



## Things not what they seem?

*We respond to a worrying increase in students forging signatures on their Records of Training.*



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**In this issue:** disciplinary decision, updated fees, join the Awarding Body, forgery changes, ACOVENE agreement, apprenticeship funding, new Diploma update, exam feedback, new exam investigation procedure, exam dates

# Disciplinary decision

Complaints and disciplinary system for RVNs from April 2011

**A complaints system will come into force for registered veterinary nurses (RVNs) on 1 April 2011, marking a further move towards recognised professional status.**

An RVN could be removed or suspended from the Register if found guilty of serious professional misconduct, fraudulent registration or criminal offences affecting his or her fitness to practise.

Following legal advice, Council opted not to remove such VNs from the statutory List, although any VNs removed from the Register will be clearly identified on the List. In addition, veterinary surgeons will be advised against delegating Schedule 3 tasks to them.

The College will continue to seek an amendment to the law to allow the removal of nurses found guilty of serious professional misconduct, or other charges, from the List.

"The Veterinary Nurses Council is committed to moving towards statutory regulation for veterinary

nurses," says VN Council Chairman Liz Branscombe. "This non-statutory commitment to a disciplinary system is our chance to show government and the public that we are ready and willing to be regulated, which should stand us in good stead for the future."

The RVN disciplinary system will mirror that for veterinary surgeons, with the same complaints-handling, investigation and decision-making processes and sanctions.

Registered veterinary nurses will receive more detailed information about the system over the coming months.



## Harper Adams grads latest for direct registration

More degrees leading directly to VN registration

**Harper Adams University College has become the latest HE institution whose veterinary nursing degrees are approved by the RCVS as sufficient for their graduates to register and work as veterinary nurses, with approval confirmed by the VN Council on 12 October.**

Students enrolled at Harper Adams since 2008 on either the Foundation Degree in Veterinary Nursing, or the BSc in Veterinary Nursing and Practice Management, will now be entitled to apply to join the VN Register without taking any further RCVS examinations, once they have received their graduation certificates.

This brings to five the number of HE establishments whose veterinary nursing degrees will permit graduates to apply directly to register without taking further exams, provided the RCVS approval was received prior to the conferment of their degree.

These institutions are: the University of Bristol, the University of Middlesex with the College of Animal Welfare, the University of Central Lancashire with Myerscough College, and Coventry University with Warwickshire College.

Students undertaking these RCVS-approved veterinary nursing degrees fulfil the RCVS requirements in respect of work experience and theoretical and practical assessment through their university qualification. A further nine institutions offering VN higher education qualifications are awaiting full approval.

"Veterinary nursing is a very demanding degree course and losing the additional assessment can only benefit the students' quality of experience," said Dr Erica Martin, Programme Manager at Harper Adams University College.

# Fees: new for 2011

## New fees listed

The table below outlines Awarding Body fees effective 1 January 2011.

Candidate enrolment fees		
Enrolment (full award)	199	For a maximum of six years
Enrolment (per single unit)	50	
Enrolment extension	66	For one year
Candidate examination fees		
<b>VRQ Level 2 2006 (100/6213/0)</b>		
Level 2 MCQ	161	Standard fee
Level 2 MCQ	151	Discounted fee - candidates sitting both papers at one session
<b>VRQ Level 3 2006 (100/6215/4)</b>		
Level 3 MCQ	104	Standard fee
Level 3 MCQ	94	Discounted fee - candidates sitting both papers at one session
<b>NVQ Level 3 2006 (100/6216/6)</b>		
Level 3 OSCE	194	Eight OSCE stations
<b>Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing 2010 (501/0487/1) Available from June 2011</b>		
MCQ	250	Sitting three papers in one window (two-week exam period)
MCQ	170	Sitting two papers in one window (two-week exam period)
MCQ	90	Sitting one paper in one window (two-week exam period)
Transitional pathway students MCQ	104	Paper 3 only
OSCE	200	12 OSCE stations
Unit certificate	43	
Exam enquiry fee (from Jan 2011)	20	
Centre fees		
Centre accreditation/re-accreditation	2,040	
Course approval (requiring a visit)	843	Approval up to five years
Course approval (no visit)	433	Approval up to five years
Annual fee	561	
Advisory consultancy per day or additional visits	347	

## VNs and the law

At the London Vet Show (22-23 October, Olympia), RCVS President Peter Jinman went back to basics on the law regarding veterinary nurses for an audience of over a hundred vets, VNs and practice managers. His presentation, which covers Schedule 3, appropriate delegation and the legal status of student veterinary nurses, is available at [www.rcvs.org.uk/lvs](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/lvs).

## VN fees due

Registered/listed VNs were sent their retention fee notices during October. The retention fee for 2010 is £61 and was due on 1 November 2010. Fees will be accepted up until 31 December 2010, after which point, names will be removed from the List/Register and it will be illegal to carry out Schedule 3 activities. Why not set up a direct debit to make sure you don't forget next year? Contact [finance@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:finance@rcvs.org.uk).

## Get ahead of the game in 2011

If you are training student veterinary nurses and need to keep yourself 'in the loop' with the latest news and updates, consider joining the RCVS Trust Library. It provides many of the journals you will need, and a range of online resources you will find you can't do without. The Library has a subsidised membership scheme for individual VNs and its new website, launching in 2011, will make remote access even easier. See [www.rcvslibrary.org.uk](http://www.rcvslibrary.org.uk) for details, or call 0207 202 0752.

