

## **EMS Working Group Meeting 2** **8 March 2022 1-5pm**

### **Zoom Attendees**

- Liz Mossop (Chair)
- Malcolm Morley (BVA Junior Vice President)
- Sally Everitt (Policy Committee representative)
- Madeleine Campbell (EWAP representative)
- Calum McIntyre (AVS representative)
- Hannah Perrin (VMG representative)
- Andrew Parker (SPVS representative)
- Elysé Smith (BVA Council recent graduate representative)
- Osiris Ointa (AGV representative)
- Anthony Ridge (AGV representative)
- John Remnant (Clinical Lecturer in Farm Animal Health and Production)
- Alex Gorman (British Veterinary Chronic Illness Support representative)
- Clare Owen (Vet Schools Council)
- 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 second meeting of the EMS Working Group and noted apologies from Jason Aldiss.

### **Minutes of the previous meeting**

2. Members discussed the minutes from the previous meeting. It was agreed the line “Partnerships between universities and vet schools to deliver IMR should be noted” should be amended, replacing the mention of vet schools with veterinary practices.
3. Members signed off the minutes as an accurate reflection of the discussion in meeting one with the above amendment.

### **Scoping form**

4. Attendees agreed that amendments to the scoping document were an accurate reflection of the discussion in meeting one.
5. Additionally, the scoping document should include reference to regional nuances. In particular, the different student financing policies in the UK. This could have impacts on widening participation and the broader delivery of EMS.

### **Student perspective on EMS**

6. Ahead of the EMS discussion Elysé Smith explained that she had collected impact statements from students and recent graduates. These experiences were shared as part of the roundtable discussion whilst maintaining appropriate confidentiality.
7. The paper “*An Investigation into pre-Clinical Extramural Studies Working Conditions in the Veterinary Undergraduate Curriculum in the UK*” by Gabriella Hetesy had been shared on

Glasscubes ahead of the meeting. Elysé, who has been in contact with the researcher, provided context to the group.

8. The paper provided an analysis of survey data from 348 vet students, with majority from years 2, 3 and 4. It was noted that data had been collected from six vet schools, but there was an overrepresentation from RVC.
9. Of those who answered the questions relating to harassment (on AHEMS placements), 31% had experienced harassment. 237 students reported facing no harassment or discrimination. 77% of students did not feel the need of assistance whilst on placement. This was noted as concerning as more vet students had indicated they had experienced harassment than considered needing assistance.
10. Other points raised included an expectation of presenteeism within EMS placements. The data indicated that 75% of respondents felt that they spent one or more of their placements only engaged in basic tasks and were unable to learn about species-specific husbandry. Can you put in the data point about day length?
11. It was noted that the experience of EMS sets a precedent for work. Therefore, expectations of presenteeism or poor work life balance established during EMS could be partially responsible for the burn out and poor retention amongst graduates.
12. However, despite these negatives, it was stressed that the data showed a clear majority had found AHEMS both academically and clinically relevant, which was a positive.
- **Action point: Secretariat to engage with Elysé Smith to ensure the input from impact assessments is captured and shared with working group as much as possible whilst maintaining confidence of participants.**

### Roundtable with guests

13. Six current students and recent graduate guests were invited into the Zoom call. The purpose of this session was for members of the working group to hear the experiences of students and recent graduates.
14. The first question was to establish the purpose of EMS. It was noted that, whilst the aim of EMS can be positive, from a student perspective, it was not always achieved for every student. Regulation and quality assurance of placements was often weak which meant the experience was variable. In certain cases, the person within an EMS provider organisation overseeing the placement may not have the time or interest to provide sufficient support.
15. It was noted that students felt that EMS was vital for the development of vet students. It provided an opportunity to explore areas of work without the commitment of signing a job contract. It pushed students out of their comfort zone and challenged expectations. The role of EMS supporting the learning of the veterinary curriculum was noted. Officially EMS is an adjunct to the veterinary curriculum i.e., RCVS sees that day one competencies should be achieved through the vet school course not by EMS. It directly connects to the course providing practical experiences to reinforce learning. This experience would vary between universities, for example Liverpool students are allowed to undertake clinical skills and EMS in their first year.
16. Having practical experience coinciding with theoretical learning provided students with a sense of purpose and usefulness for their studies. Having the “real world” experience alongside the taught perceived “gold standard” was seen as generally useful for students. However, EMS can also undermine teaching. There can be contradictions between what is taught and what happens in practice. This can confuse students, including when assessed as part of objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs).
17. There was a concern that EMS was overly relied upon by universities to provide the practical requirements of the course. Rotations, especially within a referral hospital setting, gave limited experiences for students that would need to be found instead in EMS. It was agreed that EMS

should be a complement to what was being learnt at vet school, rather than the place where students were learning essential skills.

