

The RCVS Veterinary Graduate Development Programme (VetGDP)

Guidance

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	Page
1. Aims and objectives of the VetGDP	3
2. VetGDP: Programme overview	3
3. VetGDP: Enrolment and exemptions	8
4. VetGDP: Structure and implementation	10
4.1 Requirements for hosting the VetGDP	10
4.2 Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) – what are they and how are they used in VetGDP?	11
4.3 VetGDP e-portfolio	14
4.4 Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in the VetGDP e-portfolio	14
4.5 Progressing through the VetGDP Programme: Graduate Activities	15
4.6 Progressing through the VetGDP Programme: VetGDP Adviser support activities	17
4.7 Completing the VetGDP: Peer review and sign-off	18
5. Role of the VetGDP Adviser	18
5.1 Commitment to support graduates	19
5.2 The Veterinary team	20
5.3 VetGDP Adviser Training	20
6. Quality Assurance of the VetGDP Programme	21
Appendices	22
Appendix 1: Frequently Asked Questions	22

1. Aims and Objectives of the VetGDP

The aim of the VetGDP is to provide a meaningful and effective period of support for new veterinary graduates in the first 12-18 months of their career, recognising that they are a qualified veterinary surgeon, but that a period of support is needed to help them move beyond being day one competent to become a confident and capable, independent veterinary professional.

The Objectives of the VetGDP are to:

- To provide support for veterinary graduates during the first 12-18 months of their career, giving them the confidence and capability required to have a long and happy career as a veterinary professional.
- To ensure a more consistent experience across all graduates by making sure each graduate has a trained VetGDP Adviser, with dedicated time and commitment to supporting the new graduate.
- To provide a structure for reflection, where graduates, supported by their VetGDP Advisers, can improve the quality of their reflection to inspire a practice of lifelong learning.
- To give VetGDP Advisers the tools, through an RCVS Academy course, to support new graduates to understand their capabilities and develop experience and confidence in their individual role.
- To provide a structure through an intuitive e-portfolio, which will allow graduates to record and their professional development and reflections

The programme is underpinned by the philosophy and mutual understanding that when graduates begin their veterinary career, they are yet to have sufficient experience to be entrusted to all activities without some level of support. This reassures the graduate that they are entitled to a level of support that reflects a consensus of their capabilities. As a result of the support provided by the VetGDP Adviser (and potentially other members of the practice team) the graduate's clinical and professional capabilities will develop with time as they gain more experience during the programme, leading to greater confidence and independence and consequently reducing their need for support. This should reduce the anxiety graduates face when starting their first role and give them the confidence to try, knowing there is a safety net and system of support should they need it.

2. VetGDP Programme Overview

Each graduate enrolled in the VetGDP will be supported in an RCVS- Approved Graduate Development Practice/Workplace, accredited to host the programme, by a trained, in-house VetGDP Adviser with committed time and resources to help the graduate.

Further information about requirements to host VetGDP and the Adviser role can be found on pages 10 and 19 respectively.

The VetGDP is a workplace-based programme, which enables new graduates to further develop their professional and clinical capabilities, beyond day one competence level, to the point where they are fully competent, confident and independent veterinary professionals across the entire scope of their role.

Graduates (with the support of their VetGDP Advisers) record and monitor their professional development and progress through the programme using an intuitive, versatile e-portfolio, which is structured around Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) directly relevant to their role. Essentially, EPAs are a way of describing the overarching activities carried out by a professional in their role, in a holistic manner, which represents the 'real world' of veterinary work.

Further information about EPAs can be found on page 11

At the start of the programme, the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser meet to discuss and agree the EPAs which are relevant to their full role, whether this be clinical or non-clinical, and drawing upon the RCVS Bank of EPAs, identify all which will need to be incorporated into their e-portfolio. Technical and professional skills will underpin each area of broad activity (EPA), in addition to professional skills such as communication, professionalism, organisation etc. which will apply to almost all activities. However, the focus is on the overarching holistic activity (EPA) rather than its constituent parts and improving practice and professionalism in this area across different contexts and complexities. For each activity (EPA) that is part of the graduate's role as a vet, the aim is for them to obtain further experience across different contexts (such as case complexities, clinical focus, client expectations / co-operation, and different species, environments etc.), so that they move beyond being 'day one' competent on straightforward, simple cases and situations to being a fully independent, competent and confident veterinary professional across a wide range of scenarios that relate to this activity in the workplace.

Graduates will achieve this through a combination of their own reflections on workplace activities, with ongoing observation, feedback and guidance from their VetGDP Adviser (and / or other colleagues). Although both the graduate and Adviser will monitor progression through the programme, it is the responsibility of the graduate to identify which areas they most need support with and request this from their Adviser such as inviting supervision and / or observation and feedback on activities for which they feel it would be beneficial. For example, at the start of the programme graduates are likely to request support for cases or situations that they have not experienced extensively at Vet School and therefore would feel more confident having a more experienced veterinary surgeon present, or for the more unusual / complex cases or scenarios as they are encountered.

Requesting support from the Adviser, including inviting supervision and assistance or observation with feedback, is a mechanism for the graduate to obtain helpful feedback to support their development, and not a sign of any limitation in any way. Indeed, where a true learning culture exists in the workplace environment, to request such support would be a clear demonstration of the graduate's personal leadership qualities in terms of their professional development. Graduates should feel comfortable in requesting support with any aspect of their role, and confident from the start of their programme that such requests will be welcomed by their VetGDP Adviser and readily provided.

