

# Self-assessment report for the ENQA agency review 2023

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# 1. Introduction

In 2018, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) successfully gained membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) through the demonstration of its compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015. This was endorsed by a successful follow up review in 2020.

This self-assessment report (SAR) is intended to demonstrate the ongoing compliance of the RCVS with the ESG (2015).

In its role as statutory regulator of the veterinary professions, the duties of the RCVS include:

- the regulation of the professional conduct of both veterinary surgeons (VS) and veterinary nurses (VN),
- professional conduct hearings and associated disciplinary actions,
- maintaining the registers of members and associates of the college,
- operation of the voluntary veterinary Practice Standards Scheme (PSS).

The RCVS is the sole veterinary regulator in the UK governed by primary legislation in the form of the [Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966](#). Its authority to regulate the veterinary nursing profession is conferred through its [Royal Charter](#), a revised version of which was granted to the College in 2015.

A significant component of RCVS activity is the setting and monitoring of standards in veterinary education, for both veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, and the RCVS is seeking to continue ENQA membership in order to demonstrate that ongoing quality assurance processes are fit for purpose and in line with best European practice.

Historically, the two professions (VS and VN) have developed separately and have different legal foundations. This has led to differences in procedures for standard setting and monitoring. Since the new 2015 Royal Charter came into

effect, giving greater legal recognition to veterinary nurses, efforts have been made to bring processes and requirements for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses closer together, where possible and appropriate. This process is still ongoing.

On 1 May 2018, a Legislative Order was signed by Lord Gardiner, minister for Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), that started a three-year transition process towards more modern, agile and efficient governance structures. As a result, in 2021 the Council membership was reduced from 42 to 24, to include 13 elected veterinary surgeons to ensure an overall majority of elected members, three members collectively representing UK veterinary schools, two veterinary nurses appointed by the Veterinary Nurses' Council (VNC), ensuring nurses have a say in the governance of their regulator, and six members are lay people, appointed by an independent panel.

The accreditation methodologies for both VS and VN are cyclical and involve independent committees as part of the decision-making process. Both have a system of annual quality monitoring between accreditation events and the opportunity for an accreditation event to be triggered should the monitoring reveal major concerns or changes to programmes. The processes operated by the RCVS for the accreditation of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse degrees are similar, but not identical. This is discussed further in chapter 5.1.

This SAR details how the accreditation processes are quality assured to guarantee that those graduating from veterinary and veterinary nursing degrees are competent and confident to begin their careers in their chosen veterinary profession.

The report also discusses the changes made since the last review in 2018 and how the RCVS is looking to the future of veterinary education, allowing the RCVS to lead the way in accreditation practices.

## 2. Development of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The SAR was collaboratively written by RCVS staff in the Education and Veterinary Nursing departments, as these are the departments with responsibility for the accreditation of undergraduate education within the organisation. The process commenced in spring 2022, with the understanding that the review of the ESG standards by ENQA would be carried out in Spring 2023. Following confirmation from the secretariat, an internal timeline was created along with a Gantt chart to ensure key targets were met, working backwards from the deadline of the visitation in April 2023.

Input into the SAR has been from all staff within these departments as well as from relevant committees and key stakeholders, co-ordinated by the Education Quality Improvement Manager (EQIM). A steering group of essential personnel routinely reviewed the content as it was produced through regular virtual meetings, ad hoc meetings and email communication. This group checked content for factual accuracy and clarity of communication, as well as reflecting on progress so far and how to proceed.

Updates on progress and content were shared with committees during their regular cycle of meetings, allowing

for input from the stakeholders represented in these forums. The committees involved were the Primary Qualifications Subcommittee (PQSC), the Education Committee (EC), the Veterinary Nurses' Council (VNC) the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee (VNEC) and the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC).

The first full draft of the SAR was presented to the RCVS Senior Team in early September to facilitate a wider input from all the department Directors of the RCVS, and the CEO.

As amendments were made, the subsequent drafts were shared with the committees and stakeholders to ensure the accuracy of the content and the tone. In addition to the committees already listed, the draft SAR was also shared externally with the Vet Schools Council (VSC) and International Accreditors Working Group (IAWG) for their feedback and comments.

The final draft was completed by mid-October and the RCVS communications team then worked on the formatting and presentation so that the final version was ready for submission by the published deadline.



### 3. Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency

In the UK, the education system is divided into four main parts, primary education, secondary education, further education and higher education. National assessments take place at the end of secondary and further education and the outcomes of the assessments determine the subjects and often the location of study for the continuation of either further or higher education. The stage of education is based on chronological age in primary and secondary settings, and although formal education or training must continue until age 18 (further education), individuals can return to further or higher education at any age.

Higher education is not compulsory and offers a wide choice of locations and subjects to students based on their academic ability (measured formally at the end of further education) and their preference of location.

In the UK, there are around 175 universities and other institutions that are recognised by the UK government and have the power to award UK degrees. However, there are over 400 providers of higher education, which means that there are a number who cannot award degrees themselves but are validated by a recognised university.

The higher education system in the UK is devolved, whereby each nation (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) determines its own higher education policy including regulation.

The Office for Students (OfS) regulates universities in England, ensures that new Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are credible, and that universities are making efforts to widen participation. Regulation of universities in Scotland is carried out by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), in Wales the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and in Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy (DfE).

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent charity and membership organisation. It is used by higher education providers and regulatory bodies across all four UK nations to maintain and enhance quality and standards. For English higher education providers, they currently have a separate team who are the Designated Quality Body (DQB) which carries out reviews of providers and advises the OfS. However, they have recently terminated their agreement with OfS and will stand down as the DQB in March 2023. The RCVS has carried out a mapping exercise to establish if there will be gaps in the accreditation process if a new DQB is not appointed. This mapping exercise is shown in annex 10. This has been reviewed by both the Education Committee and the VN Education Committee and the resulting action is to keep a watching brief over the situation.

There is no separation of roles within the QAA for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the QAA works closely with all higher education providers and their respective funders and regulators, in line with the policy and regulatory approach of each nation.

The RCVS expects all universities offering veterinary and veterinary nursing programmes to meet all of the QAA's quality assurance requirements, including complying with the national qualifications' frameworks and the Bologna declaration, which sets out a series of guiding principles designed to ensure comparability in standards and quality of higher education qualifications. The RCVS also expects the universities it monitors to comply with the QAA subject Benchmark Statements and QAA codes of practice.

In addition, within the UK there are Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) who set standards for, and regulate standards of, entry into their specific professions and often participate in quality assurance activities. A PSRB may often have statutory authority over a profession or group of professionals, and as such will accredit or endorse programmes and courses that meet professional standards, provide a route through the professions, or are recognised by employers.

The RCVS is a PSRB and is the statutory regulator of the veterinary profession. In order to be accredited by the RCVS, a veterinary programme (VS or VN) must be delivered by an accredited institution of Higher Education, which means that they must be recognised to have power to award degrees (PAD) and be recognised by the devolved body in the relevant nation.

