EMS Working Group Meeting 3  
6 May 2022 9am-1pm

Zoom Attendees
- Liz Mossop (Chair)
- Malcolm Morley (BVA Junior Vice President)
- Sally Everitt (Policy Committee representative)
- Madeleine Campbell (EWAP 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)
- Jade Urquhart-Gilmore (British Veterinary Chronic Illness Support representative deputising for Alex Gorman)
- Milorad Radakovic (VPHA representative deputising for Jason Aldiss)
- Clare Owen (Vet Schools Council)
- Michael McGilligan (BVA Policy and Public Affairs Officer)
- Amelia Findon (BVA Head of Policy and Governance)
- Vera Cottrell (BVA Policy and Public Affairs Officer)
- Hannah Killeen (BVA Policy and Public Affairs Officer)
- Charlotte Austen-Hardy (BVA Media Officer)

Minutes of the previous meeting
1. The minutes of the meeting held 8 March were accepted as an accurate record.
2. In discussion it was noted that the EMS Coordinators group existed under the Vet Schools Council. This would be a useful means to coordinate engagement with the schools.

Themes document
3. In discussion it was noted that:
   - There was a need to clarity what was meant by the “hidden curriculum” and delineate it from the concept of “soft skills”. Furthermore, the concept of “soft skills” should be replaced by “professional skills”. This would cover communication skills, team working, professionalism etc. These are vital skills that were traditionally not delivered in the core curriculum. However, they are now, as well as being an important part of EMS.
   - Phrasing related to the value of IMR in university referral hospitals needed to be amended to reflect the tone of the discussion more accurately. The document should remove the strong statement that IMR referral practice could not deliver practical experience akin to primary care.
   - When discussing a zero-tolerance policy on harassment and discrimination it would be important to clarify what was meant by a “zero-tolerance” approach.
   - A clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities would be beneficial to EMS. It was suggested that a new section of the themes document should seek to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder e.g., RCVS, Vet schools, students, providers etc.

Presentation and discussion with NFU
4. NFU Senior Veterinary Adviser Claire White joined the meeting. Claire delivered a presentation outlining the NFU’s views on EMS, in particular AHEMS. Key points from the presentation and discussion are collated below.

5. NFU boards, representing different sectors, have a positive perception of EMS, including AHEMS. On farm EMS offered future vets an opportunity to experience different farming systems and a range of animal husbandry scenarios.

6. It was noted that farmers had little understanding of the difference between AHEMS and clinical EMS. There were significant variables in understanding and experience between students taking part in EMS placements. There were also differences in how each vet school organises EMS, which can further confuse farmers. Consequently, the individual learning objectives of each student were not clear to farmers, unless clearly stated by the student.

7. Support and guidance to farmers is limited. No formal support was provided by NFU or equivalent organisations. Often individual farmers would have longstanding relationships with certain universities. From these relationships there may be guidance provided.

8. Claire noted that the NFU saw an opportunity for a joint dialogue to develop support for farmers. She noted that farmers had an interest in the future of the farm vet sector and profession and would be willing to work together to support AHEMS placements. She noted that farms had capacity to offer AHEMS places: a strength as other suppliers of EMS were constrained as demands grew. The availability of accommodation on farm was a strength for some placements.

9. It was noted that travel networks to farms was a weakness. There was a potential for bursary funding to overcome this barrier and support accessibility to placements.

10. Online EMS was seen as welcome development. It was particularly good for supporting learning on issues such as herd health and preventative medicines.

11. The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway in England provided an exciting opportunity for structured EMS projects. Often EMS students provided valuable insight to the providers themselves. For example, Bristol students undertaking mock audits of abattoirs provided “fresh eyes” and therefore asked questions that would not have been posed otherwise.

12. The growth of the concept of a vet-led team also provided opportunities for vet students taking part in AHEMS and clinical EMS placements on farm. Farmers were increasingly seeing the value added by members of the wider vet-led team, which could be expanded to include vet students on placement.

13. It was noted that other types of students were on farm undertaking placements. These non-veterinary students also received limited support.

14. NFU noted they host agriculture students for a yearlong placement. On these longer placements the student received a salary. It was noted that it was common for a member of staff from the university to visit during the placement. This was an opportunity to touch base and re-examine objectives. It was agreed that a yearlong placement necessitated this in a way a short EMS placement may not.

15. Larger food businesses that support these longer student placements also paid the students. It was noted that employment status would likely be different for these longer-term placements.