## Stand for a seat

Nominations have now opened for candidates who wish to stand in the 2011 elections for RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council. Three seats are due to be filled, with posts being taken up on RCVS Day in July.

Council members will be expected to spend at least six to eight days a year attending Council meetings, working parties and subcommittees (a loss-of-earnings allowance is available).

Nominations must be made in writing on the prescribed form and received by the Registrar on or before 31 January 2011. For full details, see [www.rcvs.org.uk/vncouncil11](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/vncouncil11) or contact Mrs Annette Amato (020 7202 0713 or [a.amato@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:a.amato@rcvs.org.uk)).

# Big idea? Tell the Trust

Landmark programme to celebrate 50 years of VN profession

**R**ecently, a Harper Adams University College veterinary nursing student caught the imagination of the national press. Her dissertation on “the effects of music in a veterinary environment on the stress levels of feline patients” found that cats’ stress levels were definitively lowered by the effects of music playing in practices. This was music to the ears of national dailies looking for a lively story but, more pertinently, was a simple but very effective piece of work that could really help practices with their patients.

The RCVS Trust wants to encourage VNs to pursue their ideas for making changes or innovations that affect practice. In 2011, the 50th anniversary of the VN qualification, the Trust will launch a grants and support programme to encourage VNs to push the boundaries of their role, and to make a unique difference to animal care. It will achieve this by:

- Supporting VN practical education with equipment grants
- Inspiring VNs to lead changes and innovation in practice
- Empowering VNs to disseminate their knowledge and experience



The programme will comprise a mix of direct grants, pilot studies and an educational product for VNs in practice.

“We want your ideas!” says Trust Director Cherry Bushell.

“If we think your idea’s a good one, we will help you to develop it and get others involved. Look out for our programme announcement in early 2011 for more details.”

If you want to be added to the Trust’s alert list, or just have an idea you can’t wait to share, get in touch: [grants@rcvstrust.org.uk](mailto:grants@rcvstrust.org.uk).

## Ready to come on board?

Vacancies on Awarding Body Board

**A**re you interested in safeguarding standards for VN education and training? Do you have ideas for improving our qualifications or developing new ones? If so, you may be just the person we are looking for to join the RCVS Awarding Body Board, which currently has two vacancies for stakeholders in veterinary nurse education.

The Board oversees the operation of the RCVS Awarding Body and is responsible for ensuring that it functions in accordance with the national regulatory criteria.

The Board also sets the direction of the Awarding Body in terms of the qualifications it offers, and oversees the approval (or removal) of centres that can deliver RCVS awards. The Board

meets twice annually, however, members may also be asked to participate in working parties and other related activities. The time commitment is accordingly in the region of two to five days per year.

***“The way in which VNs are initially prepared for their role, and are supported in post-qualification development, is extremely important.”***

As veterinary nursing continues to develop as a profession, the way in which VNs are initially prepared for their role, and are supported in post-qualification development, is extremely important. Interested? If you are currently employed by an RCVS-approved centre (who will support your application) and would like to become involved, please contact Annette Amato [a.amato@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:a.amato@rcvs.org.uk) for an application form.



# Forgeries prompt rule change

## VN students who forge signatures face additional hurdle

**R**esponding to a worrying increase in the number of veterinary nurse students who are forging the signatures of practice principals on their Records of Training, VN Council has agreed that such students will have to provide professional references before being allowed to register.

Student VNs undertaking work-based training must complete the equivalent of 60 weeks in clinical practice. At least one forged record of such training is being picked up by the College each week.

We hold a specimen copy of every Head of Centre and training practice principal's signature and we always check Records of Training prior to registering a new VN. If there is any doubt as to validity, we check with employers and Heads of Centre personally.

In the past, if the signature wasn't genuine, we would ask for other evidence of the period of training and, if this was satisfactory, would

***"Student VNs undertaking work-based training must complete the equivalent of 60 weeks in clinical practice."***

register the nurse whilst giving a written warning regarding falsifying documents. VN Council has agreed that, from now on, such nurses will also be required to provide professional references (from their employer and centre) as to their integrity before their registration can be considered. A record of the matter will be kept on file and may be taken into consideration in relation to any future complaint regarding the nurse's conduct. The nurse's employer may also take disciplinary action. Attempting to gain a qualification fraudulently is also a criminal offence, taken very seriously by both ourselves and other regulators, such as Ofqual.



# Qualified to start?

## Entry qualifications reminder

**T**he number of qualifications on offer is forever increasing, which makes it ever more challenging for centres to recognise some of the certificates student present as entry qualifications for VN training. As at least one centre has been asked to accept unaccredited qualifications, it's pertinent to remind you that only properly accredited qualifications can be accepted. This means that the awarding organisation must be accredited by one of the national regulators and listed as such, or an equivalently-regulated overseas organisation. A quick search of the internet in preparation for this article showed that there is a plethora of unregulated qualifications on offer in the animal care sector alone that could crop up on enrolment applications.

If you are unsure about the status of a qualification, check the Ofqual qualifications register and the status of the awarding organisation before considering it for entry to VN training. HE qualifications must be awarded by a UK university that has been granted awarding powers by the Privy Council, or an equivalent overseas institution. Once again, check if you are unsure.