For overseas veterinary schools to offer a degree accredited by the RCVS, the veterinary surgeon degree awarded must be recognised as a professional qualification for veterinary surgeons by the relevant authorities (government and/or veterinary licensing body) in its own region/country.

VN degrees are delivered by Accredited Educational Institutions (AEIs), they are required to comply with all relevant legal regulatory, professional and educational requirements and this is reviewed at the accreditation event. The Royal Charter, in recognising veterinary nurses as a profession, requires the RCVS to hold a Register of veterinary nurses who have undertaken an accredited qualification. Maintaining the Register includes the accreditation of qualifications that can lead to professional registration; these are known as Licence to Practise Qualifications. Qualifications that lead to registration can be either at Further Education (FE) or Higher Education (HE) level. It is the responsibility of the RCVS to accredit all FE and HE qualifications that lead to professional registration.

The table below shows the number of veterinary programmes in the UK (VS and VN) and the numbers of students, over the last five years.

**Table 1**

Year	Degree programme	Number of fully accredited educational establishments	Number of new educational establishments*	Total number of students (fully accredited VS programmes only)**
2018	VS	7	1	4187
	VN	18		1992
2019	VS	8		4805
	VN	17	2	1990
2020	VS	8	1	5109
	VN	17	3	2078
2021	VS	8	2	5390
	VN	17	3	2358
2022	VS	8	2	Not yet available***
	VN	16	3	2958

\* a new educational establishment is one which has commenced a programme of study, but has not yet been fully accredited, as they have not yet had any students graduating

\*\* Vet schools are not under obligation to provide student numbers until they are fully accredited.

\*\*\* information will be available for the visit

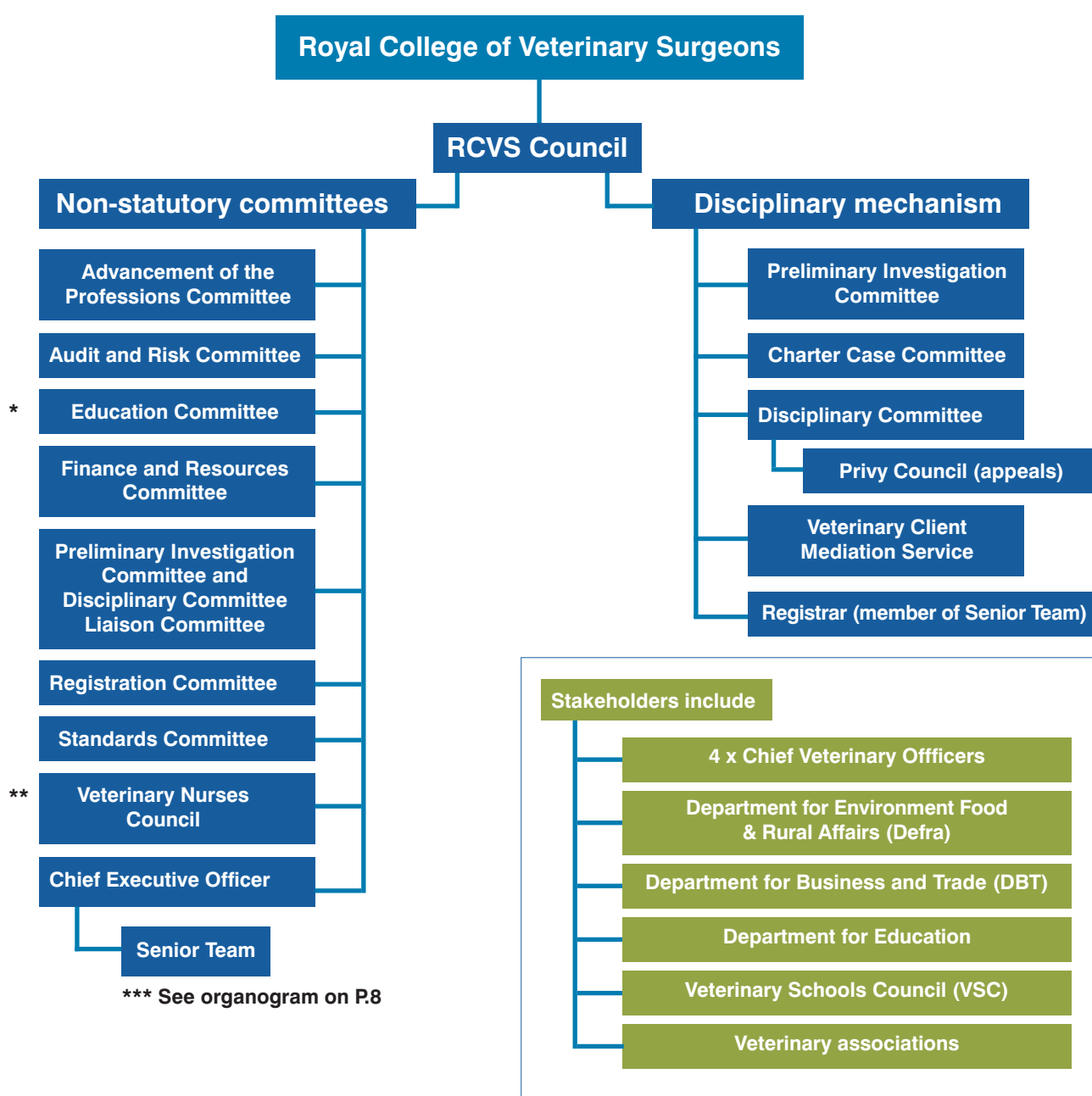
## 4. History, profile and activities of the agency

The RCVS Council and the Officer Team are supported by a system of standing, statutory and appeals committees, subcommittees, panels and working parties as well as the staff employed by the College. The organisation of the RCVS is in the chart below.

Details of the terms of reference of each committee and subcommittee can be found [here](#); details of the RCVS Council can be found [here](#); details of the VN Council can be found [here](#); details of the Officer Team can be found [here](#); details of the senior team can be found [here](#).

Figure 1

Organisation of the RCVS



\* Education Committee – Primary Qualifications Subcommittee (PQSC) is a subcommittee of the Education Committee

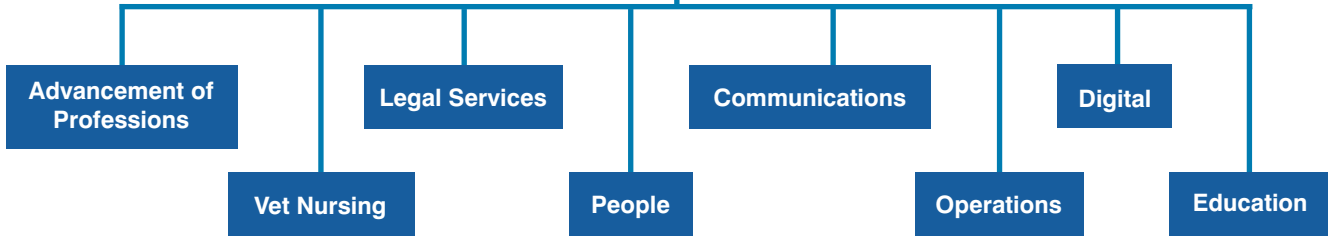
\*\* VN Council – VN Education Committee (VNEC) is a subcommittee of the VN Council



Senior Team

\*\*\*

CEO





The RCVS was established in 1844 by Royal Charter ([The history of the RCVS](#)) to be the governing body of the veterinary profession. The statutory duties are currently laid out in the [Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966](#). The key aim is to safeguard the interests of the public and animals by ensuring that only those registered with the RCVS can carry out acts of veterinary surgery.