16. There was a note that vet students providing their services on EMS placements without remuneration, could explain a negative mindset within vets. There needed to be a positive recognition of skills development. Developing experience and knowledge was positive but should not be seen as a fair reward for work in place of a salary. Generally, farming could be seen as unwelcoming to outsiders, with specific language and ways of working.

17. On the issues of safeguarding, discrimination, and safety in the workplace, diversity and inclusion was a workstream within NFU. There could be opportunities for AHEMS
placements in pairs, which could reduce lone working concerns. There was openness to exploring a joint piece of work between farmers, vets and universities to provide clear guidance on roles and responsibilities for all parties involved in EMS.

18. There was a perception that students were asked to carry out basic tasks during AHEMS. It was noted that survey data had indicated 75% of students had spent their time undertaking basic tasks such as sweeping floors. More could be done to provide a variety on placements to keep students engaged, whilst reflecting the realities of farm veterinary work which could be repetitive. It was noted that spending time on farm, understanding the system was a benefit. Often the vet student isn’t well identified on farm and therefore the type of work offered to them may not reflect the nature of their role.

19. Increasing the range of EMS provision was discussed. More food businesses and retailers could provide EMS placements which would allow an insight into the wider food chain. The nature of short EMS placements could make the burden of setting up a placement more than the benefit accrued to both student and business through the placement itself.

20. EMS could be utilised better to inform future vets of the wider political/policy space the vet profession occupies. An example given was the debate on non-stun slaughter.

21. There was a benefit to providing a more structured approach to EMS to support learning and development. A spiral curriculum was discussed. A spiral curriculum was one in which there is an iterative revisiting of topics, subjects, or themes throughout the course. A spiral curriculum was not simply the repetition of a topic taught. It also required the deepening of it, with each successive encounter building on the previous one. This concept was being utilised more with human medicine teaching, and is also utilised within some veterinary curricula.

22. It was noted that there was an opportunity for farmers to begin more active collaboration with the vet profession, universities, and other EMS providers. Central to success would be understanding the motivations of farmers to be engaged in EMS and ensure any changes did not create undue barriers to a system that relied on good will.

23. Better guidance will support the farmer as well as the student, and potentially encourage more farms to partake in EMS. A more structured approach to AHEMS may provide certainty and assurance to farmers but this could come at the cost of more bureaucracy. Farmers take a personal risk when taking part in AHEMS, which is a voluntary system.

24. Should a farm be found to have failed to live up to the standard expected, it was hoped that a new system would offer a facility to remove that farm from the scheme. Vet schools also had to be open to having difficult conversations with farmers should this occur.

Action point: BVA to engage further with NFU to take forward joint opportunities identified above.

The view of EMS providers: roundtable with guests

25. At this point, the working group meeting was joined by guests who represented the variety of providers of EMS. Guests included:

- Sue Quinney, APHA
- Emily Floyd, Rossdales
- Hannah Batty, LLM Vets
- Rob Williams, VetPartners
- Ian Futter, SSPCA and chair of the association of charity vets
- Martin Peaty, The Barn Equine Surgery
- Matt Pack-Garston Vets

Benefit to the provider e.g. recruitment tool
EMS was seen as a useful recruitment tool and helped build a relationship with potential future employees. One attendee described an EMS placement as a “four-week interview”.

At the end of a placement, one organisation undertook a formal scoring of students to determine who would make suitable interns following graduation. Those students were actively communicated with after their placement.

Within government there is an active programme to encourage vet students into government veterinary roles. It was noted that unlike other organisations government veterinary organisation did not necessarily want to employ vets directly out of university, but often benefited from graduates with additional experience in practice roles.

An extern model, utilised by Rossdales, was discussed. They make use of month-long placements which meant a different staff student relationship, with students allocated clear responsibilities as well as ad hoc learning. This facilitated the building of longer-term relationships and identification of future employees.

The benefits of students as an additional worker for the practice was noted. The student could be utilised by the provider to undertake roles at a time when capacity was limited. However, this could also mean students missed useful learning opportunities, and there was evidence of students being given less meaningful tasks at times, particularly when practices were short staffed.

**Engaging students**

- Some of the attendees noted they had a more formal process where students were expected to arrive with intended objectives planned. The same organisation also had a formal feedback session with students at the end of their placement.

- A better EMS application process could match students with EMS places better. This process could support objective setting early in the process, so no student arrives at a placement without giving proper consideration ahead of time.