18. RCVS had published new [accreditation standards](#) and methodology for Veterinary Degrees. A key change 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:
19. "Each practice area (companion animal, equine and production animal) must have 70% of their clinical education delivered in the 'general practice' context so that graduates are prepared for their first role within any type of clinical practice."
20. Attendees agreed the shift in focus was welcome, although at present, it was a very overarching statement with little detail. There was a need to define what this would look like in practice. Universities with different delivery models would have unique challenges meeting this new requirement. Vet schools would need to meet these standards to retain their RCVS accreditation. If 70% of IMR rotations would be expected to be in general practice, this could add additional demands on practices (should universities need new delivery partners) that would limit their ability to provide EMS.
21. Attendees explored the issue of widening access. Students without a veterinary or farming background could struggle to set up placements without connections. Geography can exacerbate inequalities. If students live in a part of the country with limited options for placements or which are great distances from areas with certain sectors, there were additional costs associated with taking those placements. Vet students needed to take on the additional costs, such as the expense of a car, to undertake certain placements.
22. There were very few placements available for sectors such as exotics. As such, students needed to travel further, and take on additional cost, when an opportunity is found.
23. Students made compromises on the EMS placements they chose because of financial limitations. Students noted that they would sacrifice to take these more attractive opportunities, or opportunities that they believe will lead to the areas of work they were interested in at the time. For example, students will take extra shifts at their part time jobs to save to cover these costs. Or, take less expensive (e.g., because of travel costs) EMS placements that were of less interest, to save up to take more expensive placements.
24. AVS provides grants for EMS placements. Vets4Pets had recently instigated a bursary scheme. In the United States there are examples of placements providing scholarships. There are also funds available through universities linked to hardship. However, the existence of such financial supports indicates the fundamental flaws within the EMS system.
25. Students may be unlikely to apply to these university funds because of a perception that someone else might have been in greater need than themselves. It was suggested that Cambridge University offers funding to all students undertaking EMS.

**Action Point: Secretariat to share information on Cambridge EMS funding with working group.**

26. Luke McBlain noted a survey of Glasgow University students which he was happy to share. It provided some evidence of the pressures and compromises vet students experience to finance EMS.

**Action Point: Luke McBlain to share survey data with secretariat. Secretariat would share this with working group.**

27. There is no additional financial or other support for international students undertaking EMS although there are additional complexities. For example, an international student may be unable to drive in the UK and therefore will be limited in the EMS they were able to undertake. Consequently, they were more dependent on public transport which may not extend to rural areas for AHMS. The ability to do EMS abroad is limited in terms of the amount permitted and how it is accredited by each vet school. International students will therefore spend more time in the UK outside of term time and be unable to visit family during the year, limiting much needed moral support.