Further information how the graduate might approach the programme, and the types of support they can expect to receive from their VetGDP Adviser can be found on pages 15 and 17

Recording progress in VetGDP

Graduates will be provided with access to an RCVS e-portfolio to record their progress with VetGDP, structured around their EPAs, in which they can record their own reflections, peer and Adviser feedback, case reviews, etc. Regular progress reviews (across all EPA's) should also be recorded in the e-portfolio, making it easy for the graduate and VetGDP Adviser to see how, and in which areas of activity, strengths are developing and areas needing more practice or experience remain, prior to completion of the programme.

The records (reflections, case studies, feedback etc.) for each of the EPA sections within the e-portfolio represent the evidence to supports progressive decisions (with rationale) on the graduate's competence and journey towards becoming a capable, confident, independent veterinary professional, to the point where they no longer feel they need support in their role as a vet.

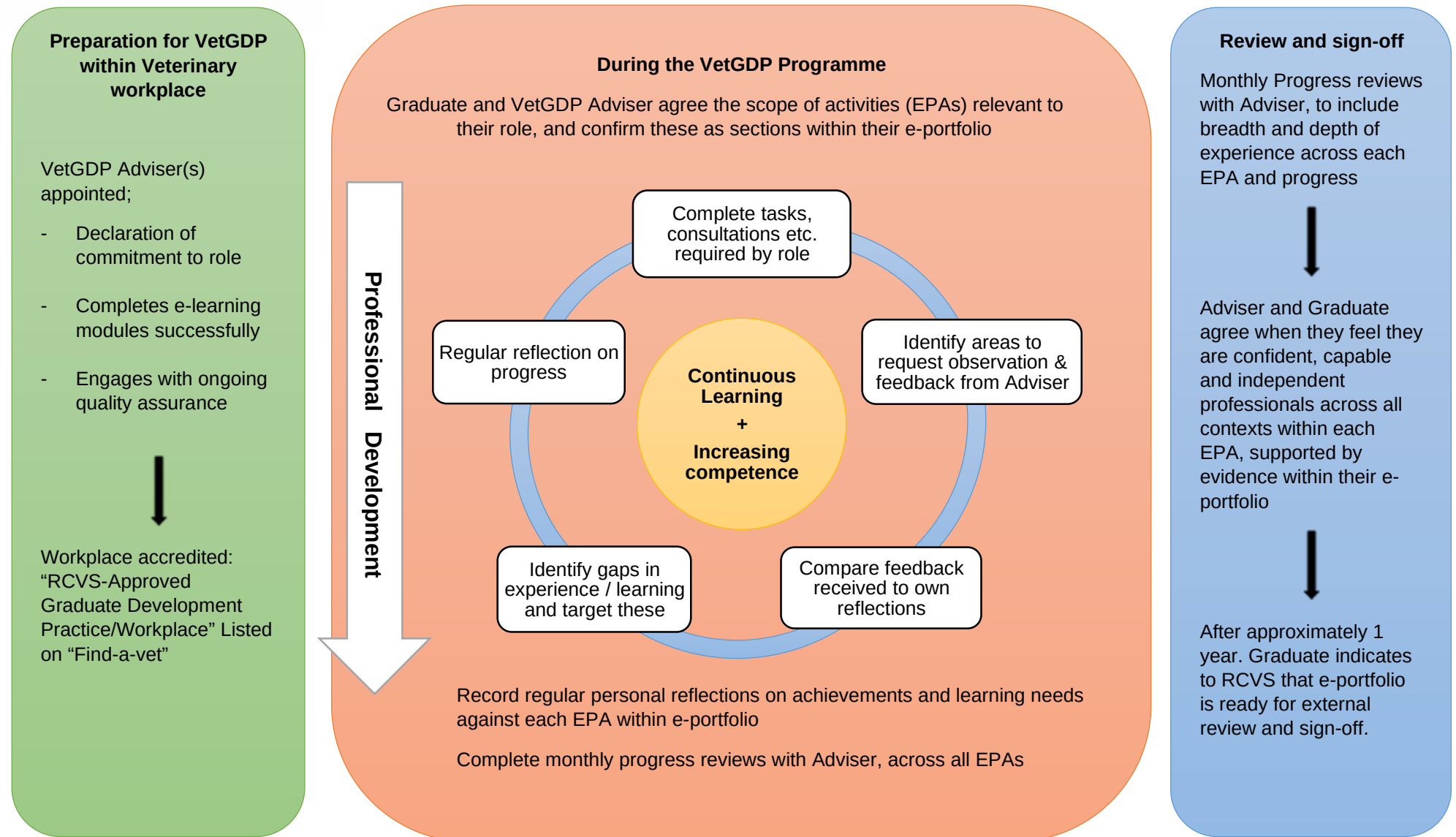
Further information about the e-portfolio (VetGDP) can be found on page 14.

Completion of the VetGDP

Once the graduate and their Adviser agree that they have made sufficient progress in all activities within their role, and that the evidence and reflections in their e-portfolio clearly support this and demonstrate their learning and journey through VetGDP, they can submit this for review and sign off by the RCVS. The process usually take between 12-18 months but it will depend on personal circumstances, the role of the graduate and the type of workplace. The graduate is set a deadline of 18 months from the date they agree their EPAs with their VetGDP Adviser but should the graduate need further time, they can contact the RCVS for an extension. Completion of the VetGDP is mandatory under the RCVS code of conduct.

Further information on the sign-off process can be found on page 18

Figure 1: VetGDP: Programme Overview



Both the graduate and the VetGDP Adviser will be asked to feed into a quality assurance process that will allow the RCVS to make continuous improvements to the programme, in line with RCVS' commitment to evaluate our processes.