- It was noted that an established interest in the relevant sector was helpful for students prior to undertaking EMS. Otherwise, the student would often feel bored or not derive the benefit another student would. A positive mindset was as important as experience.

**Costs to providers**

- There should be a recognition that when a provider decides to take on an EMS student this carries costs. Principally, working with an EMS student can create inefficiencies and slow down processes, for example a vet taking time to explain what they are doing whilst carrying out tasks. It was noted that RCVS should more effectively consider the costs to providers when updating EMS requirements.

- Attendees discussed what would make a reasonable reimbursement for the provision of EMS. It was ultimately agreed that some provision of CPD would be beneficial, but alone this would not be sufficient.

- The costs of delivering veterinary education were noted. Vet schools made a loss on each UK student and therefore needed to cross-subsidise through other routes. A change to EMS where providers were paid, in a manner like IMR, would create difficulties for vet schools’ ability to deliver veterinary education.

**Differences between IMR and EMS**

- As the learning objectives for IMR were clearer, for both student and provider, students were more consistently engaged.

- There was formal grading and feedback through IMR. This more formal process would be beneficial for EMS. It was noted that universities often provided no feedback after EMS placements, meaning providers were not made aware of changes they could make, and would happily make.
• IMR providers were given training from their sponsoring university. The quality of this training was agreed to be high and useful. Those attendees who had received this training and supported IMR placements agreed that this had improved their capability for EMS. Providers of IMR felt more comfortable and confident in their engagement with students.

• IMR training of practice staff included both online teaching on the theory of education and assessment. There were also lectures that took place within the vet school itself. At Surrey University this teaching includes staff from the school of medicine. This training was a requirement for all clinical instruction mentors. In practice this meant most clinical staff in a practice but was not necessary for all. A vet who had not undertaken the training was still able to participate in some IMR instruction.

• A key feature of IMR was guidance on how to give feedback to students. This was agreed to be beneficial to the delivery of IMR as well as EMS and other aspects of work.

• There was a suggestion that there was an opportunity to provide standardised training. This training would be beneficial to IMR, EMS, vet nurse assessments, vet GDP, as well as day to day interactions with staff.

• It was asked if EMS is the best means to deliver “real world” experience of veterinary working life. IMR was seen as increasingly performing a similar function to EMS, and the two systems were becoming less distinct. A benefit of IMR was that it recognised the commercial realities of providers by paying providers, with the subsequent ability to set higher expectations of IMR placements.

• More practices are choosing to take part in IMR over EMS. Major employers were increasingly signing overarching agreements with vet schools to provide IMR placements. This was of benefit to employers as it provided exposure to students at a scale beyond EMS. It was noted that it was still a decision for each individual practice to take on IMR, or EMS students, even where there had been an agreement made by the larger corporate structure. It was noted that as more providers opt to provide IMR, and opt out of EMS, the remaining providers supplying EMS will be reduced in numbers.

• One attendee noted that their practice had considered IMR placements but had decided against as there was a worry there would be a loss of flexibility for the practice e.g., less ability to prioritise clients or to assign annual leave.

• A potential barrier for farm vet practices taking part in IMR was a concern they would not have the flexibility to visit farms without an accompanying student. There was a concern that farmers may be unwilling to accept a vet student shadowing a vet on farm and this could lead to a loss of clients. It was suggested that EMS offered a practice greater latitude to manage each situation. Another attendee noted that their clients enjoyed the IMR experience.

Supporting student needs
• Attendees then discussed the ability of EMS to meet the specific needs of individual students (eg those with physical or mental disabilities, caring responsibilities etc). It was noted that practices providing IMR were adept at meeting these needs, and given support to enable this. Universities contacted providers ahead of time to raise any needs. Practices were able to move rotas as needed and provide other mitigations. It was felt that the university was largely understanding when these changes were needed. With EMS it was often the case that individual needs would not be raised ahead of time meaning it was difficult to make changes.

• It was likely that students would not feel comfortable to raise their needs after the start of a placement. It was also in the benefit of providers to be aware of students needs. Practices and individual vets felt that they had failed in their duty if they had not been made aware and made appropriate accommodations.

• Student access to their own vehicle was raised. This provided the student more flexibility whilst on a placement, but clearly with associated costs. A suggestion was a centralised form, which would capture student needs and share these with providers ahead of time.
General points

- There is an uncertainty about who is responsible for EMS. There was a sense that the responsibility had been delegated by the RCVS to individual vet schools and ultimately down to the individual vet student and provider. As such there was no overarching body taking an active role to ensure the continued viability of the scheme. Again, the importance of clarifying roles and responsibilities was noted as an emerging theme.

