RCVS CONSULTATION ON DRAFT POST-REGISTRATION FRAMEWORK FOR VETERINARY NURSING

1) BVA is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom and has over 17,000 members. Our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the veterinary profession in this country, and we therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.

2) Our response has been formulated in close liaison with affiliate organisation the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) with whom we work closely on a range of shared priorities. As part of our strategic alliance with BVNA we work together to represent the views of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses to the media, policymakers and general public and to raise the profile of the veterinary professions and the wider veterinary team, whilst still recognising the strong identities of the two distinct Associations and their memberships.

3) We welcome the opportunity to comment on RCVS proposals to bolster the role of registered veterinary nurses (RVNs), working as part of the veterinary team. We strongly support the aims underpinning the proposals, in particular the potential to address workforce shortages by improving retention through the development of a structured career path for veterinary nurses.

4) RVNs are an essential part of the veterinary team and deserve full recognition for their roles. Experienced and well-trained RVNs are a valuable asset to the veterinary practice team and contribute in many ways to successful medical and surgical outcomes, as well as providing essential client education and care. We welcome this opportunity to explore post-registration opportunities for RVNs with a view to developing their skills and expertise, and providing career pathways which formally recognise their invaluable contribution. This RCVS framework also provides a perfect opportunity to demonstrate to the public the value and importance of the role of RVNs within the team.

Summary

5) The career progression of RVNs should be encouraged, whilst taking care not to devalue the importance of GP RVNs, and we believe that the framework provides clear progression routes to encourage RVNs with a range of skill sets to undertake further training. The availability of such training will serve to instil confidence and increase the knowledge and practical skills of RVNs.

6) We support the proposed minimum of 18 months experience prior to beginning this type of course as being necessary to ensure the candidate has sufficient post-registration experience in order to inform further study.

Standardisation

7) There needs to be a rigorous standardisation of the training provided. Consideration also needs to be given to how this training is assessed and delivered.

8) We strongly support the aim of providing accessible, flexible and professionally recordable post-registration awards for RVNs from all academic backgrounds. However, we feel that an opportunity to create academic parity at this level may have been missed: creating a framework which allows those RVNs with a Level 3 Diploma to achieve a post-registration certificate in advance veterinary nursing equivalent to that available to candidates with a
BSc (level 7) could help to address the current academic variation in the different routes to registering as an RVN and bring clarity to the academic standard achieved at this higher post-registration level. Such parity would also enable easier assimilation of other academic qualifications into the post-registration qualifications.

Designations

9) We are broadly supportive of the proposed list of designations and acknowledge that it is subject to change.

10) In particular we support an expanded role for RVNs in general anaesthesia but consider it essential that the veterinary surgeon maintains overall responsibility for the anaesthesia process and “supervision” must be clearly defined to state that the vet must remain on the premises within audible, contactable distance at all times.

11) We believe that there is an important role for RVNs to play in the ongoing management of chronic cases, supporting owner compliance and contributing to the maintenance of long term welfare. There may be a role for RVNs in prescribing routine flea and wormer treatments and repeat prescribing for certain conditions already diagnosed, subject to routine veterinary surgeon checks. Should this option become available for RVNs, an appropriate designation could be included to recognise the additional training required to carry out this role.

12) We would value clarification on how the ‘Farm animal nursing to include TB testing’ designation is anticipated to dovetail with the current Defra proposals on Approved Tuberculin Testers.

13) We would welcome an additional Farm animal designation which incorporates the Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) role within RVN training, assessment and competencies.

14) The inclusion of an equine designation would be beneficial. The British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) has previously indicated that nurses working in equine practice are currently under-utilised and therefore options for developing their role, particularly with regard to preventive health plans, should be explored.

Conclusion

15) In conclusion, BVA supports the draft post-registration framework for RVNs. RVNs are valued members of the veterinary team and we fully support the development of career pathways to improve job satisfaction and increase retention. Consideration and clarification on the list of designations is required to ensure they meet the requirements of RVNs and veterinary practices.

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