This process is not onerous – a short questionnaire will be sent to the graduate and Adviser 3-4 times a year to gather feedback on how the programme is working for each of them. Should any significant problems arise, support will be provided where possible.

Further information about the quality assurance process can be found on page 22.

3. VetGDP: Enrolment and Exemptions

All new veterinary graduates registering with the RCVS from summer 2021, and working in the UK, must undertake the VetGDP.

The Programme is also mandatory for veterinary surgeons who return to the register after a period of 5 years or more. However, such members can apply to the RCVS for exemption, for example if they have been working abroad for this period. Veterinary surgeons returning to work after a shorter period away may also request to enrol on the programme, if they feel it would be beneficial for them.

UK Graduates going overseas

UK graduates who chose to work overseas after graduation for over 18 months will not be expected to complete the VetGDP whilst abroad. These graduates will have the option to enrol on the VetGDP if and when they come back on to the UK practising register, or to apply for exemption if the programme will no longer be beneficial due to their experience overseas. Non-completion of VetGDP under these circumstances would not affect the individual's MRCVS status.

Overseas qualified members

Overseas registrants are encouraged to enrol on the VetGDP, as it would provide excellent support for their first role in the UK.

It is mandatory for overseas qualified veterinary surgeons, who register with RCVS and have less than 18 months of significant work experience as a veterinary surgeon to enrol on the VetGDP. In addition,

Exemptions

VetGDP has been designed to be sufficiently flexible to work with almost any veterinary role; the structure of the programme around workplace activities (EPAs) is intended as a useful framework which can be applied to almost all veterinary roles, however if there are additional activities the bank does not yet cover, the graduate and their Adviser can develop their own EPA using our template.

The VetGDP is mandatory for all new graduates starting a role in the UK that required them to be MRCVS. Even if there is only a small amount of clinical work in your role, such as being an Official Veterinarian or a Meat Hygiene inspector, the VetGDP is flexible enough to work with your role.

For those continuing their education, such as studying for a Master's degree or PhD it may be more appropriate to postpone the programme. However, if the graduate is working in a veterinary role alongside their studies they can still participate in the programme.

We would encourage all graduates to enrol in VetGDP as it offers genuine support but if the graduate feels that the role they are going into is not suitable, then they should contact the RCVS and these will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Working as a Locum

New graduates who wish to work as locums may only do so in a VetGDP-approved practice. Before starting you will need to discuss your support needs with your employer. If you work across more than one practice, you only need a VetGDP Adviser in one of them. The VetGDP is based on developing a professional relationship between Adviser and graduate, underpinned by observation, feedback, and reflection so you will need to spend a significant amount of time at the same premises as your Adviser. If the graduate wishes to work as a locum, it is their responsibility to make sure that they can participate in the VetGDP. However, when a workplace is employing a new graduate as a locum, they must check that the graduate has appropriate support in place.

Further information about enrolments and exemptions can be found in the Frequently Asked Questions on page 23.

4.1 Requirements for hosting the VetGDP

It is important to the RCVS that the VetGDP fulfils the aim of being a genuinely supportive, workplace-based development programme for all graduates. It is acknowledged that many workplaces already offer excellent support to their graduates, but it is essential that all graduates – regardless of where they are employed – receive a consistent level of support, tailored to their specific requirements.

In order for a practice or workplace to be able to support graduates on the VetGDP they need to be an **RCVS-Approved Graduate Development Practice/Workplace**, having been accredited against the following criteria:

- One (or more) individuals working within the workplace meet the requirements to become a VetGDP Adviser, i.e.
 - o They have satisfactorily completed all modules within the RCVS e-learning programme for VetGDP Advisers, within the last five years, including any module assessments. (This programme also counts as 15 hours CPD for the individual). Advisers should ensure that they take note of the regular updates to the training programme from the RCVS.
 - o They have signed a declaration agreeing to provide their graduate(s) with regular support. Across the duration of the programme, this should equate to a *minimum* of 1 hour per week (per graduate), although support should be implemented flexibly in line with the specific requests of the graduate. The VetGDP Adviser must spend sufficient time at the same practice site as the graduate to have the opportunity to observe their work, provide feedback and also to be accessible when a graduate faces new challenges and may require assistance. Support activities include (but are not limited to) goal setting, planning, case discussions, observation of activities and feedback, progress review discussions, advice and guidance on practice.
- The Approved Practice/Workplace engages positively with feedback on the delivery programme and any quality assurance activity.
- The Approved Practice/Workplace should ideally be a member of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) or equivalent.

There are no restrictions on how many vets within a practice can become VetGDP Advisers and we would encourage as many as possible to do so.

Each graduate enrolled onto VetGDP must have an assigned VetGDP Adviser. It is possible that a VetGDP Adviser can be assigned more than one graduate, as long as they provide the necessary support to each individual assigned to them.

If a VetGDP Adviser plans to leave an approved practice, the practice should identify another vet who can train to be an Adviser and support the graduate. However, if the VetGDP Adviser leaves

unexpectedly and / or if the practice is struggling to replace them, the practice would need to contact RCVS to apply for a locum VetGDP Adviser. The RCVS would then contact local VetGDP Advisers that have volunteered to be on the 'locum' list to help and support the graduate, until a new VetGDP Adviser in the practice can be trained (or until the graduate completes the programme, whichever is sooner). The application will need to include details about estimated time frame until a permanent Adviser will be employed, which can be extended if necessary. Payment for the VetGDP adviser will be arranged by the workplace.