- There was discussion about the distinction between “work experience” and “work” that should be renumerated. It was noted that paid opportunities could arise from EMS placements, for example EMS students gaining paid opportunities as foal sitters.

- The breadth of the veterinary course and the fact the veterinary graduates have omni-potential upon graduation meant that teaching and EMS could lack depth. There could be consideration of better utilising the elective periods of the veterinary course and aligning these better with EMS.

- It was noted that shelter medicine was a unique area of practice. EMS placements in shelters were often taken up by American students, who were often enthusiastic. However, as a result few graduates who go on to work in the UK have gained this experience or interest through an EMS placement.

- When asked if EMS is still needed, one attendee noted that EMS was outdated and no longer required. There were better ways of accomplishing what EMS was intended to do. There needed to be a move away from measuring quantity to quality. Another attendee thought that there was a need for evolution not revolution. There remained a need for students to gain experience learning in a clinical setting and become acclimatised to veterinary workspaces. However, it was acknowledged that increasingly this was being delivered through IMR. The comparative prescriptiveness of IMR meant that the ability for the individual student to gain wider exposure and shape learning to their interests was limited.

- Learning for other professions and vets from other countries was advised.

Reflection on discussion

26. It was noted that the discussion in the previous session had generally aligned with what had been heard from students in the previous meeting. This was seen as a positive as the same problems and solutions were being mooted, meaning there was no obvious disconnect between the experiences of these different participants.

27. There was noted to be a general call from providers for more guidance and a more structured system. The expansion of IMR was noted as a theme. This raised the question if EMS was becoming redundant as a result. The purpose of EMS, within this changing landscape, needed to be more clearly defined. It was also vital that the different responsibilities within the delivery of EMS were clearly demarcated. To this aim, it would be important for BVA to provide ideas for what clarity should look like, not simply ask RCVS to clarify.

28. There was a concern that some of the outcomes of EMS, such as learning certain things from the hidden curriculum, were better accomplished by EMS and may not easily to achieved through a bolstered IMR. A looser focus on strictly defined outcomes allowed more time for students to exist in situ and soak up learning by talking with members of staff. A strength of EMS was that it provided a focus on the individual’s experience and interest.

29. Significant changes were noted which presented risks and opportunities. The rise of large corporate employers, changes to RCVS accreditation standards, the growth of IMR, growing vet student places and the development of new technology. Consequently, there was a need to be bold in recommendations and provide more detail. The effect of changes to the accreditation standards was unknown and would be uncertain for some time. Different models of IMR in different schools meant that the prescriptive requirements of EMS no longer fit with all curricular.

30. Changes to EMS had been suggested in the past but not implemented by RCVS. EMS had been referred to as the “jewel in the crown” of vet education, implying an unwillingness to reform.
Important that suggestions were made in a way that encouraged change by the college. The regulator should be making changes with a consideration on the impact on all stakeholders. In particular, the financial impacts on providers, universities and students. It was noted that an Equality Impact Assessment of EMS and any changes should be carried out.

31. Change would be difficult as EMS was embedded within the veterinary culture. It was suggested a wider rebrand may be helpful to support change. It was noted that a change in terminology could help clarify AHEMS, clinical EMS and IMR.

32. One suggestion was that EMS should be limited to term time. This may have the result of making holidays shorter. However, it was important for the wellbeing of students to have time to relax properly used for this purpose.

33. It was important as the term “entrustable professional activities” was being utilised by the RCVS, that there was clarity on what this meant.

**Action point: Chair and secretariat to share appropriate information on entrustable professional activities with working group.**

**AOB and next steps**

34. It was agreed that it would be sensible to use the next meeting to explore the perspective of universities. VSC would be happy to facilitate engagement. A survey of vet schools was agreed as a sensible first step with specific expertise invited to the next meeting. Engagement from new vet school, embryonic vet school and vet schools not in the UK was agreed to be useful. Heather Bacon of UCLAN was noted as a potential useful guest.

35. Engagement with RCVS was also discussed. The chair noted an intention to meet with RCVS to engage on the emerging themes and potential next steps.

**Action point: Secretariat to develop survey to vet schools and provide findings in papers for next meeting.**

**Close of meeting**

36. Next meeting was scheduled for 22 June 1-5pm.