In 1967, most of the original Royal Charter was superseded by the [Supplemental Charter of 1967](#), and in 2015 this was replaced by a new [Supplemental Charter](#). This was an important change as it established two key objectives:

- Sets the objects of the College – ‘to set, uphold and advance veterinary standards, and to promote, encourage and advance the study and practice of the art and science of veterinary medicine, in the interests of the health and welfare of animals and in the wider public interest’. The Charter gives the College power to ‘undertake any activities which seem to it necessary or expedient to help it to achieve its objects’ and mentions a number of specific activities.
- The recognition of veterinary nursing as a profession. It requires the College to continue to keep a list of veterinary nurses, which is to be known as the Register of Veterinary Nurses and gives registered veterinary nurses – RVNs – the formal status of associates of the College. The Veterinary Nurses’ Council is required to set standards for their education, training and conduct. New byelaws attached to the Charter require the RCVS Council to make rules dealing with the registration of veterinary nurses and the supervision of their professional conduct.

‘Veterinary Surgery’ as an area of work is protected by the [Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966](#) meaning that only veterinary surgeons can carry out acts of veterinary surgery, with some exemptions. Veterinary surgeons must be registered with the RCVS to practise in the UK and have the initials ‘MRCVS’ (for Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons) or ‘FRCVS’ (for Fellow) after their names. The title ‘veterinary surgeon’ is protected in law: only those who are registered with the RCVS can use the title. In 2015, the RCVS approved the optional use of the courtesy title “Doctor” by MRCVS.

The title ‘veterinary nurse’, and the letters ‘RVN’ (registered veterinary nurse), should only be used by those who have completed an RCVS accredited veterinary nurse licence to practise qualification and are registered with the RCVS. The title ‘veterinary nurse’ is not yet legally protected, but is one of the recommendations detailed in the report “[recommendations for future legislation](#)” (recommendation 1.4 page 8) published in October 2021.

There are currently over 36,000 registered veterinary surgeons with over 28,000 of these registered as “UK Practising” which means they can practise in the UK, with the remainder

being either registered as non-practising or practising outside the UK. There are nearly 22,000 registered veterinary nurses. The RCVS does not hold a non-practising or practising outside of the UK register for veterinary nurses.

One of the primary statutory duties of the RCVS is the regulation of the professional conduct of both veterinary surgeons (VSs) and veterinary nurses (VNs). Both professions have their own codes of conduct ([Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons](#) and [Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses](#)) and failure to comply with the code can result in disciplinary action. This action could result in the removal of the VS or VN from the RCVS Register of Members or RCVS Register of Veterinary Nurses, thus removing their right to practise their profession.

The voluntary Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) has been adopted by around two-thirds of UK veterinary practices and aims to promote and maintain high standards of veterinary care, through adherence to a set of published standards.

Another key duty of the RCVS is the setting and monitoring of the standards for the education of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. Section 3 of the [Veterinary Surgeons Act](#) specifies that those who hold a veterinary degree from a UK veterinary school that has received a [Privy Council Recognition Order](#) are entitled to be registered as Members of the RCVS (MRCVS). Only Members of RCVS have the legal right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK. Membership of the RCVS therefore constitutes the UK “licence to practise” for veterinary surgeons. [Section 5 of the Act](#) gives the RCVS the duty to supervise courses of study followed by students training to be veterinary surgeons in the UK. The Act specifies that the RCVS can appoint visitors to visit universities and to observe examinations ([Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, section 5 \(2\)](#)). In addition to visiting universities, the Act allows the RCVS to request other information from universities “as to the course of study and examinations leading to the degree to which the recognition order relates”. Under this provision, RCVS is able to monitor standards at UK universities on a regular basis, not just through the formal process of periodic accreditation visits.

Under the Act, the RCVS advises the King’s [Privy Council](#), which is a formal body of advisers to the Sovereign of the United Kingdom, on whether a UK university should have a Recognition Order. The official [statutory Recognition Order](#) is issued by the Privy Council and remains in place until the RCVS advises the Privy Council otherwise. The RCVS also accredits non-UK veterinary degrees, for example in Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa, under a separate section of the Act (VSA Section 6) and through mutual recognition agreements with the relevant authorities in those countries.

The RCVS regulates the veterinary nursing profession through the [Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 Schedule 3](#), the [Royal Charter 2015](#), the [Veterinary Nursing Registration Rules 2017](#) and the [Veterinary Nurse Conduct and Discipline Rules 2014](#) to protect the public interest and to safeguard animal health and welfare.

Veterinary nurse training was initially only available through a level 3 (further education) qualification through the RCVS awarding organisation for veterinary nurse qualifications. In 2015, the RCVS ceased its functions as an awarding organisation in VN education, and from 1999, degrees in veterinary nursing were available. At the time of publication, there are 20 organisations who offer higher education qualifications that are accredited by the RCVS as a “licence to practise” in veterinary nursing, and which entitle holders to enter the RCVS Register of Veterinary Nurses. Of the 20 organisations, two have the status of terminal accreditation and three have the status of provisional accreditation.

The RCVS has published criteria that must be met by providers of either VS or VN degrees. These criteria are known as the accreditation standards, and they are both available on the website. [RCVS Standards Framework for Veterinary Nurse Education and Training. RCVS Standards and Guidance for the Accreditation of Veterinary Degree Programmes 2023.](#)

The VS standards are categorised into six Domains:

- The learning environment
- Organisation, culture and values
- Educational governance and quality improvement
- Supporting students
- Supporting educators
- Curriculum and assessment

The VN standards are divided into six Domains:

- Learning culture
- Governance and quality
- Student empowerment
- Educators and assessors
- Curricula and assessment
- Effective clinical learning

The full accreditation process is described in detail in Chapter 5 and in the [RCVS methodology for the accreditation of veterinary degree programmes](#) and the RCVS VN standards handbook (currently being updated and will be available towards the end of 2022).

The RCVS works collaboratively with several international agencies who also accredit VS programmes: in Europe (the European Association of Establishments of Veterinary Education – [EAEVE](#)), Australia and New Zealand (the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council – [AVBC](#)), U.S.A and Canada (the American Veterinary Medical Association – [AVMA](#)) and South Africa (the South African Veterinary Council – [SAVC](#)). The RCVS invites visitors and observers from these other international agencies to join its VS visitation teams and, in some circumstances, undertakes joint visitations with these agencies. The RCVS has mutual recognition agreements with these agencies, which allow for the recognition of qualifications to be accepted as the basis for registration to practise veterinary surgery in the UK and the reciprocating country.