# The Continental way?

## New agreement between RCVS and ACOVENE

**V**eterinary nurse education has taken a further step towards international quality assurance now that the RCVS has affiliated with the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education (ACOVENE). A Memorandum of Understanding, formally affiliating the College, was signed at the Board meeting in Barcelona at the end of November.

ACOVENE was established in 2007 to allow greater movement of trained veterinary nurses within Europe by quality assuring veterinary nursing training programmes and their delivery across the continent. Accredited schools map their programmes against an agreed 'Dossier of Competencies' for veterinary nurses (similar to the UK Occupational Standards) and operate according to a comprehensive set of accreditation criteria. ACOVENE's quality assurance systems were originally adapted from those in use by the American Veterinary Medical Association in relation to veterinary technician programmes in the USA, which adds a further international dimension.

Seven schools are currently accredited, in Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Italy

and Sweden, and two new applications are currently in progress, with visitations due to take place in 2011. ACOVENE was developed in conjunction with the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA), which retains a supervisory role and seats on the Board.

Under the terms of the new arrangement, any establishment approved by the College to deliver veterinary nursing qualifications will be considered an affiliate member of ACOVENE – which is a tribute to the high standards maintained by the College and its Awarding Body. Practically, the affiliation means that RCVS-approved centres are now able to use the ACOVENE logo on their stationery, promotional materials and certificates. The RCVS will also take a permanent seat on the ACOVENE Board.

What does this mean for centres? The answer is nothing they are not already doing. The ACOVENE Board will visit a small number of centres annually (one or two is envisaged) in order to ensure that the RCVS standards for VN education continue to articulate with those of ACOVENE, and that the Awarding Body's quality assurance of schools of

## Go Norse!

### Vetnnet goes to Norway next year

**V**etnnet, the European association of veterinary nurse educators, organises an annual conference, hosted by one of the member colleges. The conference offers a variety of workshops, which are interesting for teachers and anyone supporting training students in the workplace.

Next year's conference will be in Oslo, hosted by the Norwegian School of Veterinary Science. The main theme will be teaching nursing as a science, with the hot topics of rehabilitation and pain management, along with making best use of a nursing skills lab.

Also on the agenda is internationalisation, especially the sharing of best education practice across international boundaries and the facilitation of student and teaching staff exchanges.



As well as the serious CPD, there will be lots of opportunity to network during the evenings and plenty of time to explore Oslo and, if you have a weekend free following the conference, further afield in Norway. The dates for your diary are 29-30 September 2011. Watch [www.vetnnet.com](http://www.vetnnet.com) for further information.

veterinary nursing is effective. These visits will be conducted by a Board member and one other visitor, neither of whom will have any connection with the RCVS or its centres, and will normally take one day.

The idea is to 'spot check' against selected elements of the ACOVENE accreditation criteria (which can be downloaded from [www.acovene.com](http://www.acovene.com)) rather than to conduct a full two-day accreditation visitation. Schools will be given approximately six weeks' notice, via the RCVS, of such a visit (dates can be fine-tuned to suit both parties), and will be informed three weeks in advance by the visitors of the areas they wish to audit. The RCVS will not have advance notice of centres to be visited and so will not be in a position to prepare centres!

There will be no additional fee for visits; the affiliation costs will be met by the RCVS. However, as with RCVS visits, centres that cancel at short notice will bear the cost of a re-visit. ACOVENE will provide the RCVS with visit reports and will require the College to address any arising quality issues with the centre concerned and, if warranted, across all RCVS-approved programme provision. In other



Libby Earle, RCVS Head of Veterinary Nursing, and José Marin, ACOVENE Chairman and FECAVA representative, signing the agreement

words, ACOVENE will function in much the same way as Ofqual in auditing the RCVS's quality assurance through the functioning of its centres.

Libby Earle, Head of Veterinary Nursing, said: "This regular quality check of our standards adds a welcome oversight of the College's quality assurance systems. While VN qualifications are subject to the usual national regulatory systems, ACOVENE is specific to veterinary nursing programmes and will be comparing us against the European accepted standard for VN programmes. We also hope it will foster closer links with Europe for our schools of veterinary nursing and open up opportunities for both teachers and students to widen their professional horizons."

For more information, contact [vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk).

## Stop press for centres

**H**ere are a few last-minute points as we go to press, and on the agenda for the December Heads of Centre meeting:

### Reducing the photocopying and postage

A review of our enrolment processes means that we now no longer need you to send us a full copy of every student's enrolment form or qualifications certificates. From January we need only the following:

- A copy of the front page only, with the student's signed declaration and personal details as completed by them
- A copy of their birth certificate and any subsequent change of name certification

We won't need the rest of the enrolment form or qualifications certificate copies.

You should still retain original enrolment application forms and all certificate copies as previously.

### External moderation

Your EV will make arrangements to externally

moderate college-based assessments in much the same way as the verification of NVQ portfolios. You will accordingly be asked to provide the timings of assignment submissions and internal examinations on a spreadsheet for each of your cohorts. Your EV will ask you to provide mark lists and moderators' reports using this information as a guide. She will accordingly request samples of scripts for moderation.

You may not have to provide mark sheets to the RCVS for every assessment. At the point of certification, you will be asked to verify that students have passed all required assessments and may, at this stage, be asked to provide mark sheets prior to a final verification check.

