EMS principles and emerging themes

**What is EMS seeking to achieve?**

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<th>1.1</th>
<th>Overarching purpose</th>
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<td>BVA recognises that the provision of accessible, high-quality and appropriately funded extra-mural studies (EMS) is an important part of veterinary education. EMS enables exposure to a wide range of working environments, both clinical and non-clinical, as well as all aspects of the veterinary team. As such, EMS should be underpinned by a commitment to maintain exposure to different sectors and career routes and recognition of the importance of exposure to general practice as a cornerstone of veterinary education.</td>
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- What is the purpose of EMS and what should it achieve? This will help clarify the benefits and costs of delivering EMS for all involved.
- What is the contribution of EMS to the attainment of day one competences? Is EMS supplementary to the veterinary course?
- What is the reasoning behind the 26-week requirement? Is a rigid requirement for a number of weeks an anomaly in an otherwise outcome focused approach?
- There is a shift to a greater focus on the ‘general practice’ context which must now make up at least 70% of vet students’ studies. How should EMS provision reflect this emphasis?
- EMS should support the transition from being a student to being a new graduate vet.
- When discussing the shift from student to new graduate how do we connect EMS to graduate outcomes in order to support that transition.
- EMS can aid in the development of a professional identity through the opportunity to engage with role models.
- EMS delivery should be outcomes focused.
- EMS should offer appropriate flexibility to meet the individual needs and aspirations of students.
- Resilience in the system to provide EMS in any future pandemic or other emergency should be explored.
- Improved EMS could be a driver to improving wider retention and recruitment concerns in the profession.

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<th>1.2</th>
<th>How does EMS provide exposure to real work situations</th>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td>Ensuring exposure to the right kind of workplaces was important.</td>
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<td>Exposure to clients is a benefit of EMS</td>
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<td>The “hidden curriculum” is important ie the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn during EMS</td>
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**Student experience**

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<th>2.1</th>
<th>The safety and wellbeing of vet students undertaking EMS</th>
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<td>There are instances of harassment and assault of students on EMS placements this includes cases of sexual assault as well as threats of physical violence.</td>
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- There are also cases where students were told to hide their religion, disability, and other protected characteristics.
- There is a power imbalance between the vet students and those signing off on their EMS placements. This may be more pronounced during AHEMS (which has the potential for a negative on-farm experience to directly impact on the number of graduates choosing to pursue large animal work) or where the student is reliant on the EMS provider for accommodation.
- 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.
- 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 is unknown.
- Where there are complaints raised it is important to understand how universities respond, and whether that is consistent. There must be a zero-tolerance policy on harassment and discrimination which is standardised across all the vet schools (links to BVA position on good veterinary workplaces)
- How can we provide more flexibility within the system to allow adjustments for students who encounter unexpected circumstances?
- Veterinary students with disabilities experience barriers. Anecdotally disabled students who had undertaken EMS have noted stressful and tiring experiences sometimes resulting in being unable to study afterwards. Online EMS has been a particular benefit for disabled students this flexibility should be maintained.

### 2.2 Financial costs to students

- Understanding the financial costs to students would be useful to illustrate the “return on investment”.
- Do EMS bursaries to support students undertaking placements have real benefit? Do they only served to mitigate issues rather than solve the systemic issues?

### 2.3 Value of EMS for students

- 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. Recent graduates, simply by virtue of more time in work, may have 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.

### 2.4 Quality Assurance (QA) of EMS

- How can we ensure consistency of standards across EMS provision? Weak QA means experience and outcomes are variable.
- The system of EMS was too reliant on goodwill and connections

### The perspective of providers of EMS

- Understanding the financial costs to organisations delivering EMS would be useful to illustrate the “return on investment”.
- The fact EMS could act as a recruitment tool is a positive. It helped foster buy-in from employers. This can also be a weakness as it could increase the power imbalance between vet student and EMS deliverer/ potential future employer.
- To what extent is it an issue if practices charge students for EMS?
- Placing additional requirements on EMS providers (eg training or QA) could raise barriers to taking part which could see them opt out. Alternatively, increased support via training could encourage engagement.
There is an opportunity to bolster team vet by including vet nurses and other allied professionals in the delivery of EMS.

Themes last updated: February 2022