- 28.** When discussing support from vet schools it was noted that known “bad” placements remain on university databases despite complaints being raised. Considering how much students invested and sacrificed to take these placements, those databases should be updated. Student groups had taken it upon themselves to develop and update lists of EMS placements. These are often sector specific as they are led by sector specific student groups.
- 29.** Covid-19 had brought additional difficulties. However, a silver lining was online EMS. This allowed students to maintain their part time jobs for more of the year, meaning they could save for more expensive placements which they saw as an investment. As a result, students were able to be more strategic/ picky with their EMS placement choices. It could be difficult to find EMS placements in certain parts of the country. Online EMS meant these placements became accessible for more students. Examples given included the pig and poultry sectors. AHDB had provided online resources for [pig AHEMS](#). The British Veterinary Poultry Association had supported similar resources for [poultry AHEMS](#).
- 30.** One student noted their experience of working in a vet practice alongside their studies. Often this work provided a more worthwhile experience than EMS but in the example given could not be counted towards EMS as they were employed. In their work they could feel like part of a team and didn't feel like a burden. They had the benefit of being paid, and the fact they were being paid meant the practice was taking the time to invest in their training and understanding of the work.
- 31.** EMS provided real world experiences that were different to IMR. EMS provides greater exposure to a variety of sectors and types of organisations within sectors. Students gained knowledge by interacting as part of a team, they experienced the realities of clients, practice finances, and how the financial circumstances of clients impacted on treatment decisions. This was noted as being part of the “hidden curriculum” and a valuable part of the preparations for work.
- 32.** EMS provides an opportunity to meet vets, network and find mentors. It was suggested that an official UK-wide mentor scheme would be helpful. There was goodwill in the profession to do this.
- 33.** For disabled students, online EMS during Covid-19 restrictions was good because it adapted to their needs in a way in-person EMS did not. Online EMS had opened doors to new areas of work and broadened horizons, that would not have been the case if they had been limited to in person placements. The fact that this was possible during Covid, meant it was always possible and should remain. EMS requirements needed to reflect the modern world both in terms of technology but also in regard to the needs of students.
- 34.** A definition of the purpose of EMS would enable a clearer discussion on the form that EMS should take. This would allow the development of online EMS resources which could match the expected outcomes.
- 35.** There were concerns about discrimination on EMS placements. Data from the Hetesy paper was referenced. It manifested in different ways. AHEMS was raised as a particular concern, especially where vet students were living in farm accommodation. University reporting systems were perceived as poor by the students. There was also a reported lack of support on EMS placements. Students were not aware who to call outside of office hours if they needed emergency support.
- 36.** AHEMS happens very early in the course when students themselves have limited understanding. Therefore, guidance needs to be very clear. Glasgow was noted as an example of good practice. Before placements, students were provided with a business card with numbers, including out of hours support. There was also a university “safe zone” app where students can talk with university security wherever they were in the UK.
- 37.** Microaggressions were raised also. This can have effects on the areas of work vet students chose to work in. Discrimination and discriminatory language could be broad and therefore hard to define. Negative comments on body image were raised on AHEMS placements which would not fit within protected characteristics definitions.

38. The requirement to reach a certain number of weeks of EMS was a barrier. Students forced to leave placements because of a bad experience, such as discrimination, would be penalised by having that week not counted towards their overall requirement. This could have knock on effects in terms of other placements and even the ability to graduate on time.
39. When discussing discrimination and discriminatory language on farm it is important to recognise this did not just come from farmers but also vets and the wider team. There was a need for wider change, and vets needed to be part of the solution and not the problem.
40. The benefits of working with vet nurses during placements was noted. Often EMS students spent as much time with RVNs as vets, and gained a lot of understanding as a result. The RVN student placement system was seen as good. There was a clear online portal and sign off process.
41. There was seen to be a move within some practices to provide a more structured EMS experience. Good EMS experiences benefited recruitment exercises.
42. A more objective standardised approach to EMS may be beneficial. Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) were noted. These were units of professional practice that capture essential competencies in which trainees must become proficient before undertaking them independently. This may provide a basis to better harmonise EMS with the degree programme. Some schools are already utilising them within IMR. This should also be linked to post graduate development, where EPAs have recently been introduced by the RCVS.
43. EMS should support retention and sustainability of the profession. The demands of EMS alongside the degree course could lead to students' identity being limited to "just being a vet". Allowing more time for other pursuits may allow vets to have more rounded identities and outside activities which may allow more stress relief, which in turn would support mental health and retention.
44. New graduates may not have all of the clinical skills expected by an individual employer on day one. The example given was cat spaying. Overburdened practices did not have the time, or would not find the time, to teach clinical skills on the job, or provide support to new graduates as they developed their clinical confidence. As a result, some vets had paid to participate in spay clinics in order to be confident in that skill ahead of interviews. This was seen as further exacerbating inequality as only those who could afford extra training would be able to benefit from it. If something is a competence expected on day one, it should be delivered as part of the course, not through the supplement of EMS.
45. Students learn valuable skills for their work as vets from roles outside of EMS placements. For example, as a high-level athlete, a part time job in customer service or through AVS. Those skills are valued by employers. Students need time to undertake those roles alongside EMS and their course.
46. Reducing the EMS time commitment does not mean vet students would not exceed that minimum level.
47. Important to consider this discussion within the wider transition to graduate vets. The work of Rosie Allister was referenced, specifically *Veterinary Transition Study - investigating the transition from veterinary student to practising veterinary surgeon: prospective cohort study*.
48. Guest participants were thanked for their insights and frank discussion of the challenges they had experienced.

#### **What does good look like?**

49. The working group members reflected on the roundtable discussion in the first half of the meeting.
50. Elsie provided further experiences gained through impact assessments which were not discussed earlier. She shared the story of a disabled vet who had undertaken EMS. They noted how their disability was discussed during their placement, leaving them feeling that the provider was more interested in their disability than they were in them as a human being.
51. A second case where a student on an AHEMS placement experienced physical threats leading them to cut their placement short. When the student raised this issue with the university, they were

called to a disciplinary hearing and made to feel like they were not believed or supported. To them the university was on the side of the farmer. That placement remained on the university list of approved placements after this incident. This experience had stayed with this vet years after graduating.