The timing of internal assessments (assignments and examinations) is very much a matter for your centre and your programme design. However, your EV needs to know what these timings are.

# You've been funded!

## Demystifying apprenticeships and their funding

**T**he ongoing debate about university tuition fees has somewhat overshadowed the Government's commitment to training people in the workplace via apprenticeships. Whilst the universities are feeling the financial pinch, there is extra money available for work-based training and a Government commitment to train an additional 75,000 apprentices by 2014. This is excellent news for veterinary nursing, where over 75% of students train whilst employed in practice. This article draws on a factsheet developed by Lantra to help employers understand the ins and outs of apprenticeships and their funding.

### What is a Veterinary Nursing apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is not a qualification in itself, but is a package of learning and qualifications combined with practical work experience gained through employment in a chosen industry, in our case veterinary practice. Apprenticeships are tailored to meet the needs of each specific sector and in every case the industry concerned, businesses, training providers and Sector Skills Councils are all involved in designing the 'package' or framework.

### What does an Apprenticeship Framework contain?

- A competence-based element
- A knowledge-based element: in our case the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing addresses both knowledge and practical competence
- Transferable skills: these are key or functional skills which test literacy, numeracy and IT skills
- Employment rights and responsibilities – this induction package helps the learner understand their rights and responsibilities within the workplace

### How are the qualifications achieved?

Apprentices work alongside other employees within the workplace and learn the skills of the job. An assessor (clinical coach), which may be the employer, will observe the apprentice using their skills and make the decision as to whether they are competent at a particular task or whether they need further training. This is known as *on-the-job training*.

An apprentice will also be required to attend college to acquire the knowledge and understanding required for the job. This can be on a day- or block-release basis. They will be required to sit some tests

(formal examinations in the case of veterinary nursing) to confirm their level of knowledge. This is known as *off-the-job training*.

### How long will the Advanced Apprenticeship in Veterinary Nursing take?

The apprenticeship lasts as long as it takes for the individual apprentice (student veterinary nurse) to achieve the qualifications within the apprenticeship package. Learners all progress at different rates but, on average, the advanced apprenticeship will take between two and three years to achieve.

### How are apprenticeships funded?

As previously mentioned, apprenticeships comprise different qualifications and courses. The qualifications within the apprenticeship framework each attract their own funding. For veterinary nursing, they are:

- The Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing, with assessment methods designed to test competence, knowledge and understanding
- Key or Functional Skills – these are Communication (Level 2), Application of Number (Level 2) and ICT (Level 1)

### As an employer, will I get help with funding?

Employers are required to employ the apprentice, pay their wages, and, in some cases (19+ years), contribute towards the training costs. The apprentice will be employed like any other member of staff.

As an employer, you will be expected to employ the apprentice and pay the relevant salary that reflects their skills, experience and age. A new National Minimum Wage for apprentices was introduced from 1 October 2010. The wage applies to all apprentices aged under 19 and apprentices aged 19 or over in the first year of their apprenticeship. The apprentice minimum wage is £2.50 per hour and applies to time working, plus time spent training that is part of the working week, ie college time.

### Do I pay for the apprentice to complete the apprenticeship?

Depending on the age of the apprentice, the employer may be required to contribute to the costs of the additional courses within the apprenticeship. The contribution will be discussed and agreed between the training provider and employer prior to sign-up.



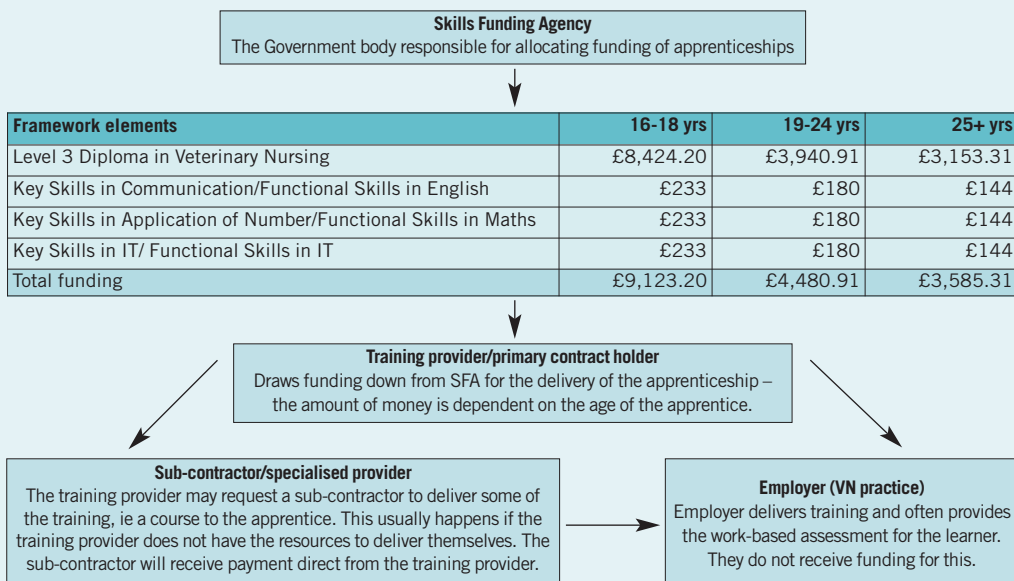


Figure reproduced courtesy of Lantra

### Does age make a difference to the funding?

Yes. If an apprentice is aged 16-18 at the date of enrolment onto the apprenticeship, it will be fully funded. This applies right up to the apprentice's 19th birthday; if they register for training before this date, they will be fully funded. If he/she is over 19, the funding will be reduced by approximately 40-50%. This reduction is because older employees are assumed to already have some experience that is valuable to a business and therefore it is seen to be equitable that a proportion of their training should be funded by their employer.

