the VN Council, all news relating to VN training will be in this new publication, the *VN Standard*.

This first issue includes stories about major changes to both practical and written exams and guidance on topics such as centre admissions policies and maximising the potential of Accreditation of Prior Learning.

I hope you find it interesting – please let us have your feedback!

Neil Smith
Chairman of the RCVS Awarding Body

Under the microscope

We get audited too... QCA pays us a visit

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) team completed their audit of the Awarding Body in October, having visited the Veterinary Nursing Department and several of our centres; they also attended various of our key meetings.

Although we have yet to receive a draft report, the feedback so far has been very constructive and we are pleased to say that our “action points” are all relatively minor and easy to correct.

We, and our centres, were complimented on our openness and facilitation of the audit process. We will publish the main report (and our response to it) on RCVSonline when it has been received. In the meantime, thank you to the centres and training practices who took part in the audit for bearing with yet another visit.



APL for teacher

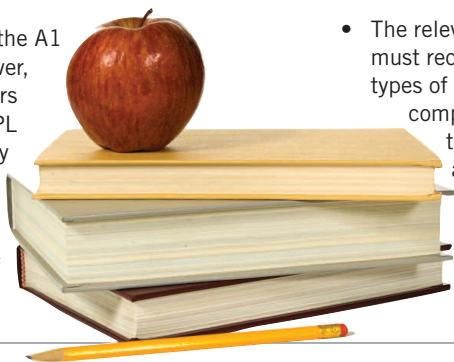
Pre-enrolment experience gets candidates off to flying start

“My student’s enrolment is held up and we can’t assess her!”: it’s a cry we often hear.

It’s correct that no assessment of candidates can take place until they have actually been registered for an NVQ award. However, that doesn’t mean that candidates cannot begin to collect evidence of their competence and prepare for assessment.

Many student veterinary nurses have significant experience of working in practice and may be in a position to present evidence of competence in areas such as reception work almost straight away.

Presenting evidence of competence from previous experience is called Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and every NVQ assessor is trained to evaluate this sort of evidence as part of the A1 qualification. However, very few VN assessors seem to consider APL evidence and so may be missing opportunities to get their candidates’ NVQ assessment off to a flying start.



The keys to APL assessment are:

- Evidence of competence is collected in exactly the same way as usual, ie observed work, witness testimony etc
- APL evidence must be clearly labelled as such (in the “type of evidence” box on the recording form)
- Signatures on APL evidence indicate that the evidence is valid and authentic but not that it suggests competence, ie it is not assessed at this point
- APL evidence is taken into account by the assessor, alongside more current evidence, once the candidate has registered for the relevant award
- The relevant unit assessment summary sheet(s) must record the use of APL (along with other types of evidence) in determining unit competence, ie APL is listed as one of the types of assessment evidence taken into account

APL can also be used to provide relevant evidence towards Level 3 assessment whilst a candidate is still awaiting Level 2 certification.

Who’s coming in?

A clear admissions policy is a requirement for all centres

The operation of a clear and fair admissions (access) policy is a requirement for all centres (VRQ and NVQ awards), but recent enquiries indicate that some centres may need to review and update theirs.

Whilst the RCVS Awarding Body sets criteria in terms of entry qualifications for the VN awards, these are not the only factors that need to be taken into consideration when admitting candidates.

Every centre must have an up-to-date admissions policy that is published to potential students. All Further Education colleges and universities will already have a general admissions policy, taking into account issues such as equality of opportunity and disability, interview policy etc.

However, this may need to be interpreted in the context of veterinary nursing. For example:

- Are potential VN students interviewed?
- Is there any specific guidance to potential candidates on disability in relation to working in a veterinary practice?
- Have affiliated training practices been involved in developing the centre’s admissions policy and are they all aware of its provisions?

It may be a little late for this academic year, but it’s certainly an area worth reviewing before the next round of admissions.

Fees: all change for 2008

New exams mean new cost structure

Next year will see some significant changes to the RCVS Awarding Body fee structure. The first of these is the levy of an annual flat-rate fee to all centres. This has been introduced to ensure that centre fees cover the basic costs of essential quality assurance, ie the costs of us making two visits to a centre each year.

In the case of larger centres, with more affiliated training practices and therefore more candidates, income from candidate enrolment fees will fund the additional EV site visits required. Unfortunately, enrolment income alone does not cover the costs of EV visits to smaller centres which generate a low number of enrolments each year.

Exam fees

The introduction of more frequent practical examinations and e-assessment (see page 6)

means that the exam fee structure will also change. Candidates will apply separately for written and practical exams and will pay two fees, which represent the proportionate costs of the respective examinations.

The slightly higher first-attempt fees for both Level 2 and for Level 3 practical exams include the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) award levy payable by the College. The higher exam fees overall reflect the costs of providing e-assessment.