For Graduates who choose to work outside of veterinary practice, for example, in the public sector or for the Royal Army Veterinary Corp, etc., the employer will need to be a RCVS VetGDP-approved workplace and provide the same level of commitment i.e. a trained VetGDP Adviser with available time to fully support the graduate and participate in the required quality assurance activity.

4.2 Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) – what are they and how are they used in VetGDP?

EPAs describe the overarching activities carried out by a professional in their role and workplace.

Upon graduation, all veterinary students have demonstrated that they have achieved the RCVS Day One Competences, and that they have sufficient knowledge and skills to begin working as a veterinary surgeon. However, it is recognised that this is the *start* of their journey towards becoming fully experienced, confident and competent veterinary professionals across the entire scope of veterinary activities in their role. During VetGDP, it is envisaged that graduates will further develop as veterinary professionals, building upon and integrating their knowledge and skills into the context and breadth of holistic veterinary practice in the real world.

EPAs describe performance in a holistic sense, i.e., the everyday work activities of a vet in terms of 'real' situations involving dealing with clients, across a range of unique clinical contexts and scenarios. The focus is on the whole (EPA) activity as it carried out in the workplace, rather than on the deconstructed individual competences that are done during the process.

The EPAs are deliberately 'high level' descriptions of activity, and flexible, so that they can be relevant to all of the cases and / or scenarios which will occur in the workplace. Although EPAs will focus on one (broad) area of work, they are integrative and general professional skills such as communication, professionalism, organisation etc. will apply across multiple EPAs. EPAs capture the interactive nature of veterinary work, not only with the public but with the whole veterinary team.

The RCVS has developed a bank of EPAs relevant to the veterinary workplace, and this can be accessed on the RCVS website.

For each activity (EPA), the following information is provided:

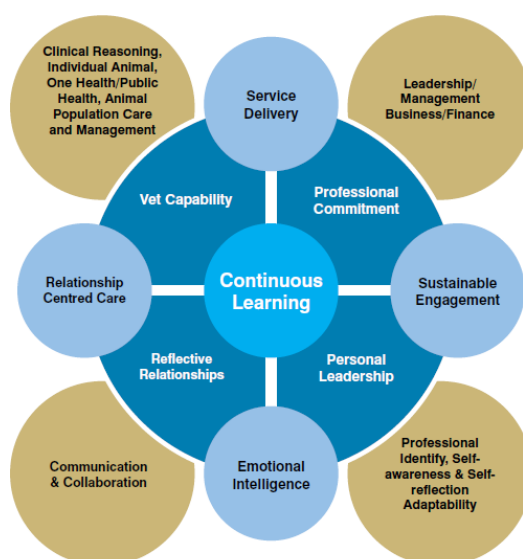
- a description and commentary of what the activity involves and encompasses
- relevant variables within the activity which may involve different knowledge and skill, for example different species, case complexity, environments.

- details of the main areas of competence that are involved in the activity, from the RCVS conceptual model for day one competences (Fig 2).
N.B. only the main domains are referenced for each EPA in order to highlight the primary focus of the EPA. In practice, any of the domains from the model can apply to any case / scenario

The aim is for graduates, upon completion of the VetGDP, to have reached the point whereby, across all EPAs relevant to their role, they no longer feel they would benefit from additional support regardless of the complexity of the activity faced, and that their VetGDP Adviser shares this view. The process is not time bound but we would anticipate that this will be approximately one year, depending on the learning needs and opportunities presented in the workplace.

If a graduate moves practices part way through the programme, they can take their e-portfolio with them and recommence with a new VetGDP Adviser. If their new role differs in any way, they are also able to change or update their EPAs within their portfolio.

Figure 2: RCVS Conceptual Model for Day One Competences



Using EPAs within the VetGDP

As a graduate progresses through VetGDP, they will gain more experience across each activity within their role (EPA), and with the support provided by their VetGDP Adviser gain increased competence, confidence and independence in each area.

At the start of the VetGDP

At the start of the programme, the graduate should meet with their Adviser to discuss and agree the EPAs relevant to their full role. It is important that all aspects of the role are covered by their choices so that the graduate gets the opportunity to reflect and learn from all areas of their work. If a portfolio is presented for review and it is felt that some EPAs are missing, this may result in adding extra time

to the programme to add in the missing EPAs. If there are any activities not covered in the RCVS bank of EPAs, then there is a template to help the development of further activities as required. Once agreed, these EPAs will become the framework of the graduates own, personal e-portfolio, against which they will record and monitor their professional development.

Within the VetGDP, the EPAs aim to provide a useful framework and structure for the programme, sufficiently flexible to apply across the majority of veterinary roles. However, should a graduate enter a role which includes activities not covered by the existing RCVS bank of EPAs, they should not feel restricted in any way. Those activities should still be included in their portfolio (a template is available to develop new EPAs, and RCVS can support this process).

During the VetGDP Programme

Through a range of support activities (see section 4.6 page17), it is envisaged that the graduate will carry out their veterinary duties as normal, and in doing so work through their EPAs and monitor progress against each of the contexts and variables within each. Although both the graduate and Adviser should monitor progress and identify areas to gain further experience, it is the responsibility of the graduate to request support where it would be most helpful to them. At the start of the programme, this may be on straightforward cases or situations to give them the confidence they need to work independently in these areas, and as they master straightforward activities, they may embark upon more complex procedures with the support of their VetGDP Adviser.

For example, for EPA 6 (see RCVS website EPAs) ***“Perform a common surgical procedure on a patient, including pre-operative and post-operative management”***. Upon completion of the programme there should be evidence within the graduate’s VetGDP e-portfolio (through reflections and feedback on a wide range of cases completed) that they are competent, confident and able to perform independently, common surgical procedures involving different species relevant to their role, case presentations, case complexities and where acute / chronic conditions are present.