### Who applies for the funding?

Funding is available from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) in England, the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI) in Northern Ireland, which is applied for by the training provider, ie college or private training provider. This funding given to the training provider is used for the delivery and assessment of the apprenticeship. An example of how much funding is available from the Skills Funding Agency is shown above.

### What does the funding cover?

The funding issued by the Skills Funding Agency to training providers is provided to cover the costs of the following:

- Entry activities, group-based induction
- Registering learners onto the necessary qualifications contained in the apprenticeship
- The delivery of the qualifications contained in the apprenticeship – with the exception of any additional employer requirements that may be required by the framework, for example,
  - Competence element (in this case Diploma in Veterinary Nursing)
  - Functional/Essential/Key skills
- Assessment and support time
- Work-based support – assessor (coach) allocated to knowledge and skills development
- Group-based knowledge and skills
- Regular review of progress (of learner), learner support and/or advice
- Internal verification/s
- Examinations and Assessments
- Certification costs

This information may not be the same for all providers/learners/apprenticeship frameworks as it will depend on the individual circumstances at the time funding is issued. Also remember that for learners aged over 19, employers are expected to make a contribution of 50% to the total cost of funding the apprenticeship.

For more information about apprenticeships, please visit [www.lantra.co.uk/apprenticeships](http://www.lantra.co.uk/apprenticeships).

# VN training pays off for practices

Qualified VN retention rates are on the up

**G**ood news for those investing in VN training – **10% more recent qualifiers are staying on at their training practices than in 2008, according to our 2010 Survey of the Veterinary and Veterinary Nursing Professions, published in October.**

This year we issued surveys to vets and veterinary nurses at the same time, so that comparisons could be made in key areas. The veterinary nursing survey was sent to 13,072 individuals in February 2010 and the response rate was 31% – slightly down on the last survey, in 2008, but still a good basis for analysis.

Those with veterinary nursing roles who replied to the survey included students, registered, listed, recently de-listed veterinary nurses, and some unqualified people. Of these, 18% were currently student VNs and 8% qualified after 31 December 2008. We asked these two groups specific questions about their training experience, and also their plans post-qualification.

## Staying power

Dubunking the widely-held myth that there is no point in practices training their own veterinary nurses, as they do not stay in the training practice, we found that 61% of students intended to remain employed in their TPs post-qualification, and in fact over three-quarters of the 2009/2010 qualifiers had remained at their training practice. This is up from 57% and 68% respectively, when we asked the same questions in our 2008 VN survey.

It was heartening to find that over 70% of veterinary nursing students and 2009/10 qualifiers were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the support given by their centre, and quality of their training practice and college/university.

The number of student VNs and recent VN qualifiers who received appraisals stood at 76%, up slightly from 72% in 2008. This is a markedly higher percentage than for recent veterinary graduates – only 57% of whom received appraisals or performance reviews during their first year in practice. And the effort seems to pay off, as those student VNs receiving appraisals rated more highly their satisfaction with their centre, and their training experience generally (see figure below). Whether it is the better centres and TPs who offer appraisals, or the act of appraisal itself that increases student satisfaction, is not clear

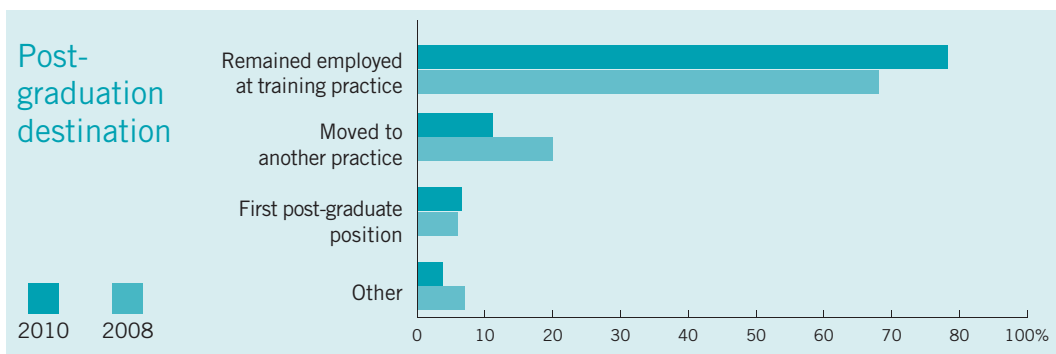
## CPD counts

Finally, data about CPD uptake and provision may be of interest to colleges. On top of their salaries, 83% of VN respondents working in clinical practice receive time off and/or financial support for CPD.

VNs spent three days away from the practice giving or receiving CPD in the last 12 months, a drop from 3.6 days in 2008. They are easily reaching their CPD targets (45 hours averaged over three years) and top up with other types of CPD such as in-house courses, books/journals/articles and distance learning. On average, VNs carried out 29 hours of CPD in the last 12 months.