Work with the International Accreditors Working Group (IAWG), which comprises RCVS and the four agencies listed above, has harmonised accreditation standards and procedures for veterinary surgeon degrees across USA, Australasia, Europe including the UK, and South Africa, in which RCVS has played a key role. This has enabled common standards to be applied and joint visitations to be undertaken internationally, reducing the burden on veterinary schools.

When considering reports prepared by other international agencies, the RCVS has the final decision-making power in relation to accreditation of the overseas degree for registration purposes in the UK. The RCVS will only consider such reports where it is assured that the agency undertaking the visit has operated in accordance with RCVS accreditation standards, and where there is a formal mutual recognition agreement in place.

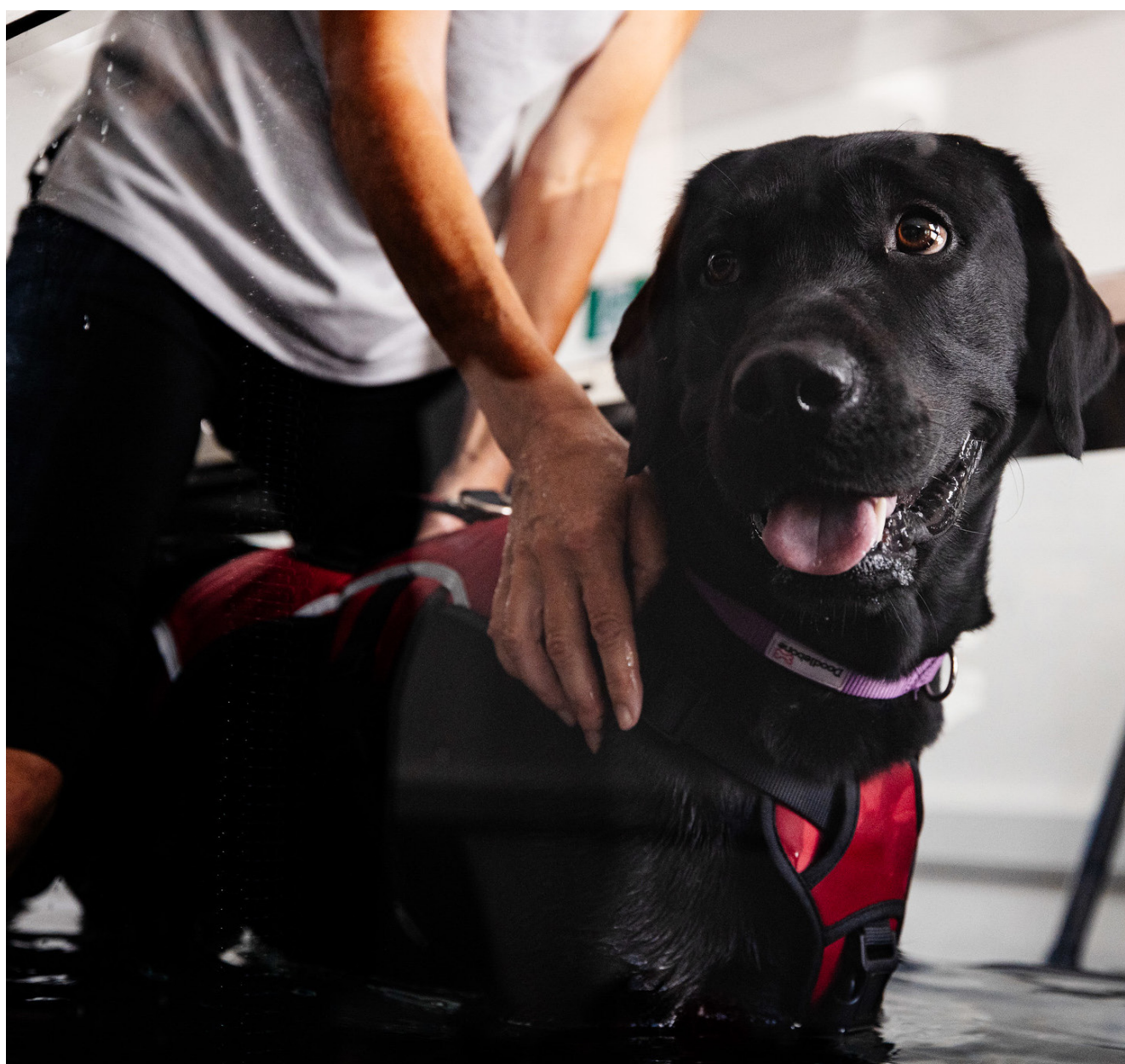
Since the UK left the European Union (EU) the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) is still in effect, although the RCVS is not bound by it. The RCVS Council made a temporary decision to continue to recognise graduates from EAEVE approved or accredited vet schools for registration purposes. This temporary decision is reviewed on an annual basis at which time the levels of assurance provided by EAEVE approval/accreditation are considered alongside the impact on the UK workforce.

[The Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education](#) (ACOVENE) is a voluntary organisation that was founded in 2007 to accredit veterinary nurse education programmes in the EU. The RCVS provides the secretariat for the organisation and the terms of the agreement remain since the UK left the EU. Accreditation by ACOVENE ensures that a minimum standard of veterinary nurse education has been met, allowing reciprocal recognition arrangements to exist between associated countries. This therefore means students graduating from accredited European veterinary nursing programmes may join the RCVS Register of Veterinary Nurses

without being subject to the veterinary nurse pre-registration examination. RCVS ACOVENE affiliation has raised the profile of the RCVS within the veterinary nurse profession in Europe.

The Veterinary Nursing department has regular involvement with the [Veterinary European Transnational Network for Nursing Education and Training](#) (VETNNET) conferences, where best practice is shared as well as collaboration on projects.

Since joining ENQA, two members of RCVS staff have participated in the Leadership Development Programme, there is representation on the Academic Integrity Working Group and the RCVS has a member of staff included in the ENQA pool of review experts.