So, in the first week of their role, a graduate might be happy to complete a dog castrate as they have had experience of this at vet school. However, if that same case has multiple co-morbidities or complexities, such as a testicular tumour or retained testicle, which could impact on the outcomes of surgery, the graduate may wish to request some guidance from their VetGDP Adviser or ask them to supervise and provide feedback afterwards.

The accumulation of these experiences will move the graduate beyond ‘day one’ to working independently across each of the areas of activity relevant to their role. Through regular review on progress within and across the EPAs, the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser are able to see which activities are being done well, and areas that may need further development.

It is important to understand that the way in which EPAs are used within VetGDP is somewhat different to how they are applied in other contexts, such as at undergraduate level or within other health professions training programmes. In such contexts, they are often aligned with formal performance assessment processes, leading to the ability to perform a certain procedure unsupervised, or the achievement of specific competences. This is not the case in VetGDP. EPAs within the VetGDP context simply provide a useful framework for a graduate’s e-portfolio, which

represents the activities in their role. There are no 'formal' assessments or tick-boxes in VetGDP. Successful completion of the programme will be demonstrated through reflections, feedback and progress reviews within the e-portfolio.

4.3 VetGDP e-portfolio

All graduates enrolled onto the VetGDP will have access to a bespoke e-portfolio where they can record their reflections, feedback and progress against the EPA's they have identified as being part of their role.

VetGDP Advisers will also have access to the platform so that they can support their graduate when reflecting on activities and add their feedback on either observed cases / situations, or progress review discussions. They will also be able to consider the evidence supporting progress across all EPA activities with the graduate towards the end of the programme in order to agree when to submit the portfolio to the RCVS for final peer review and sign off. *See further information on peer review and sign-off on page 18*

The e-portfolio has been designed to be intuitive to use. The recording platform has a range of features intended to make the user experience easy and straightforward to record all reflections, feedback and progress, including:

- Separate sections for each EPA, with easy navigation within and across each.
- The ability to upload documents, and or dictate text into fields to record reflections or feedback
- Easy to view progress for each individual activity and across all EPAs in the programme
- The ability to upload photos from your phone to your e-portfolio to record case-specific information
- The ability to record discussions using audio and upload e.g. feedback from the VetGDP Adviser

The e-portfolio is sufficiently flexible that if the graduate decides to move on to a new workplace before completing their VetGDP, they may take their e-portfolio with them and sign on with a new VetGDP Adviser. They can also amend their chosen EPAs if necessary.

4.4 Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in the VetGDP e-portfolio

The VetGDP e-portfolio is intended to provide an authentic record of a graduate's professional development and experience. All evidence submitted as part of the programme must represent the individual's own work and professional judgement.

All case material entered into the e-portfolio by a graduate must relate to genuine cases encountered in practice/workplace. Cases must not be created, altered or generated using generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools.

VetGDP Advisers are expected to undertake appropriate spot checks of the e-portfolio to satisfy themselves that the cases recorded by the graduate are authentic and accurately reflect real experience, rather than content generated using GenAI tools.

All reflections included within the e-portfolio must be the graduate's own work. Reflections must not be written or generated, in whole or in part, using GenAI tools.

AI may support the process of learning and presenting evidence, but it should not replace the experience, reflection or professional judgement that the portfolio is intended to evidence. There are instances where it is appropriate to use AI:

- Checking spelling, grammar and readability
- Improving the structure of something already written
- Asking AI to assist the graduate in guiding their reflection, for example, prompting questions to make them think more deeply

Progress reviews and development objectives must be completed by the VetGDP Adviser and or Graduate and must reflect their own professional judgement. These records must not be written or generated, in whole or in part, using GenAI tools.

Peer reviewers must complete their assessment of an e-portfolio using their own professional expertise and judgement. The review must not be undertaken, assisted or written by GenAI tools.

The integrity of the VetGDP programme depends on the authenticity of the evidence submitted and the professional judgement applied throughout the assessment process. If a graduate, VetGDP Adviser or peer reviewer is found to have used GenAI tools to generate any part of the e-portfolio or its assessment, they may be subject to action under the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct, or any other relevant policies or procedures.

As part of the submission and review process, graduates, VetGDP Advisers and peer reviewers must confirm that the work they have submitted or reviewed is their own and has not been created, in whole or in part, using generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools.

4.5 Progressing through the VetGDP programme: Graduate activities

At the start of the programme, the graduate will meet with their VetGDP Adviser to discuss the scope of their role and agree all of the EPAs within the RCVS bank which cover their full role and whether there are any additional areas which need to be included. (see section on EPAs, page 11).

Once agreed, these areas will be established as the different sections within the graduates own VetGDP e-portfolio, and progress against these can be recorded throughout the programme.

The VetGDP programme is workplace-based, and therefore the nature of the graduate's job as a vet (i.e., the clients, cases and activities undertaken day-to-day) drives the experience gained, particularly in the early stages. As the graduate becomes more established later in the programme and starts to look at their progress across the full scope of their role, they may identify particular types of activity (such as rare / unusual / complex cases or scenarios) where they feel they would like more experience and request support from their VetGDP Adviser (and/or other colleagues) in gaining access to these as they arise.