“The overall benefits of the new e-assessment system, together with reduced associated travel costs and much greater convenience (both to candidates and employers), should offset these higher fees,” believes Head of Veterinary Nursing, Libby Earle.

Meet the Awarding Body team



Julie Dugmore

RVN D32/33/34/V2

What's your role?

Awarding Body Quality Assurance Manager

What's your background?

I started training in a small animal practice in the West Midlands and qualified in 1987. I was then Head

Nurse in a one-vet practice in Devon, before returning to the Midlands as Head Nurse of a four-branch practice and the lead assessor responsible for veterinary nurse training. I achieved D32/33 in 1999 and D34 in 2000.

From 2000 to 2002, I worked as an internal verifier and tutor with a Midlands-based training provider. My responsibilities included developing and implementing quality assurance systems for both dental and veterinary nursing programmes, conducting work-based learning visits and ensuring compliance with the NVQ Code of Practice. I joined the RCVS in December 2002 as an external verifier.

What do you do?

I manage a team of three external verifiers and provide support, guidance and quality assurance to approved centres affiliated to the RCVS Awarding Body. I review regulatory and statutory requirements relating to veterinary nurse training to ensure that the RCVS Awarding Body remains compliant and that the systems and procedures are effective and efficient.

Last year, I developed the examiner training certificate course, designed to prepare assessors and internal verifiers to assess clinical skills using the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) system.

What's been your biggest challenge?

Involvement with the development and implementation of a pan-European system of accreditation for veterinary nurse education – ACOVENE.

Surprise us...

Many, many years ago I used to do ballroom dancing and won many medals!

Candidate fees (£)			
Enrolment	184	Covers Level 2 and Level 3 awards	
Exam fee Level 2	165	Exam fee Level 3 written	85
Exam fee Level 2 re-sit	140	Exam fee Level 3 written re-sit	85
		Exam fee Level 3 practical	185
		Exam fee Level 3 practical re-sit	175
Exam late-entry fee	50	Applies to entries received up to 5 days late	
Unit certificate	38	Replacement certificate	35

Centre fees (£)			
Centre (VNAC or course) approval	1000	Payable for all approvals requiring a site visit	
Centre annual fee	500	Payable annually by all centres	
Course amendment	400	Payable for amendments to approved courses agreed by correspondence	
Additional visit/consultation	315	Payable for cancelled visits or additional consultation visits	



VETNNET at large

Delegates at the annual Veterinary European Transnational Network for Nursing Education and Training (VETNNET) conference in October enjoyed some time off in Geel, Belgium.

The two-day conference, which was hosted by the Katholieke Hogeschool, Kempen, comprised lectures and workshops. Attended by our Quality Assurance Manager, Julie Dugmore, the event provided a useful forum for veterinary nurse educators to discuss VN training issues.

Flexible, local, frequent: new exams coming soon

New format for written and practical exams in 2008

We are introducing changes to both the written and practical exams for 2008 which will make them more accessible to candidates and help practices with multiple students plan cover more easily.



Candidates travelling en masse to London is a thing of the past

Practicals

From next year the practical exams will run four times per year over long weekends. "We hope that the provision of more frequent opportunities to take this exam will encourage students to feel able to enter when they are ready to be assessed, rather than rushing to fit into one of two opportunities during the year," explains Libby Earle, Head of Veterinary Nursing.

The new system will also mean that students needing to re-take this assessment will be able to do so within a shorter time. Details of the practical exam dates and application windows are in the table on the back page.

Written exams

A more major modernisation will affect the written examinations. We have been working with Pearson VUE, an established company offering IT-based assessment, to transfer our paper-based multiple-

choice question (MCQ) exams to a computer-based system. Pearson VUE already successfully runs the UK driving test theory examination and RCVS Council has given us the green light to use the facilities for VNs from July 2008.

The new IT-based examinations will, as with the new practical exam system, offer a major improvement in access for students. Instead of having to attend one of five invigilated exam centres on a specified day, candidates will be able to book an individual examination appointment to attend a local Pearson VUE test centre.

There will be three examination "windows" every year, rather than the current two. These windows will be one week long in the spring and winter and two weeks in the summer. Candidates will be able to book an appointment at a time and exam centre of their choice, either online or via Pearson VUE's telephone call centre. The Pearson VUE centres are located throughout the UK; there are over one hundred and fifty centres from Lerwick to all points south, including the Channel Islands.

"Candidates will be able to book an appointment at a time and exam centre of their choice, either online or via Pearson VUE's telephone call centre."

Inevitably, examination fees will be more expensive to take account of developing the new system (the combination of Level 3 written and practical exams will be £270 instead of the old combined fee of £193). However, the benefits of flexibility, more frequent assessment opportunities and, for the vast majority of students, a major reduction in travelling time and expense, should outweigh this.