## 5. Profile, functioning and (EQA) activities of the agency (compliance with Part 3 of the ESG)

### 5.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and process for quality assurance

**Standard:** Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

#### How we meet this standard:

The RCVS Strategic Plan for 2020 – 2024 is published on the RCVS [website](#) and not only includes the vision and mission of the College, but also references the actions that were taken against the previous strategic plan 2017 – 2019. The vision is: *“To be recognised as a trusted, compassionate and proactive regulator, and a supportive and ambitious Royal College, underpinning confident veterinary professionals of which the UK can be rightly proud.” This is underpinned by the four key ambitions: Clarity, Compassion, Courage and Confidence.* Clarity of the standards for education for both veterinary and veterinary nurse degree programmes is ensured through the review and update of these (see ESG standards 2.2 and 2.4); the implementation of the new standards has been carried out compassionately through individualised engagement with HEIs and AEs to support their understanding and to ensure that their adoption doesn't adversely affect the status of the HEI or AEI; it has taken courage to introduce standards that reflect the needs of the profession and a risk-based methodology that is unique amongst veterinary regulators. The changes have not always been met with unanimous agreement amongst stakeholders, but the College has taken courageous decisions in light of evidence and the changing needs of the professions; the

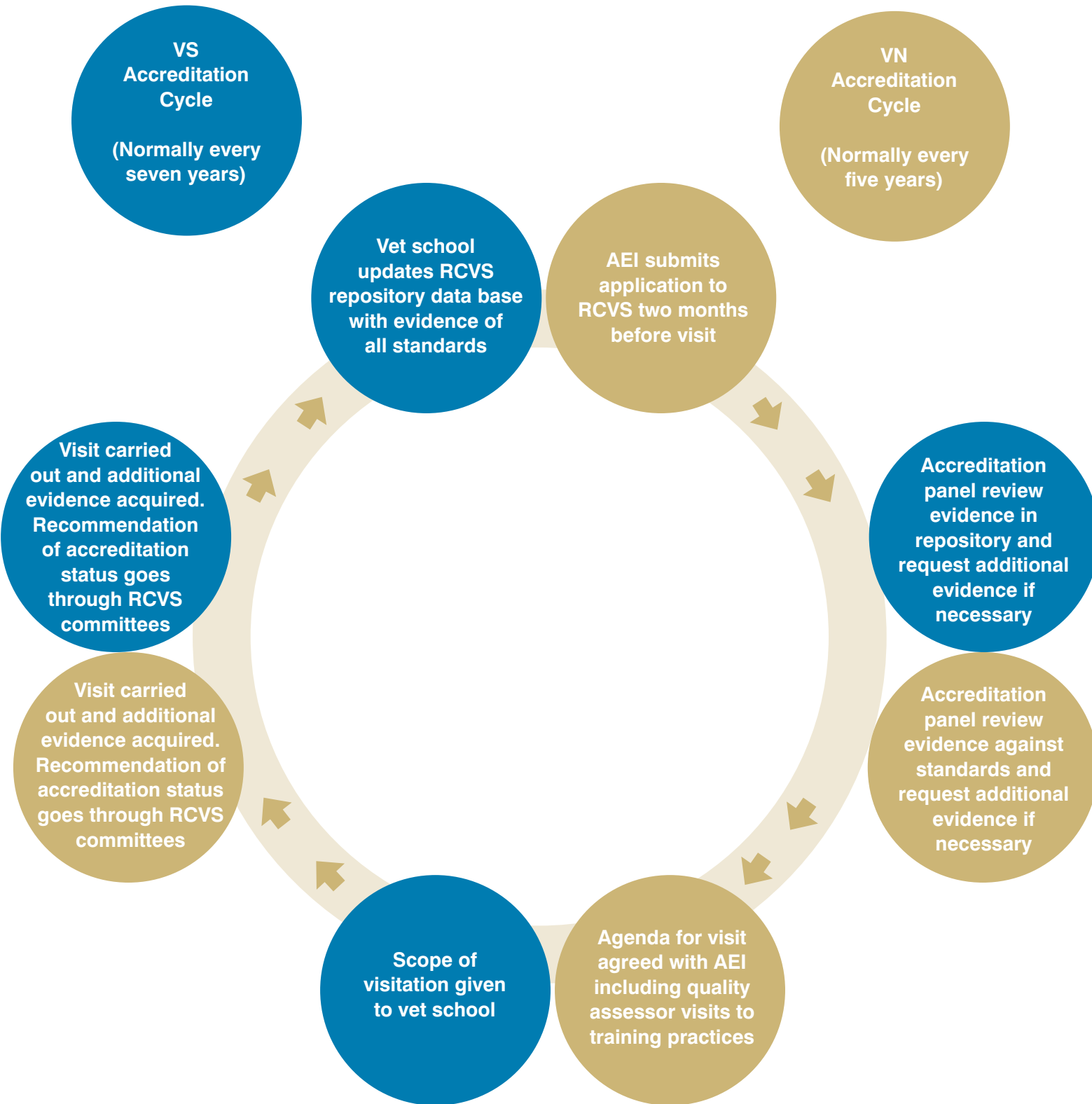
review and updates to the standards for education allow the College to be confident that the veterinary and veterinary nurse professions are supported with graduates who are both confident and competent on graduation.

The College operates as both a regulator and a Royal College. The College mission states *“As a regulator, we set, uphold and advance veterinary standards. As a Royal College, we promote, encourage and advance the study and practice of the art and science of veterinary surgery and medicine. We do all these things in the interests of animal health and welfare, and in the wider public interest.”*

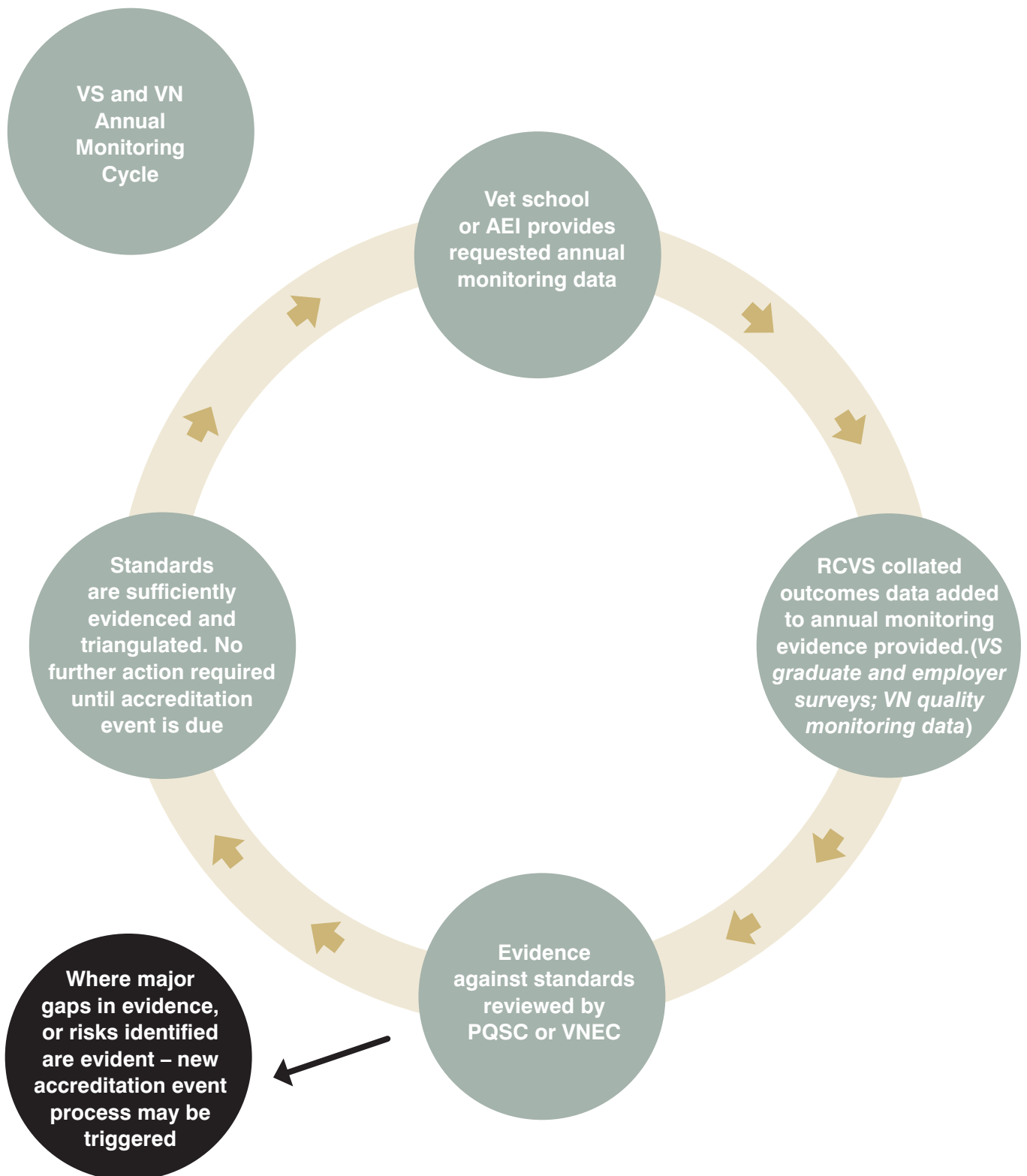
One of the primary roles under the College's Royal Charter and the Veterinary Surgeons Act is to set, monitor and uphold standards for veterinary education, and in order to achieve this the RCVS accredits programmes within universities offering the VS or VN degrees to quality assure whether these courses meet the required standards set out by the RCVS.