As indicated in Figure 1, while carrying out their day-to-day activities as a vet, graduates will progress through the programme gaining increasing experience, competence and confidence through their professional and clinical activities through the following activities:

- **Personal reflections on activities**, which include the overarching skills involved such as client communication, teamwork, professionalism etc. as well as the technical / clinical components of the EPA. These reflections would ideally be carried out – and recorded - each week – they do not need to be onerous and might involve adding an activity or recording some questions to discuss with your VetGDP Adviser as bullet points.
- **To ensure an unbiased external review, entries (from the graduate and the adviser) should remain anonymous so that the graduate the adviser and the workplace cannot be identified.**
- **Requesting observation and feedback from the VetGDP Adviser or a colleague.** In any working environment where there is a positive learning culture, a request for support, guidance or observation and feedback by the graduate demonstrates their personal leadership qualities and ownership of their professional development. There might be several reasons to request observation / feedback:
 - o To confirm their own reflections that something went well, and they carried the activity out to a high standard. This would give them confidence for future activities of this type or help them identify further areas to work on.
 - o To provide support during a difficult case or encounter, or where confidence is perhaps lacking, such as a complex clinical presentation not seen before, or working in a challenging environment or with a challenging client. In this situation the graduate can take confidence from the fact that there is someone with more experience nearby, but still able to attempt to perform the activity independently and receive valuable feedback.
 - o To revisit an activity where areas for improvement had previously been identified (through the graduate's own reflection, or feedback from a colleague / Adviser), in order to confirm the progress made.
- **Ad hoc requests for advice or case discussions.** For example, the graduate may wish to check their approach to a case, or a diagnosis or treatment plan, or they may wish to debrief following an activity that did not go as planned.
- **Monthly meetings with VetGDP Adviser to discuss progress.** These regular meetings should review progress made across *all* activities (EPAs), including the professional skills relevant across activities such as client communication, organisation, professionalism etc. in addition to an opportunity to look at the specific progress in each area. Taking a holistic view in this way, will also enable the graduate and Adviser to identify areas where additional opportunities for experience might be helpful, such as particular case types that don't come up regularly.

The VetGDP programme is led jointly by the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser, however it is the responsibility of the graduate to identify which areas they feel they need support in and to request support as required. Although all graduates have met the RCVS day one competences upon graduation, each will inevitably have had different experiences during their time as a student, whether that be the case types seen at vet school, or EMS experience.

It is envisaged that during the early stages of the VetGDP programme, graduates are likely to request support from their VetGDP Adviser / colleagues more often than in the later stages of the programme, when perhaps their requests for supervision / observation may only be for complex or unusual cases or situations, or to confirm their progress in particular activities.

It is likely that the programme will take around a year to complete for most vets, although some may be ready in more or less time. When monthly progress reviews indicate that the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser agree they have demonstrated (and recorded in their VetGDP portfolio) that they are sufficiently confident and competent to work independently across all activities, including different contexts and challenging cases, they will submit their portfolio to the RCVS for peer review and sign off. (Further information on peer review and sign-off is on page 18).

For further info access the graduate course on the RCVS academy

4.6 Progressing through the VetGDP programme: VetGDP Adviser support activities

VetGDP Advisers have agreed to be the primary individual providing support to the graduate(s) enrolled in the VetGDP in their workplace. This involves making a commitment to spending dedicated time supporting the graduate in their professional development, through a range of activities, in addition to learning best practice techniques for doing so and keeping up to date through the VetGDP Adviser learning modules.

At the start of the programme the VetGDP Adviser and the graduate should meet to review the graduate's role and identify all of the RCVS EPAs in the bank are relevant to their job. If there are any activities not covered by the bank of EPAs, they should develop additional EPAs using the template provided and the RCVS can provide support in doing this. Once agreed, the set of EPAs relevant to the graduate's role should be uploaded into their VetGDP e-portfolio.

The VetGDP is a workplace-based programme, and therefore learning takes place while doing the daily activities required as part of the graduate's job.

There are a wide range of support activities which might prove useful to the graduate. The VetGDP is led jointly by the graduate and their Adviser, however it is the graduate who is responsible for identifying when and how they would like support from their VetGDP Adviser (or other colleagues), as they are best placed to identify the areas in which they feel they would benefit from your support most.

VetGDP Advisers should ensure the graduate understands that their requests for support will be acknowledged positively, and they should feel confident that seeking guidance and feedback is expected and part of every vet's professional development.

In addition to support relating to individual activities carried out in the workplace, VetGDP Advisers are encouraged to diarise a monthly meeting with the graduate to review progress and provide feedback across all (EPA) activities.

Some examples of the types of *ad hoc* support that may be requested by graduates are as follows:

- General advice before, during or after a clinical case or consultation
- Case / activity discussion or debrief, to understand whether their approach was correct, or if they could have done something differently
- A 1:1 meeting to discuss their own reflections on an activity, and receive feedback
- Observation and / or supervision, and the provision of feedback and guidance for future activities or to discuss different scenarios and contexts
- Hands-on support (for complex cases or situations), with feedback
- A meeting to review progress with either an individual activity (EPA) or monthly reviews of their progress across all activities relevant to their role.

It is likely that most VetGDP Adviser support will relate to tasks/cases in which the new graduate is assuming primary responsibility, but which present new challenges. They may need “talking through” the procedure or “someone in the room”. Subsequently, the graduate will then make a note of when they completed a similar task/case unaided.

The RCVS VetGDP Adviser e-learning modules will prepare individuals to carry out this role effectively, and ensure they have the knowledge and skills to provide effective support. (see page 21 for VetGDP Adviser Training)

Once VetGDP Advisers have completed their training, they have the opportunity to register as a “locum VetGDP Adviser” that can potentially be called upon to support another local graduate in their geographical area on a temporary basis. This will, over time, create a pool of Locum VetGDP Advisers that can be used in exceptional circumstances. The RCVS will administer the register of Locum VetGDP Advisers, and support practices in finding one if required. Locums would be paid for their services by the practice they were temporarily supporting.