The most common form of CPD after books/journals/articles was in-house courses, and the most popular were weekend, distance/online and in-house courses.

For the full report, visit RCVSonline at [www.rcvs.org.uk/surveys](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/surveys), or, for a hard copy, contact Lizzie Lockett on 020 7202 0725 or [l.lockett@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:l.lockett@rcvs.org.uk).



# Come to us – or we can come to you!

## Put your questions to the College

**E**ach year, we host a range of events to help you better understand what we do, and to offer you the opportunity to pose your burning questions.

**Meet the RCVS Days** are your opportunity to find out what goes on behind the scenes by visiting RCVS HQ at Belgravia House. It's your chance to chat to the President and Heads of Department, including those who run the VN Awarding Body, in a relaxed atmosphere – we take small groups of no more than 15. The next events are on 31 January and 15 April: reasonable travel expenses will be paid.

If you can't make it to us, we'll come to you! Our **Regional Question Time** programme sees the Officer team and members of VN Council and the Awarding Body Board hit the road for evening Q&A sessions. In the first half of next year we will be visiting:

Norwich – 20 January  
South London – 24 March  
Inverness – 19 May



For more information and to book your place, contact Fiona Harcourt, Events Co-ordinator, on 020 7202 0773 or [f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk).

## Meet the team

### Helen Cook



**What's your role?**  
Veterinary Nursing  
Administrative Assistant

**What's your background?**  
While working in the Administration and Finance Departments at Twycross Zoo, Warwickshire, my role included reception duties, organising Animal

Encounters and processing Adoptions. It was during this time that I achieved an NVQ Level 3 in Business and Administration. I moved to London from my hometown of Ashby de la Zouch and joined the membership team at ZSL London Zoo. In 2009, I began my role as Administrative Assistant in the Veterinary Nursing Department at the RCVS.

#### What do you do?

In my current role, I provide administrative support for my colleagues in the veterinary nursing

department, assisting with enrolments, registrations, admissions ceremonies and mailings.

From 1 January 2011, I will be covering maternity leave for the VN Awards Secretary, in which role I will issue NVQ certificates to student veterinary nurses who have passed their examinations, request portfolios for quality monitoring, register newly-qualified nurses, organise admissions ceremonies for the presentation of certificates and badges by the President of the RCVS and also transfer listed nurses onto the Register of Veterinary Nurses.

#### What's been your biggest challenge?

My biggest challenge since joining the RCVS has been learning all that the VN Awards Secretary role entails before covering the position from January, while still managing my current role and assisting my colleagues in veterinary nursing during a busy period in the department.

#### Surprise us....

I recently discovered that I'm related to Lord of the Rings author JRR Tolkien.

# First steps & teething problems

## Good uptake for the new Level 3 Diploma

**R**egistrations onto the new Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing got off to a flying start in September and, by the end of November, we had registered over 750 students onto the qualification (out of a total of 930 enrolments so far this year). They are still coming in thick and fast, so there will be significantly more by the year-end.

However, as with most new things, there have been some teething problems. These almost all relate to incorrectly completed enrolment documentation, without which we can't register students. Normally we can process a batch of enrolments, including the request of Nursing Progress Log (NPL) log-ins, well within three weeks. However, the very high level of deficient documentation sent in from centres has slowed this down considerably and we have sometimes struggled to keep within our agreed customer service levels this autumn. The delays with enrolment have led to some students waiting longer than should be necessary for their NPL log-ins, which has been very frustrating all round.

In order to improve matters for the courses starting in January, we suggest the following may be helpful to centres (and TPs):

- Prepare your students for enrolment – ensure they bring their qualification certificates, birth/marriage certificates and payment (where appropriate) to college on day one of the course, ie give them a clear written instruction as to what is needed
- Consider completing the enrolment forms as a class exercise during induction to ensure they are done correctly
- Check signatures – enrolment forms must be signed by the designated practice principal and not a deputy or 'pp'
- Consider running a pre-course induction day a month or so before the programme proper begins, so that students are enrolled right from the beginning, and can count training time towards the RCVS Bye-law requirement for eventual registration
- Identify students who do not have the requisite supporting certificates and inform employers about the reasons for delaying their enrolment
- Check spreadsheets and supporting documentation carefully for errors (typos) and

omissions before submitting them to the Awarding Body

- Send in spreadsheets with correct applications as early as possible, while informing the Awarding Body of candidates yet to apply

Meanwhile, our IT systems are being significantly upgraded to allow for full electronic uploads of data. When completed in the New Year, this should speed things up at the RCVS – but only if the data supplied to us is correct!

### NPL going well

In late November, we issued the 1,000th NPL log-in. Most of the log-ins have been for new students, with 400 or so going out to second-year students commencing the transitional pathway. So far, the feedback on the new NPL has been very positive. Students seem to like it and most centres and practices are finding it easy to work with. The company that developed the system for us, Skillwise, has continued to build in fixes and upgrades during the autumn. One of these allows students to log several (relevant) skills against a single case, which saves having to cut and paste into several separate skills.

***“Reports can now be extracted, making it possible for centres to send regular progress reports.”***

A further important feature is the reports that can now be extracted, making it possible for centres to send regular progress reports to employers by email. We hope to refine the reporting features in due course; however, a more sophisticated system will carry some development costs and we would like to see how the current arrangements work before committing to this.