The cycle of accreditation and annual monitoring for VS and VN programmes is summarised in **Figure 2**.

**Figure 2:** VS and VN accreditation and annual monitoring cycles



**Figure 2:** VS and VN accreditation and annual monitoring cycles



The veterinary degree accreditation cycle runs over seven years, whereas the veterinary nursing accreditation cycle runs over five years. This difference reflects the relative lengths of the programmes – VS degrees take five (or in one case six) years to complete, whereas, a VN degree takes three or four years to complete. Part of the accreditation cycle includes a visit to the educational establishment.

The accreditation standards and procedures are available publicly through the [RCVS website](#). These standards ensure that accreditation procedures are applied consistently so that each accreditation visit follows the pattern of:

- Evidence collection through repository (VS)/application (VN) prepared by the institution (See annex 8 for the application spreadsheet for VN),
- Review of the evidence and pre-visit meetings of the accreditation panel,
- External evaluation through an on-site visit,
- Visitation report and rubric (see annex 12) based on the findings of professional experts,
- Period of consultation with the university being accredited, in which it is given the opportunity to respond to the panel members' findings,
- Accreditation decision by RCVS committee,
- Final visit reports published on the RCVS website.

Competences, standards and changes to the requirements of programmes are governed ultimately by the RCVS Council for veterinary surgeons and the Veterinary Nurses' Council for veterinary nurses. Significant changes to accreditation standards or processes are made through consultation and working parties derived from the professions and involving lay member input, to allow legitimate endorsement from key stakeholders. Minutes of committee meetings where such changes are discussed or approved are published on the RCVS website. Because of this multi-agency consultation process, all parties can be assured that no decision is taken without proper consideration.

One of the actions set out in the strategic plan for 2017 – 2019 was legislative reform to include veterinary nurses on RCVS Council. This was the result of a long process and co-incidentally was one of the recommendations from the last ENQA review in 2018.

RCVS Council and Veterinary Nurses' Council comprise a mixture of elected and appointed stakeholders (from the profession and universities) and lay members. Any registered veterinary nurse and member of the RCVS (MRCVS) can stand for election and candidates are voted for by their peers in an independent, annual procedure, following set protocols.

Other standing, statutory and appeals committees, subcommittees, panels and working parties are composed of council members and other appointed individuals, including student representatives. Accreditation panels for both veterinary and veterinary nurse programmes are made up of educationalists, employers and students, who have all undergone relevant training (see chapter 6.4).

Stakeholders are involved in the governance and work of the RCVS through their membership of RCVS committees such as the RCVS Council and the RCVS Veterinary Nurses' Council, through working parties, through collaboration with the Veterinary Schools Council (a separate organisation whose board includes the Heads of each UK veterinary school), and through direct contact with each individual veterinary nursing AEI. Other representative bodies within the professions are also consulted, for example, the British Veterinary Nursing Association and the British Veterinary Association and its specialist divisions.

The RCVS regularly conducts profession-wide consultations on significant issues, involving multiple stakeholders. Recent examples include the [graduate outcomes project](#), consultation on day-one competences, skills and professional behaviours for veterinary nurses and consultation on the RCVS Standards for Accreditation and methodology for veterinary degree programmes.

In July 2021, the [Veterinary Graduate Development Programme](#) (VetGDP) was launched to actively support new graduates in their first role. The launch was timed to coincide with students who were graduating with potentially less practical experience due to the impact of the Covid pandemic. Each graduate has an assigned adviser within their practice or other place of work, who has undergone an online training programme developed by the RCVS, who will guide and support them through the first year or so of their role. Every graduate and adviser has to complete a survey on commencement of the programme that reflects on how prepared the graduate felt on graduation, and how well prepared the adviser (employer) felt the graduate was. This is a reflection on the veterinary programmes by key stakeholders and provides nearly 100% response rates from new graduates and their employers. The data is shared with individual vet schools as well as being used by accreditation panels. The graduate and adviser survey summary can be found in annex 1.

Through working with the IAWG and ACOVENE to harmonise standards of accreditation around the world, the work of the RCVS is strengthened and its mission of advancing the educational standards of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses is achieved.



**Table 2** summarises the external quality assurance (EQA) procedures undertaken over the last five years at HEIs and AEIs running either veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse undergraduate degrees.