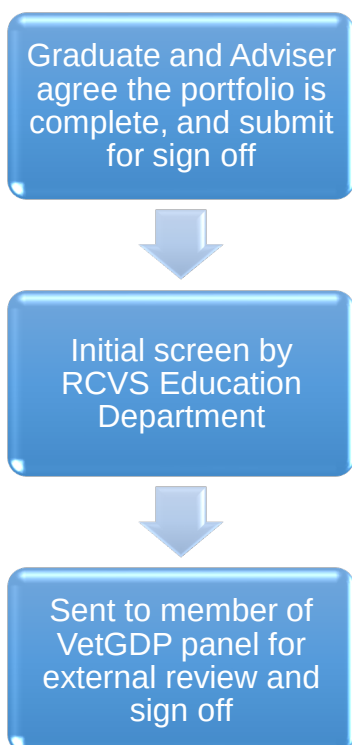
4.7 Completing the VetGDP: Peer Review and sign off

In order for the graduate to complete the VetGDP programme the evidence within their VetGDP e-portfolio supporting their journey to being a competent, confident independent professional across the full scope of their role will be subject to peer review by a third party.

For successful completion of the VetGDP programme, graduates must demonstrate that they can perform all activities within their role largely without support. Their VetGDP e-portfolio will portray their journey, from their first weeks in work where they needed a lot of support to becoming a more

experienced professional, working independently with confidence. It will show that they can perform each of the EPAs across a range of contexts/success criteria (identified in each EPA), including the professional skills relevant to all activities such as professionalism, client / team communication and organisation etc. This will be evident from the evidence (reflections, feedback etc.) within their e-portfolio showing the breadth and depth of their abilities, rather than through counting the number of cases they have seen. We anticipate that the process will be approximately one year – 18 months, depending on the learning needs and opportunities presented in the workplace. If the graduate needs extra time, they only need contact the RCVS.

This independent review of the e-portfolio ensures that the VetGDP Adviser does not have final responsibility for the sign off of the graduate, which might conflict with the mentorship aspect of their role.



However, it is expected that the VetGDP Adviser – through monthly and final reviews of progress with the graduate – will agree when the time is right to submit the e-portfolio to the RCVS for sign off. The graduate and the Adviser should ensure that the e-portfolio doesn't include any information that could identify the graduate, the Adviser of the practice so that there is an unbiased review.

Once received, each e-portfolio will be reviewed for completeness initially by a member of the RCVS Education Department. At this stage they will be looking to ensure there are sufficient reflections, feedback and progress reviews to support the professional development journey of the graduate relating to each EPA activity, and that this includes an appropriate range of contexts (as highlighted in the EPA, such as different species, case complexities etc.).

Providing the e-portfolio is considered to be sufficient in terms of content, it is then shared without the graduate's name with a RCVS VetGDP peer reviewers. Peer reviewers are experienced vets who have completed the VetGDP Adviser learning modules and are

most likely to be (or have been previously) an Adviser themselves.

In exceptional circumstances when the graduate and the VetGDP Adviser disagree about the progress made of the graduate and / or the readiness for final peer review and sign off, the graduate may submit their e-portfolio without the agreement of their VetGDP Adviser. Under such circumstances the e-portfolio should then include a commentary from the VetGDP Adviser as to why they do not think it is complete, and a response from the graduate. This will then be independently assessed by an RCVS peer reviewer.

5. Role of the VetGDP Adviser

The role of the VetGDP Adviser is to provide valuable one-to-one, in-house support for the new graduate for the duration of the programme, giving the graduate the confidence and experience to progress and work independently.

The role includes:

- **Giving effective feedback:** frequently observing the graduate carrying out the activities in their role and engaging in timely feedback discussions which are constructive, motivational and specific to the graduate's development.
- **Guiding reflection:** helping the graduate explore and express what they feel they have learned during specific cases or other work activities and guiding them to recognise their strengths and areas for further development; ensuring they are challenging themselves to progress in a supportive environment.
- **Providing 'hands-on' support and supervision:** providing guidance and / or assistance for challenging cases or activities, giving them the confidence to perform new or challenging techniques with the security of having a more experienced vet to help if needed. Encouraging reflection, discussing capabilities and expectations, assisting when called upon, sharing knowledge and experience and demonstrating skills.
- **Coaching:** listening to the graduate and guiding them to find their own solutions; supporting them in their identification of next steps for development. Supporting graduates in identifying where the gaps in their experience are, and helping them develop a plan how to address these areas.
- **Mentoring:** providing guidance and reassurance, developing their self-belief and encouraging them to find their professional identity. Managing expectations and encouraging discussions to help their professional development. (Further mentorship as part of a wider pastoral role may also come from elsewhere in the practice)
- **Goal setting:** working with the graduate to set clear, specific, challenging (but achievable) time bound goals, acting on feedback and reflections. Ensuring that all progress and the achievement of goals is recognised by the graduate and new goals are made which will move them forward.
- **Facilitating:** ensuring support is given from all areas of the workplace, allowing graduates to get involved with the cases they need to progress.
- **Progress Reviews:** meeting regularly (ideally on a monthly basis) to discuss the graduates' progress as a whole across all the activities in their role (EPAs).

VetGDP Advisers will have completed all modules within the RCVS e-learning package, including any module assessments, and keep this learning up to date with any changes to the training modules via a top up every 5 years.

