

Extra Mural Studies Working Group (EMSWG)

Meeting 1 – Scoping and workplan

Tuesday 11 January 2022, 11am- 3pm

Attendees

- Liz Mossop (Chair)
- Malcolm Morley (BVA Junior Vice President)
- Sally Everitt (Policy Committee representative)
- Calum McIntyre (AVS representative)
- Hannah Perrin (VMG representative)
- Andrew Parker (SPVS representative)
- Elysé Smith (BVA Council recent graduate representative)
- Osiris Ointa (AGV representative)
- John Remnant (Clinical Lecturer in Farm Animal Health and Production)
- Alex Gorman (British Veterinary Chronic Illness Support representative)
- Michael McGilligan (BVA Policy Officer)
- Amelia Findon (BVA Head of Policy and Governance)
- Sally Burnell (BVA Director of Policy, Media and Strategy)

Apologies

- Jason Aldiss (VPHA representative)

Welcome, participants and apologies

1. Liz Mossop as chair introduced the first meeting of the EMS Working Group. Attendees introduced themselves and noted their interest and expertise. The Chair set out the ethos for working of the group which would be to prioritise open and respectful discussion.
2. The secretariat explained that a minute of each meeting would be taken. Additionally, as the work of the group progressed a themes document would be developed. This would be a living document that captured what had been discussed and agreed.

Review of working group scope and objectives

3. The working group noted the scoping document agreed by Policy Committee. They were asked to discuss and propose any amendments that would benefit the document.
4. Under intended audiences it was agreed that:
 - “Veterinary employers” was not the correct term. This should be replaced with “Vets administering/delivering EMS” as this would cover the involvement of employers and non-employers.
 - “Vet schools” should be added alongside educationalists, as the interests of the wider institution should be recognised.
 - “Prospective applicants” should be added.
5. Under remit it was agreed that:

- The terminology “post-covid world” was not correct as it suggested a point when the disease would be over. This should be amended to “considering the impact of Covid-19”.
- There was a need to explicitly state that the safety and welfare of students undertaking EMS was part of the remit of the group.
- Under the third bullet point add a statement to include the transition from being a student to being a new graduate vet. This should highlight the role of EMS in the development of a professional identity through the opportunity to engage with role models.
- There should be some reference to the concept of the “hidden curriculum” i.e., the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn during EMS.
- It should be stated that influencing RCVS’ review of EMS should be included within this section of the scoping document.
- The working group should explore the purpose of EMS and establish what it should achieve. Doing this would help to clarify the benefits and costs of delivering EMS for all involved.
- Important to be clear that while there would be an exploration of “limited licensure”, it is a small aspect and should not divert the work of the group from the wider scope.

Action point: Secretariat to share BVA response to RCVS proposals on limited licensure from both the Graduate Outcomes project and legislative reform work, for information

6. Under sources of evidence, it was agreed that:

- Secretariat should aim to find evidence on the financial costs for both students and organisations delivering EMS. Having these costs would be useful to illustrate the “return on investment” for both parties.

7. Under consultees, it was agreed that:

- Government Veterinary Services ambassadors could be a useful source of information. There is a steering group that intersects different government agencies and could provide the wider view.
- British Veterinary Union should be included as they provide relevant information on workplace rights.
- Vet You have partnered with AVS. They would be a useful consultee from the perspective of personal finance and would hold relevant data.
- Rosie Allister should be consulted. Her research as focused on issues of veterinary students transitions from study to work and perceptions of EMS.
- Charlotte McCarroll was named as a useful consultee.
- Utrecht University has useful work on [“Entrustable professional activities in competency based veterinary education”](#) that should be explored also.

Action Point: Osiris Ointa will provide GVS webpage with the relevant information.

Action: secretariat to circulate updated scoping document.

Context and SWOT analysis

Education position

8. Working group members considered the existing BVA position in relation to EMS. It was noted by the chair that the education position was agreed in 2019, before Covid and the full impact of EU exit were known.