**Table 2:** EQA procedures

Year	Number of EQA activities	
	Veterinary surgeon (VS) degree programmes	Veterinary nurse (VN) degree programmes
2018	3	4
2019	4	5
2020	1	2 (1 in person; 1 virtual)
2121	8 (2 in person; 6 virtual)	3 (all virtual)
2022	1	1

Due to the pandemic, there was a decrease in accreditation visits in 2020, however, these were resumed in 2021, with six VS accreditation events and three VN accreditation events being carried out virtually and a further two VS events carried out in-person at the end of the year. In-person visits are planned to follow-up the virtual VS visit as per joint international virtual accreditation visit guidelines (Annex 2) 12–18 months after the virtual visit. These are not full visits

and will not duplicate the work of the original visit but are to provide reassurance on areas that would benefit from an in-person visit. This procedure was developed in conjunction with the IAWG to ensure that all regulatory bodies were following the same procedure which is key for joint visitations. VN visits were not required to undergo the same follow-up visitations as each AEI is subject to annual audits following accreditation. See **Table 3** for the quality monitoring cycle

**Table 3:** Veterinary Nursing Accredited Education Institutions Quality Monitoring Cycle

Year zero	Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four	Year five
<b>HE three-year programme</b>					
Accreditation	Progress Review & Assessment audit	Mock OSCE & DOS audit	Final OSCE & assessment audit	Stakeholder feedback	Accreditation
<b>HE four-year programme</b>					
Accreditation	Progress Review & Assessment audit	DOS audit	Mock OSCE & Stakeholder feedback	Final OSCE & Assessment audit	Accreditation
<b>Awarding Organisation</b>					
Accreditation	Delivery site audits	Mock OSCE & Delivery site audits	Final OSCE & Delivery site audits	Delivery site audits	Accreditation

In 2021, it was observed that since the introduction of the [RCVS Standards Framework for Veterinary Nurse Education and Training](#) in 2020, there had been a noticeable change in the quality of accreditation applications and supporting evidence being submitted. As a result, a proposal was made to the VNEC for the introduction of a pre-application engagement system to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of applications and to improve the quality of the accreditation events and the likelihood of success (see Annex 3). The VNEC supported the proposal, and the action was implemented from January 2022 for a 12-month period. For 2022, AEIs undergoing an accreditation event could choose to delay their accreditation visit by 12 months, if they underwent a pre-accreditation support visit.

The AEIs offering vet nursing undergraduate degrees who were due to be accredited during 2022 were contacted first and offered the support of a pre-application engagement during 2022, which consists of a face-to-face meeting with the relevant personnel at the AEI to be tailored to their individual needs. Following these meetings, the same provision was offered to those AEIs due accreditation in 2023, followed

by those due in 2024 and so on. All pre-accreditation meetings are taking place during 2022 and follow the same format (see Annex 4).

Each meeting is attended by at least two RCVS staff from the group of Director for Veterinary Nursing, Veterinary Nursing Qualifications Manager and Education Quality Improvement Manager. All meetings are followed up by feedback questionnaires and subsequent action plans made based on the findings through observation and feedback.

All visitations for both veterinary and veterinary nurse degrees are subject to [the Internal Quality Assurance \(IQA\) policy and procedures](#). Subject to availability, accreditation events for both VS and VN degrees are observed by the Education Quality Improvement Manager (EQIM), and feedback is gathered from all participants, both at the HEI/AEI and from the RCVS panel members. The observations and feedback are collated into a report of the event and any actions arising are fed back to the relevant teams. Analysis reports are generated and presented to the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) for review.

## 5.2 ESG Standard 3.2 Official status

**Standard:** Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

### How we meet this standard:

The RCVS is the sole statutory regulatory body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It operates under primary national legislation ([The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966](#)), and is also designated as the “Competent Authority” for the veterinary profession under European Union legislation (VSA, Section 1a). It is constituted under a Royal Charter, the first of which was granted in 1844, followed by various updated Charters, with the most recent [Royal Charter](#) coming into effect on 17 February 2015, bringing veterinary nurses into full regulation under RCVS.

Its role as a Chartered regulator is to set, uphold and advance the educational, ethical and clinical standards of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act, its primary roles are:

- a) to keep the Register of veterinary surgeons eligible to practise in the UK,
- b) set and monitor standards for veterinary education, and
- c) regulate the professional conduct of veterinary surgeons through its Disciplinary Committee procedures.

The RCVS’s authority and statutory obligation to accredit veterinary schools comes under primary national legislation, the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. Section 3 of the Act specifies that those who hold a degree from a UK veterinary school that has received a recognition order are entitled to be registered as Members of RCVS. Only Members of RCVS have the right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK. Membership of the RCVS therefore constitutes the UK “licence to practise” for veterinarians.

Section 5 of the Act gives RCVS the duty to supervise courses of study followed by students training to be veterinary surgeons in the UK. The Act specifies that RCVS can appoint visitors to visit universities and to observe examinations. In addition to visiting universities, the Act allows RCVS to request other information from universities “as to the courses of study and examinations leading to the degree to which the recognition order relates”. Under this provision, RCVS is able to monitor standards at UK universities on a regular basis, not just through the formal process of periodic accreditation visits. Under the Act, the RCVS advises the King’s Privy Council on whether a UK university should have a recognition order.

However, this is a historical technicality and, to all intents and purposes, the decision on whether or not to approve a given degree programme is made by the RCVS. The official statutory Recognition Order is issued by the Privy Council and remains in place until the RCVS advises the Privy Council otherwise.

The activities of veterinary nurses are covered by Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act, 1966. This sets out the professional and clinical jurisdiction of registered and student veterinary nurses, from which relevant veterinary nurse competences have been developed.

Under Schedule 3, the privilege of giving any medical treatment or carrying out minor surgery, not involving entry into a body cavity, is given to:

- a. *Registered veterinary nurses under the direction of their veterinary surgeon employer to animals under their employer's care. The directing veterinary surgeon must be satisfied that the veterinary nurse is qualified to carry out the medical treatment or minor surgery (see paragraph 18.5).*
- b. *Student veterinary nurses under the direction of their veterinary surgeon employer to animals under their employer's care. In addition, medical treatment or minor surgery must be supervised by a veterinary surgeon or registered veterinary nurse and, in the case of minor surgery, the supervision*

*must be direct, continuous and personal. The medical treatment or minor surgery must be carried out in the course of the student veterinary nurse's training.*

The RCVS was created by and still exists by virtue of a Royal Charter of 1844. Most of the original charter was superseded by the Supplemental Charter of 1967. A new Supplemental Charter to replace that of 1967 came into operation on 17 February 2015, which reaffirmed the role of the RCVS and the functions it may undertake in relation to veterinary education. The 2015 Charter also gave authority to the Veterinary Nurses' Council to set standards for veterinary nurse education, training and conduct. Under the RCVS Supplemental Royal Charter 2015, section 14, powers are granted for the setting of standards for the training and education of persons wishing to be entered in the register of veterinary nurses. It is this Charter that outlines the status of veterinary nurses as Associates of the College, and the Veterinary Nurses' Council (VNC) as the body which sets training and education standards for veterinary nurses.

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has responsibility for the Veterinary Surgeons Act and as such acts as the 'overseeing' department in relation to the activities of the RCVS.

## 5.3 ESG Standard 3.3 Independence

**Standard:** Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third-party influence.

### How we meet this standard:

#### *Organisational independence*

As detailed in [Chapter 4 – History, Profile and Activities of the Agency](#), the RCVS is the sole organisation responsible for the regulation of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the UK and it acts autonomously and independently in its accreditation activities. The RCVS accreditation activities are carried out without any third-party influence. In advising the Privy Council on UK accreditations, the RCVS is independent of the government of the day.

The RCVS is not reliant on other organisations for its finances, as it derives most of its income from the annual registration/retention (licence to practise) fees of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses.

The RCVS is an autonomous organisation independent of government, universities and any other veterinary organisations.