On the whole, though, there have been relatively few problems. The star prize goes to the clinical coach who logged lots of skills, but unfortunately for the wrong student. We deleted them for her, however, it's worth noting that the NPL doesn't normally obliterate mistakes – it just puts a line through them. This is to prevent the editing of entries after the event, but will be embarrassing if you get distracted and log reams of skills under the wrong candidate!

# Are you preparing your students properly?

## OSCE examination feedback

**T**he September OSCE examinations results were disappointing; only 60% of candidates passed the examination, as opposed to 71% in the summer. There does appear to be a pattern emerging with the pass rates for the September OSCE; for the last three years, these exams have produced a lower pass rate than other sittings. After the examinations, we received 18 requests for examination investigations. As part of this process, many of the students described how they performed the OSCE and it was clear from this correspondence that students are either not being objectively observed in practice or those who are observing them are not themselves aware of safe methodologies.

### Blade running

For example, OSCE SM01 requires students to put clipper blades onto clippers. The correct method for doing this was reported in the May issue of *VN Standard*. It was therefore surprising that not only did 22% of students fail to do this correctly in the exam, but one student wrote and told us that she tested the clippers in the same way she did daily in practice: "I put the clipper blades on, plugged them in and switched them on".

Another point raised within this station is that some students do not carry out hand hygiene for the amount of time detailed within the World Health Organisation (WHO) method. We will leave you to investigate this one for yourselves.

### Drape expectations

More reading is also required for the correct method for folding drapes as required for ST08. The RCVS examiners are provided with pictorial instructions for two methods (folding and concertina); these being the methods widely published in veterinary nursing textbooks. Students, clinical coaches and lecturers are strongly advised to check the method they use against those that are published. The examiners also reported that many students placed the TST strip with the indicator end sticking out of the drape (presumably for easy viewing). However, the indicator end of the TST strip should be placed in the middle of the drapes to ensure that the centre of the bundle has been adequately sterilised. Does this mean that some surgeons are unwittingly using incompletely sterilised gowns and drapes in practice?

### Leak-proof?

Finally, in SA05 students should note that it is not acceptable to blow down an ET tube to check it is patent. Also a visual inspection of the external tubing of the breathing system (as one student reported she does daily in practice) will not necessarily demonstrate if there are any leaks. To check for leaks, students should occlude the end of the breathing system and fill with oxygen.

If the system fails to fill then there is likely to be a leak.

When the OSCE stations are developed the examiners use several different sources of reference to check the correct methodology rather than rely on what they may have been taught (usually several years previously). In the same way, students, lecturers and clinical coaches are urged to check a number of sources of literature to ensure that best practice is being undertaken at all times.





# Grounds for appeal?

## New examination investigation procedure

**O**ver the last few years, the quantity of veterinary nurse OSCE appeals has increased. A majority are dismissed by the chairman of the appeals committee because they are not allowed under the appeals rules. The appeal rules state:

**“No appeal shall be entertained in respect of any marks awarded, or other academic judgment made, by the examiners in the examination in question.”**

In other words, students cannot take issue with the judgement of examiners and the marks awarded in the absence of any other grounds for appeal. An examination result can only be appealed if there is an irregularity with the way in which the test was conducted. In such cases, the Awarding Body will often identify the problem at an early stage and act to offer disadvantaged students a way forward without them needing to go through a formal appeal process.

An appeal can take up to three months to be processed, counting from the date results were published. In order to enable students to make a decision regarding whether to appeal or not, the RCVS has recently implemented an examination investigation procedure. Students can request the

investigation of an examination result (theory or practical) within 28 days of receipt of the examination results. The Examination Manager will carry out an investigation using the examiner notes and, where necessary, contacting the examiners involved for more detailed information.

***“The Awarding Body will often identify the problem at an early stage.”***

Students will normally be given the results of the investigation within four weeks. We will also indicate if there appear to be any grounds for appeal or will indicate why an appeal is not appropriate. Students who remain unsatisfied with the result of the enquiry may appeal the examination result within 14 days of the date of the investigation report letter.

Forms are available to download online. There is a fee of £20 to cover the cost of the investigation (applicable from January 2011). If the investigation of your enquiry reveals fault with the RCVS examination processes, or a subsequent examination appeal is successful, your enquiry fee will be refunded in full.

# Get a clearer Vue

## We bust exam myths about Pearson Vue and OSCEs

**W**e continue our series that debunks some of the myths that surround the exams.

**Myth:** Pearson Vue randomly creates the exams papers from a question bank produced by the RCVS.

**Truth:** Pearson Vue's involvement with the exam papers is purely to facilitate delivery via their test centres and to provide a psychometrician service. The papers are compiled by the RCVS and fully quality-assured before the examination date (see opposite for the full process).

**Myth:** the last OSCE with eight stations will be in March 2011, after this time all students will have to sit the new 12-station OSCE.

**Truth:** students registered for NVQ Level 3 will continue to sit both theory and practical examinations in relation to the NVQ/VRQ award until the qualification end-date of 31 July 2013. This means exams of eight OSCE stations and two theory papers containing 90 multiple-choice questions each. The examinations will be available alongside the Level 3 Diploma in veterinary nursing examinations, but the choice of OSCE venues may be reduced as demand lessens. See the August 2010 edition of *VN Standard* for more information on the exam format for the Level 3 Diploma.