52. It was stressed, despite these negative experiences, that the survey data indicated the majority of students had positive experiences and valued AHEMS placements.
53. The BVA discrimination report noted that discrimination is experienced on EMS, 19% of cases are reported but this was likely to be an underreporting. It was noted that underreporting could be because of a lack of faith in the system to take action where discrimination was identified. Understanding the scale of the issue was important. However, this should not take away from the magnitude of the lived experience of individuals. It was explored whether there would be benefit in a new reporting mechanism which could collate the overall picture of incidents and provide support to students.
  - **Action Point: Secretariat to share BVA discrimination report with working group.**
54. EMS needs to be updated given the significant societal and professional changes that have happened since it was last amended. It was agreed that a system that was designed to work for the marginalised EMS student would also work better for everyone.
55. An overarching issue is that EMS is not well defined and therefore each stakeholder had a different perspective on the purpose and intended outcomes. However, whatever the outcomes, these would not be best measured in weeks. This working group needs to agree a definition of the purpose informed by their engagement with all of the relevant stakeholders.
56. EMS providers are expected to teach students but may not have the necessary teaching skills. There should be CPD for EMS providers. Quality assurance is important. This seems to have been done well for practices that provide IMR as part of distributive models. It would be worthwhile to explore how IMR practices provide EMS. There was an assumption that they may be better placed to provide this function.
57. There was already quality assurance of vet schools which provide veterinary teaching. There was a model that could be transposed, with amendments, to the teaching aspects of EMS, although this may be challenging given the different context.
58. In most cases good looks like a student being asked what they want to achieve at the start of a placement, or even beforehand to ensure there is a level of understanding at the beginning.
59. A proposal put forward was a national EMS database. It was noted that this had been suggested in the past and had not become a reality. Consequently, this was seen a solution that required additional consideration to develop further. It would be beneficial to have an EMS database which could support better matching of vet students with EMS providers. For example, a Welsh speaking farm could ask for a Welsh speaking student. Students with no experience on farm could be paired with farms that was willing to introduce the basics of farm life.
60. Discussing the existing themes document and using the headings in the document the below points were raised.
61. On the value of EMS, the working group noted that it allowed students to learn additional skills. Students got exposure to more areas of the profession. It provided complementary value to the degree course. Exposure to real world veterinary decision making, as opposed to academic “textbook” practice sometimes experienced in IMR referral practices is a benefit of EMS. There was a benefit for business who can identify potential employees through EMS placements.
62. The benefits of AHEMS were drawn out. It provided an opportunity for students to develop comfort on farm and with large animals. It removed barriers to a farm career which is important for a sustainable farm vet workforce. Those students without a farm background, and farm contacts, were the students most in need of this placement. It is worth exploring how best to design AHEMS to meet that aim. For example, did it need to be 12 weeks?