Now it's our turn to answer the questions....

How will students apply for written exams?

Initially, the application process will be similar to the current system. Candidates will fill in an application form, which will be authorised and submitted via their college. Because the system is IT-based, candidates will be asked to provide an email address via which they will receive confirmation of their entry and instructions about how to book their examination appointment. This should not present difficulties to the majority of candidates who can access email via their home, practice or college account. For the few who cannot do this, we will communicate by post.

How will students book an exam appointment?

Once students receive confirmation of their exam entry, they will be able to book an examination appointment either online or via the Pearson VUE phone service. We anticipate that most candidates will want to sit both papers in one three-hour appointment. However, two separate appointments for papers one and two can be arranged.

What are the exam centres like?

Anyone who has taken the driving theory test has been to a Pearson VUE centre! Lots of VN students will therefore be familiar with them. For those who haven't, the centres are equipped to a standard design. Each one has a comfortable reception area and secure lockers for personal belongings. The exam room has computer booths that are well-screened from neighbouring candidates and an independent invigilator oversees each computer terminal via CCTV. The exam papers themselves will be presented question by question on screen; all candidates will complete a short tutorial before they start the test to ensure that they are comfortable with the system. As soon as candidates finish the test they will be free to leave the centre. Confirmation of having taken the exam is provided before candidates leave the centre.

What about dyslexic candidates and others with special examination needs?

We will still cater for these candidates, making "reasonable adjustments" as we currently do. The test centres can be authorised to allow additional exam time and to assist candidates with physical disabilities. We will continue to offer specialist invigilation for candidates who need words or phrases read to them. However, this will be available on a specific date at specified centres because it will (as now) involve an RCVS-appointed invigilator being in attendance.

Will students get their examination results more quickly?

The reduction in paper processing will enable us to release results more quickly – approximately within one month of the examination window. Ultimately, we hope to be able to offer instantaneous results, once the systems have bedded in.

Do Level 3 students have to apply for written examinations and practicals together?

No, students should be encouraged to apply for examination only when they are ready to take the relevant assessment. In the case of the practical examination, students must have completed their NVQ portfolio to the satisfaction of their internal verifier by the time they sit the examination.

This will mean that every student who passes the practical exam will be in a position to achieve their NVQ Level 3 award straight away.

Will students still need to have completed 60% of the portfolio before entering written exams?

The current position does not change: colleges must be satisfied that their candidates are in the best position to succeed if they enter an examination. The written exams test applied veterinary nursing knowledge and candidates who have completed a substantial amount of work-based assessment, and can therefore apply their knowledge in practice, are more likely to be in a better position to perform well than those who have not. This is why 60% portfolio completion is currently suggested as a way of determining adequate progress/preparation. In future, colleges will simply have to certify that they consider their students sufficiently prepared to enter. This judgement should be based on tangible evidence, such as formative (internal) tests. Portfolio completion will remain useful evidence of suitable progress.

Key facts for 2008 exams

- Practicals four times per year over long weekends
- Written exams across three extended exam windows, in 150 computerised test centres
- Written exam results within a month
- Fees changing (see page 4)
- Portfolios 100% complete prior to practical exam entry
- Portfolios 60% complete prior to written exam entry (guideline)

Veterinary nursing exams 2008

Dates for your diary

Here are key dates for examinations and entry dates for 2008. We are starting new cycles for both the written and practical exams next year so our time-honoured closing dates for exams, which most tutors and assessors can remember from their own student days, no longer apply!

The most important things to note are:

- Candidates must apply for Level 3 written and practical exams separately
- Entries must be authorised by candidates' centres – course providers for VRQ (written) exams and

VNACs for NVQ level 3 (practical) exams

- The entry window for re-sit candidates is shorter; centres (VNACs and colleges) should ensure that any students needing to re-take an exam submit their entry forms as soon as possible after receiving a fail result (either written or practical exam). We send out re-entry forms with result letters to assist with this
- Entries must be received by the closing dates; we cannot process late entries regardless of the reason for late receipt.

Written examinations (e-assessment)			
Summer 2008		Winter 2008	
Closing date for entries	18 April	Closing date for entries	20 September
Appointment booking window	19 May - 4 July	Appointment booking window	20 October - 21 November
Examination window	W/c 7 and 14 July	Examination window	W/c 24 November
Results published	W/c 11 August	Results published	W/c 7 January

Practical examinations			
Spring 2008		Autumn 2008	
Closing date for entries	15 February	Closing date for entries	8 August
Examination	28 - 30 March	Examination	12 - 14 September
Results published	W/c 28 April	Results published	W/c 13 October
Summer 2008		Winter 2008	
Closing date for entries	16 May	Closing date for entries	31 October
Examination	20 - 22 June	Examination	5 - 7 December
Results published	W/c 21 July	Results published	W/c 19 January

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