Tune in next time for more myth-busting!

# Under scrutiny

## Quality assuring the theory exams

**The winter VRQ examinations have just finished – the eighth session of delivering the examinations at Pearson Vue testing centres. Whilst the majority of those who have undertaken the examinations have reported a good experience, a few concerns have been raised relating to the balance and relevance of the test content.**

In one case, a centre reported that the exam papers each of their students sat differed to such an extent that at least one student taking the Level 3 exam reported having no diagnostic imaging questions while another reported that there were approximately 10. The centre was understandably concerned that the breadth and depth of the syllabus was not being tested. In order to allay such worries, here is a brief explanation of the mysteries of test paper development and quality assurance.

The RCVS question bank is held on a purpose-built database. Each question is referenced to one part of the RCVS professional syllabus and many of the questions are also referenced to literature sources.

Exam paper development starts a year before the examination. A pre-agreed blueprint is used to ensure that similar quantities of questions are selected for each syllabus area for each exam paper each year. All areas of the syllabus are tested.

Once the papers have been formulated, a check is made to ensure that each version of the exam paper is at the same difficulty level. This is done using statistics gained when questions are used in an exam (more on this later).

A minimum of two subject-specific scrutineers verify the questions within each paper. They report on:

- Relevance to the RCVS professional syllabus
- Factual accuracy
- Balance of the paper
- Incorrect answer or more than one correct answer present
- Suitability of pictures and diagrams
- Ability to complete in the time allowed
- Appropriateness of completing any calculation without a calculator
- Any incorrect grammar and spelling
- Fairness

The RCVS takes on board the comments made by the

scrutineer and make changes as necessary. The papers are then sent to the Chief Scrutineer who carries out a final audit before signing the papers off. A final proof-read is carried out at the RCVS before the questions are put into the format seen by the students.

***“During the examinations, regular quality checks are made.”***

Pearson Vue carries out further quality assurance to ensure that the papers will be displayed correctly during the examination period. One week before the examination window, the papers are viewed for a final time by the RCVS and signed off.

During the examinations, regular quality checks are made. Statistical information is uploaded on a daily basis and questions that are not performing well are reviewed. For instance, if 90% of students chose answer A when the correct answer was keyed a B, this would be investigated. If at this stage it became clear that the answer was actually A or that both A and B were correct, the question would be adjusted.

Final checks are made by the psychometrician at Pearson Vue; this provides further details of the difficulty level of each paper to make sure that all students were tested at an equivalent level. The results are then processed and letters sent to the candidates.

All questions which did not perform well are either removed from the question bank or rewritten. And the process of paper setting begins again.

Returning to the queries about radiography questions, in all of the 2010 examination papers there were 27 diagnostic imaging questions. We would like to reassure centres and students that the exams are all rigorous and weighted equally. Questions are, however, randomised, and so students comparing notes after an exam will find they did not see the questions in the same order, which may explain their perception.

# Classroom quiz-time?

## Online VN Guide quiz

**We** have launched an online quiz to test VNs' knowledge of their *Guide to Professional Conduct* in the run up to the launch of the disciplinary system for registered veterinary nurses – and it may be just the thing to test your students in the classroom.

The 25-question test can be completed anonymously and at the end of the quiz it's possible to review the answers, which are cross-referenced with the relevant section of the *Guide*, making it a good learning tool.

The quiz can be found at [www.rcvs.org.uk/vnguidequiz](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/vnguidequiz) - good luck!

Theory examinations (e-assessment)		Practical examinations (OSCE)	
<b>Winter 2010</b>		<b>Winter 2010</b>	
Results published	6 January 2011	Results published	20 January 2011
<b>Spring 2011</b>		<b>Spring 2011</b>	
Closing date for entries	28 January	Closing date for entries	4 February
Appointment booking window	21 February – 18 March	Exam weekend	11 – 13 March
Exam week	21 – 26 March	Results published	14 April
Results published	21 April	<b>Summer 2011</b>	
<b>Summer 2011</b>		Closing date for entries	13 May
Closing date for entries	6 May	Exam weekend	17 – 19 June
Appointment booking window	6 June – 1 July	Results published	21 July
Exam weeks	4 – 16 July	<b>Autumn 2011</b>	
Results published	25 August	Closing date for entries	12 August
<b>Winter 2011</b>		Exam weekend	16 – 18 September
Closing date for entries	16 September	Results published	20 October
Appointment booking window	17 October – 11 November	<b>Winter 2011</b>	
Exam weeks	14 – 25 November	Closing date for entries	4 November
Results published	TBC	Exam weekend	9 – 11 December
		Results published	January 2012 TBC

## Who does what...

Libby Earle: *Head of Veterinary Nursing*  
 Annette Amato: *Deputy Head of Department,  
 Awarding Body Board Secretary,  
 Secretary to VN Council*  
 Julie Dugmore: *Quality assurance and EV liaison*  
 Vicky Hedges: *Examinations and higher  
 education quality assurance*  
 Christine James: *Centre approvals and monitoring*

Amy Woods: *Student enrolments, careers advice*  
 Helen Cook: *Award certificates, registration for  
 newly-qualified nurses*  
 Ben Myring: *Examinations*

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