63. There had been a greater blurring between EMS and IMR and therefore the intended outcomes of each were more confused. Both needed to be better defined.
64. The opportunity for students to chat to more experienced vets in a work environment was a benefit for students. Being present in a workplace could lead to opportunities. Whilst online EMS had benefits, in the past 2 years there had been a loss of in-person interactions.
65. It was in the interest of providers of EMS to improve EMS, although the challenges of placement provision are clear. For certain sectors there was a benefit in being able to demonstrate a positive culture change which would support recruitment and overall capacity.
66. Encouraging exposure to different parts of the profession was a positive. A benefit was that it expands horizons and opens doors. Another positive is that allow students exposure to areas that they can decide not to pursue and therefore plan their careers more effectively.
67. A large variety of placements was positive. But there was also a benefit to spending a longer portion of time in one setting as this gave a deeper understanding of the workplace that would be transferable to other workplaces.
68. On student finances, it was expressed that if RCVS could consider EMS as an essential part of the veterinary course this would allow student financial support for students. The Long Courses Loan is awarded where a student was attending their course for more than 30 weeks and 3 days during their academic year (other than for the final year of a course). This is to provide extra living cost support for students who were required to continue full-time study on longer courses at the end of the academic year. If a placement was a compulsory part of the course and the higher education institution (HEI) agreed that the placement is an integral part of the course the HEI would need to confirm with the Student Loans Company the true study period and attendance dates for the student, and a Long Courses Loan could then be awarded manually.
69. The benefits of EMS were not shared equally by all students. Those with part time jobs were less able to partake in the benefits. Some universities will not allow a paid placement to be considered EMS. If a student has an existing part time job in a veterinary workplace this cannot be considered towards their weeks of EMS.
70. There was a sense, expressed by students and recent graduates, that part time jobs during study were frowned upon. Attendees all agreed that part time jobs offered beneficial experiences that would be valued by interviewers. Important for this group to counteract the message that students were hearing.
71. As a profession, vets can be overly focussed on the clinical aspects of the job and oversell these, when in fact it is the human factors- communication, teamwork, influencing, that are often more important to veterinary jobs. It may be worthwhile to broaden the definition of EMS to include non-veterinary roles where these interpersonal skills were developed such as athletics, a part time job or AVS involvement. This would also support widening participation.
72. Reducing the time requirement for EMS could have wider benefits in terms of mental health, identity and retention.
73. Vet schools should be better at interacting with students when they raise a complaint about an EMS placement. That student should feel supported and believed.
74. On regulating EMS there was discussion about how any quality assurance process by vet schools should also be applied to participating farms.
75. It was important to recognise that the structure of EMS and growing pressures may have limited vet schools' ability to act decisively when a complaint is raised. If there was a shortage of farms participating in AHEMS it was harder to strike one off the list for poor performance. The system relied on good will which limits what sanctions can be taken. It was important to recognise this issue is not limited to AHEMS.
76. Better support during a placement is also key. An emergency contact should be provided and students should be well aware of how to make use of this contact ahead of their placement.

77. An overarching point is that EMS should be an individualised experience as part of personalised learning, recognising that everyone's starting point was different. A cultural shift in this direction would solve many of the issues raised.
78. There are gaps between what vet schools think they are supplying and what they are supplying, based on what had been heard in the roundtable. Active listening was seen as a skill EMS coordinators should have.

#### **Discussion of Emerging Themes Document**

79. In the previous item the working group discussed the aspects of the themes document pertaining to the student experience. Other parts of the document explore aspects outside of that remit. Members were asked for wider comments on the document, in discussion the below points were raised.
80. The actual number of weeks of EMS should be reflected. As the group is focussed on all EMS not just clinical EMS, we should refer to 38 weeks: 12 weeks pre-clinical and 26 weeks of clinical placements.
81. The document should refer to EMS providers not EMS suppliers.

#### **Next steps**

82. Members of the working group agreed that the next meeting should focus on gathering the experiences of EMS providers. It was seen as important to gather appropriate input from a range of sources.
  83. A questionnaire should be sent to BVA specialist divisions to gather sector specific issues. It was noted that certain EMS providers seek payment for providing EMS. A question on this should be included in the questionnaire to understand how this worked in different sectors.
  84. Further analysis of the SPVS EMS survey data explored in meeting one would be useful in the next meeting.
  85. Hearing from both corporate and independent practices was also essential. Corporate practices were seen as providing increasingly structured programmes of EMS which should be explored. The meeting should also explore how both corporate and independent practices benefit from EMS (eg as a recruitment tool)
  86. There can be a disconnect between the plans set in head office and the delivery in individual practices. It would be important to capture that distinction.
  87. It was noted that hearing the experiences of practices that are delivering both EMS and IMR would be beneficial to understand the difference from their perspective.
  88. Hearing from a government or public health EMS provider would be beneficial also. The perspective of zoos, perhaps through BIAZA was also suggested.
  89. Engaging with farmers who provide AHMS would also need to be explored. BVA contacts within farming unions would be the initial first step.
  90. It would be useful to agree guests or expert witnesses for meeting 3, as soon as possible.
  91. It was agreed that approaching other professions with similar work placement requirements should be explored, in particular, how they were using technology to provide that experience.
- **Action point: Secretariat to develop and send questionnaire to BVA species specialist divisions and other relevant stakeholders. The findings should then be shared with the working group in papers ahead of the next meeting.**
  - **Action point: Secretariat to explore expert witnesses who would provide the breadth of evidence needed across EMS providers ahead of next meeting. Specifically, it would be worthwhile to explore how IMR practices provide EMS.**
  - **Action point: Members of working group to share any contacts via Glasscubes or email.**
  - **Action point: Secretariat to share plans for meeting three as soon as possible to arrange guests' dairies.**



**Close of meeting**

**92.** Next meeting was scheduled for Friday 6th May 9am-1pm.