The VetGDP Adviser is committed to supporting the development of the graduate:

- by being approachable and making themselves available to give help and advice, building a relationship of trust with the graduate so that they are comfortable to come and ask questions and actively seek guidance and feedback.

- by completing support activities, which may include guidance discussions, observations, feedback, reviewing specific skills, etc. It is likely that more time will be needed in the early stages of the programme.
- by completing a monthly progress review of all the EPA activities within the graduate's e-portfolio, (including professional skills relevant across activities such as communication, teamwork, professionalism etc.), looking at areas where the graduate is now capable and areas which still need more experience.

5.2 The Veterinary Team

Although each new graduate should have an assigned VetGDP Adviser who provides them with the support outlined above, all members of the Veterinary team are encouraged to assist, encourage and give feedback to new graduates. Some support activities such as supervision or observation and feedback may be delegated by the VetGDP Adviser to other team members if it falls outside their area of expertise, e.g. if the Adviser is a small animal vet and the graduate is in a mixed practice role. However, the VetGDP Adviser must still ensure that they spend at least the minimum recommended time with the graduate, and are available to give advice. All members of the veterinary team involved in supporting graduates are encouraged to complete the VetGDP training if possible.

5.3 VetGDP Adviser Training

One of the criteria for a practice to be recognised as a RCVS- Approved Graduate Development Practice is that the designated VetGDP Adviser has satisfactorily completed all modules within the RCVS e-learning programme, within the last five years, including any module assessments.

The training will prepare the VetGDP Adviser for their role in supporting new graduates in the workplace.

The VetGDP Adviser training is made up of the following modules:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Module 1: | Understanding the VetGDP Programme and the VetGDP Adviser Role |
| Module 2: | How to support your graduate effectively: Best practice to achieve positive outcomes |
| Module 3: | Exploring graduate's reactions, guiding reflection and providing feedback |
| Module 4: | Supporting graduates progression: Educational Alliances, Coaching for Change and Goal Setting |
| Module 5: | Supporting and mentoring a graduate who is struggling |
| Module 6: | Application of VetGDP Adviser skills in different scenarios |

Each module will represent 2-3hours of CPD.

The training is provided through the RCVS on-line training platform and incorporates mixed methods of learning, including short recorded presentations, reading, reflections, case studies etc. The learning is broken down into bite sized chunks of information to make learning manageable and accessible. Each module will have an element of assessment to provide feedback to Adviser that the content has been understood.

6. Quality Assurance of the VetGDP programme

It is important that all graduates receive the support they need throughout their VetGDP.

The specific requirements will vary between individuals, and it is likely that most graduates will need more support at the start of the programme, and less towards the end, as they become more independent and their experience, confidence and competence develops.

As part of our quality assurance processes, approximately 3-4 times a year we will administer – via the VetGDP e-portfolio platform – a short questionnaire comprising up to five generic questions, to understand whether the graduate feels they are being given the support that was agreed. Similarly, as it is also the responsibility of the graduate to drive the programme and request support when required (and to a reasonable level), a short evaluation questionnaire will be sent to the VetGDP Adviser to understand if this is working well. Any publication of this data will be in an anonymised, aggregated format only.

Should any problems be identified, the RCVS will endeavour to support the employer and graduate if / where needed.

It is important to note that all information provided within the e-portfolio and quality assurance questions will remain strictly within the RCVS Education department. A member of the VetGDP Panel will carry out a peer review of the e-portfolio prior to sign off, but the name of the graduate and VetGDP Adviser will be removed. The Graduate and Adviser should ensure that they do not include details in the e-portfolio which would identify the graduate, the adviser of the workplace so that peer review can remain anonymous and unbiased.

RCVS VetGDP Sub-committee

The programme will be overseen by an RCVS VetGDP and CPD Compliance subcommittee as well as the VetGDP and CPD Engagement Group. These committees report to RCVS Education Committee and will review and respond to the quality assurance processes as well as providing guidance for any issues and queries arising as the programme progresses.

For any additional information about VetGDP please contact vetgdp@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0791

Appendix 1: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I have been off the register for more than 5 years; do I need to do the VetGDP?

A: Yes, members who come back on to the register following a break of more than 5 years must sign up for the VetGDP. You may apply for an exemption if, for example, you have been working in veterinary practice overseas for the period off the register.

Q: I've not been off the register, but feel I would benefit from the VetGDP, can I sign up?

A: Yes, you can sign up for the VetGDP, please ensure that you have a VetGDP Adviser in place to support you.

Q: I qualified overseas and have now joined the RCVS register, do I need to do the VetGDP?

A: New members, who have less than one year of significant work experience as a veterinary graduate will be expected to enrol in the VetGDP.

Q: What happens if I change jobs? Will I lose everything in my e-portfolio?

A: If you change role you can take your VetGDP e-portfolio with you and sign in again with your new VetGDP Adviser. You can amend your EPAs if necessary.

Q: I'm studying for a PhD/Master's degree, how will I do the VetGDP?

A: If there is no clinical element to your work you may find it difficult to complete the VetGDP. In this situation you may wish to postpone the VetGDP until you are in a more applicable role.

Q: I have not been on the RCVS register for three years', but I have more than three years' experience overseas. May I sign up to be a VetGDP Adviser?

A: Yes, in many circumstances you may. Please contact the RCVS directly.

Q: I work part-time, can I be a VetGDP Adviser?

A: Yes you can, as long as you can spend at least an hour a week with the graduate and be available to give support.

Q: I am retired, can I be a VetGDP adviser?

A: Unfortunately not. VetGDP Advisers need to be on the RCVS register and be up to date with their CPD.