Wider context

9. Andrew Parker provided a presentation on SPVS EMS survey findings which would then be shared with members of the group. AVS survey reports were included within the papers of the meeting. Calum noted that he found the findings shocking specifically that EMS was often costly for students, that limited availability led to increased travel and accommodation costs. He also noted the wider impacts on wellbeing from isolation, mental health issues, and health and safety risks. However, these findings predated any impact from Covid-19, which was likely to have compounded pre-existing issues. He noted plans for a new survey to capture more up to date data on impact of Covid on EMS.
10. Alex noted a desire by BVCIS to undertake surveys with veterinary students with disabilities, to better understand the barriers they experience. He communicated anecdotes from disabled students who had undertaken EMS. They had stressful and tiring experiences sometimes resulting in being unable to study afterwards. He noted that online EMS has been a particular benefit for disabled students and hoped this flexibility would be maintained.
11. The contribution of EMS to the attainment of day one competences was addressed. It was noted that EMS was supplementary to the veterinary course, and it was the course which was designed to meet all of the requirements of the day one competences. It was unclear where the requirement for 26 weeks of EMS originated. It would be useful to have the reasoning behind this, as it appeared to be an anomaly in an otherwise outcome focused approach
12. It was noted that within the student survey data there was a divergence between the satisfaction scores of students and recent graduates. Specifically, the perception of the utility of EMS increases in the transition from vet student to recent graduate. Reasons behind this discrepancy were explored. Recent graduates, simply by virtue of more time in work, had more opportunities to apply any lessons they acquired from EMS. As recent graduates had more distance from their experience of EMS, they may be able to see negative experiences in a different light.
13. When discussing the shift from student to new graduate there was discussion on how to connect EMS to graduate outcomes in order to support that transition. Providing support and training to those providing EMS would be beneficial also.
14. Resilience in the system to provide EMS in any future pandemic or other emergency should be explored.
15. Elysé reported on a piece of research of relevance to the group. As part of the RVC research circa 350 vet students and recent graduates had been interviewed and provided their personal experiences of EMS. This data would have the added benefit of recency and would capture some Covid impacts.
16. Malcolm Morley reported on the RCVS EMS workshop which took place on 21 November 2021. He noted that BVA was awaiting the outcomes of the event but believed there may be an opportunity for the work of the group to influence the RCVS's next steps.

Action point: Secretariat to share SPVS EMS survey findings with members of the working group.

Action point: Elysé Smith to share contact details with RVC researcher with secretariat.

17. At this point the working group was split in two to undertake a SWOT analysis to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the current approach to the delivery of EMS. When both groups returned the following points were raised:

Strengths

- The fact EMS could act as a recruitment tool is a positive. It helped foster buy-in from employers.
- EMS provided vet students a wider understanding of the variety of functions within roles, in particular non-clinical aspects of clinical roles eg finance, insurance.
- It offered mentorship.

Weaknesses

- The system of EMS was too reliant on goodwill, connections and backscratching.
- At present the system failed to show students the variety of veterinary roles available to them.
- The fact EMS acts as a recruitment tool could be a weakness as it increased the power imbalance between vet student and EMS deliverer/ potential future employer.
- There could be limited opportunities to develop certain skills eg surgery.
- The businesses that delivered EMS incur a cost.
- The students that undertook it incur a cost.
- The quality assurance of EMS was weak. There was no standardization of approach, so experience was variable. Students may also learn bad habits or pick up anxieties around particular procedures.
- There was confusion about where exactly EMS sits within the training of vets and thus what it should achieve.

Opportunities

- Some practices had charged for EMS. It should be noted that this was an opportunity for those practices to generate revenue.
- RCVS acknowledging there is a need to reform EMS was a positive and created an opening for new ideas.
- There was an opportunity to bolster team vet by including vet nurses and other allied professionals in the delivery of EMS.
- Improved EMS could be a driver to improving wider retention and recruitment concerns in the profession.

Threats

- Changing practice structure.
- Partnerships between universities and vet schools to deliver IMR should be noted.
- The wider impact of EU exit created a threat to the delivery of EMS e.g., the need for visas to undertake EMS.

18. Following the group work reporting there was wider discussion. It was noted that there have been instances where a vet student has not been the vet student that was “expected” by the EMS administrator or clients. Attendees noted instances of harassment and assault of students on EMS placements. Cases of sexual assault were raised, as well

as threats of physical violence. Furthermore, cases where students were told to hide their religion, disability, and other protected characteristics. These cases were discussed without using names or identifying any specifics.

19. It was noted that there was a power imbalance between the vet students and those signing off on their EMS placements. It is difficult for a vet student to raise a complaint or leave a placement even when they may want to. This is in part because of the strict 26-week requirement. It may feel impossible to rearrange another placement or there may not be enough time to do so to ensure graduation on time.
20. It was recognised that a wider culture change would be needed to fix the issues raised above. These issues were not limited to EMS and were being addressed as part of the BVA Good Workplace position and the campaign surrounding it.
21. There would be a need, within the work of the group, to focus on support to students as well as to EMS administrators. Consideration should be given to how to ensure consistency of standards across EMS provision e.g., more accountabilities including sanctions for providers who fail to meet standards. The working group should also explore how to provide more flexibility within the system to allow adjustments for students who encounter unexpected circumstances.
22. It was noted that many students who experience difficulties during EMS may be unwilling to make an official complaint or raise the matter with their university. Consequently, the scale of the issue would be unknown. Where there are complaints raised it is important to understand how universities respond, how consistent that approach was. There was deemed to be a need for a strong approach on harassment and discrimination and that needed to be standardised across all the vet schools.
23. A further point raised to highlight the power imbalance was the vet students were reliant on the practice or individual EMS administrators for their accommodation during EMS. A particular issue with animal handling EMS is that vet students are working on a farmer's property- a further power imbalance. There was potential for a negative on-farm experience to directly impact on the number of graduates choosing to pursue large animal work. It was noted that there needs to be discussion with the farming sector to understand their role and to collaborate on solutions. As such, farming unions should be added to the list of consultees.

Establishing key principles

24. To guide the development of the group's work they were asked to establish some key principles. These principles would underpin the final position and would support and structure the working group's discussions.
25. In the BVA position on UK veterinary undergraduate education, was a statement that sets out an overarching vision for EMS. This was the starting point for discussion, where the following additional points were raised:
 - The current statement was summarised as setting out: what EMS was and was seeking to achieve, what students should see when experiencing EMS, and how EMS was underpinned by exposure to real work situations.
 - There was a lack of focus on the experiences of students within the current statement.
 - Specifically, a statement on the safety and wellbeing of students should be a principle.
 - There should be a reference to the client within the key principles. Exposure to clients is a benefit of EMS.
 - EMS underpins the hidden curriculum and the skills that students need to develop that support their personal and professional development.
 - EMS should support the transition from student life into work.

- EMS delivery should be outcomes focussed.
 - EMS should offer appropriate flexibility to meet the individual needs and aspirations of students.
 - Ensuring exposure to the right kind of workplaces was important.
26. In wider discussion it was noted that RCVS was in the process of publishing new accreditation standards and methodology for Veterinary Degrees. A key change to the current standards was that there will be a much greater focus on clinical education work in the 'general practice' context which must now make up at least 70% of vet students' studies. How general practice would be defined may be a difficulty. Furthermore, how should EMS provision reflect this emphasis.
27. Engaging with other professions on approaches to requirements for clinical placements as part of their training would be beneficial. Student vet nurses undertake placements in practice, although it was recognised that the structure was different, and it was more closely linked to future employment. There was a sense these are more well-ordered than is the case for EMS. There was therefore an opportunity to learn from this experience. It would also be useful to learn from the experience of veterinary education around the world.
28. The financial impact on delivery organisations should be considered. Consideration of placing additional requirements for these organisations e.g., training or reporting, could raise barriers to taking part which could see them opt out.
29. It was noted that EMS bursaries had been developed to support students undertaking placements. The example given was from [Vets4Pets](#). It would be important to understand these and their benefits, and whether they only served to mitigate issues rather than solve the systemic issues. EMS coordinators working within corporates was thought to be a useful view for the working group to hear.
30. It will be important to consider EMS in relation to Intra-mural rotations (IMR) to understand the distinct objectives of each and why the delivery is different. It was suggested that IMR was more structured for both participating practices and students. The practices are supported with specific training both in terms of the clinical delivery as well as issues such as diversity. They are also supported more directly by the university with more regular contact. Rotas are also different. IMR students would shadow the rota of the practice meaning they will get regular rest days. However, EMS students will often work 5 days a week, often long days. However, does this provide a more realistic picture of the lived experience of a vet.
31. It is important we consider the different costs for businesses. It was also asked how different the legal duties are for universities for IMR and EMS. It was unclear where EMS fits within veterinary education- is integral or supplementary. There is a question about how this distinction could affect funding.

Review of workplan

32. The members of the working group next discussed their workplan. It was agreed to add further meetings into the diary beyond already agreed second and third meetings. Two further meetings at regular 1.5-2monthly intervals should be added by the secretariat.
33. When discussing topics, it was agreed that the next meeting should focus on the student experience. The secretariat should then develop the work plan and meeting topics based on the development of the principles and themes document.

Action point: Secretariat to add two further meetings to the schedule and share with working group.

34. Members were then asked to provide any evidence, data or to name any experts which would be useful to the working group.
35. Members noted the importance of not just focussing on identifying problems. It would be important to see good examples of EMS and good systems of delivery.
36. It was noted that understanding the wider context of numbers of vet students as places grew and new vet schools opened would be important to understand the feasibility of any recommendations.
37. Engagement with organisation such as BVEDS and BVLGBT+ would be useful as they would be able to provide the perspectives from their memberships.
38. EMS coordinators would be a valuable source of information and should be engaged. Philipa Yam, Chair of the VSC EMS Group would be a useful contact.

Action point: Secretariat to gather available evidence on student places and any projections.