The Veterinary Surgeons Act and Royal Charter determine the functions of the RCVS that ensures independence from the institutions that it evaluates.

#### *Operational independence*

The RCVS operates under primary national legislation and its statutory duties are laid out in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. The RCVS is also designated as the "Competent Authority" for the veterinary profession under European Union legislation ([VSA, section 1a](#)).

Under the [RCVS Supplemental Royal Charter 2015](#), section 14, powers are granted for the setting of standards for the training and education of persons wishing to be entered in the Register of Veterinary Nurses. It is this Charter that outlines the status of veterinary nurses as Associates of the College, and the Veterinary Nurses' Council (VNC) as the body which sets training and education standards for veterinary nurses.

### *Independence of formal outcomes*

The RCVS panel members appointed to VS and VN accreditation event teams act on behalf of the College and remain impartial throughout the process. Their role is to assess whether an institution is meeting the RCVS standards of accreditation and report back their findings to RCVS committees, who use this information to make a judgement on accreditation status. The RCVS accreditation panels contain individuals from all spheres of the veterinary professions ranging from university academics to practitioners in corporate or private practice, and current or recently graduated students. Whilst participating in RCVS accreditation events, individuals represent the RCVS and not their constituent organisations. VS panel member training includes guidance on how to avoid unconscious bias to ensure that procedures and decisions are based on panel members expertise and evidence-based decision making that aligns with the RCVS values and processes of accreditation. VN panel member training is to be updated to an on-line format and will also include this guidance.

VS and VN panel members are required to declare that they have no conflicts of interest when joining an accreditation team, so that they can operate impartially without any prejudice towards the university being accredited. The conflict-of-interest guidance and declaration is in annex 11.

Part of the panel member training emphasises that there is not one prescriptive model of education, that there are many

possible variations on how an institution can meet the RCVS standards, and panel members are encouraged to be open to these differences.

The formal outcomes of the accreditation process are a collaborative effort so that no one individual holds sway over an accreditation decision. External expert opinion and student representatives populate the accreditation event rubric for both VS and VN events and this is then considered by a committee process which includes impartial experts who were not involved in the writing of the rubric/report or were involved in the accreditation event process.

Where a member of a committee or sub-committee involved in the accreditation process has acted as part of the accreditation team or has other links to the HEI/AEI under discussion, they would play no part in the making of recommendations on accreditation status.

For a new school or programme, the RCVS Council or the VNC has final approval of an HEIs/AEIs accreditation status, based on the recommendations from experts at all stages of the process. However, for an existing programme, responsibility is devolved to the Education Committee (EC) for VS. All decision making for VN programmes are delegated to the VNEC, however, these decisions are ratified by the VNC. Because of this multi-level approval process, the RCVS is confident that its accreditation decisions are independent and based solely on impartial expert opinion.

## 5.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

**Standard:** Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

### **How we meet this standard:**

In 2018, we stated that *“the College has not hitherto analysed themes and trends across reports to any great extent”*.

Following this review, a thematic analysis policy was adopted and presented to the panel during the follow up visit in 2020, who were satisfied with its inclusion.

Through its quality assurance activities, the RCVS generates a range of data from veterinary education establishments. Since the last visit by ENQA in 2018, there has been an increase in data collected, in particular graduate and employer surveys, for which there has been almost a 100% response rate, and improved feedback following accreditation events. This includes stakeholder feedback following accreditation events of both VS and VN programmes, graduate and employer surveys, National Student Survey (NSS) data and annual monitoring data.

Through appropriate analysis of this data, these findings can contribute towards the analysis of educational activities and on the improvement of quality assurance processes. A thorough and careful analysis highlights developments, trends and areas of good practice within the regulated educational establishments, as well as any areas of persistent difficulty. Through the effective sharing of the general findings with stakeholders, relevant actions are identified and implemented. The anonymised data is shared with each vet school, thus vastly improving their ability to consider this in their own Quality Improvement activities. Previous to this, schools only had a 5% – 10% response rate to their graduate and employer surveys.

Of the accreditation events carried out for both VS and VN programmes, a representative sample are observed by the EQIM. Feedback is also sought from the panel members,

the education establishment, students at the establishment and other stakeholders linked to the establishment. The observations and feedback are used to complete an IQA report for each visit and the reports are used to improve the accreditation processes. The individual reports are presented to the ARC for consideration, and thematic analysis of key areas is also reported and presented. Examples of these reports are in Annex 5.

The Thematic Analysis policy (see Annex 6) has been updated and reviewed by the ARC to include a projected plan of thematic analyses to be undertaken over the coming years. The policy also includes details of the reports that are written based on the findings of the accreditation events for both VS and VN programmes. These are not thematic

analyses per se but do represent how data is used to explore the trends and themes being seen in the accreditation events and how these are then used to inform future events.

It is recognised by the RCVS that this is a work in progress, but the planning should highlight that a range of thematic reviews are proposed that will have meaningful outcomes. For example, exploring the trends in meeting individual standards as the RCVS moves from an input-based system to a more outcomes focussed system; trends in graduate perceptions of their strengths and weakness over time; the changes in the types of evidence submitted by HEIs and AELs as they move into outcomes-based evidence to meet standards.

## 5.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

**Standard:** Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

### How we meet this standard:

#### Human resources/people

The RCVS supports separate departments for the veterinary and veterinary nursing school accreditation activities.

These departments are responsible for implementation of policy agreed by the RCVS Education Committee and the RCVS Veterinary Nurse Education Committee. Workload is monitored by the Director of Education and the Director of Veterinary Nursing, and the operation of accreditation activities is managed by separate teams within these departments. Resourcing and staff reviews are regularly carried out through formal (meetings and appraisals) and informal means. Any extra resource needs are identified and communicated to the Director, who will create a resource rationale. This is then presented for approval to the Chief Executive Officer and People Director.

Once approved, the People Team supports the process by helping to produce job descriptions and personal specifications, dealing with advertising and/or agency liaison, and then short listing and arranging interviews. The Education and Veterinary Nursing teams work with the People Team throughout the recruitment process in order to make appropriate recruitment decisions.

Since 2018, the Education team has expanded in line with an expansion of vet schools within the UK (both an increase in student numbers in existing vet schools and an increase in the number of vet schools). Changes in working practice

have also allowed recruitment to be nationwide as it is no longer necessary for staff to be working daily from the office in London, thus expanding the recruitment radius.

In February 2020, the VN Team went through a restructure to address the following:

- The uneven distribution of workload within the Qualifications Team. The facilitation of a robust, risk based and consistent auditing strategy to drive improvement in educational experiences within the profession was proving very difficult with the resource available,
- The provision of opportunities for career progression within the department, which was potentially impacting negatively on longer-term staff engagement and motivation (evident from staff engagement survey (Peakon) feedback and 1:1 sessions). It was important to create a structure that considers a succession plan for the Director of Vet Nursing, Examinations Manager and other roles for the future success of the department,
- With the relinquishing of the RCVS Awards in 2015, reduction in the amount of assessment delivered by the RCVS and the redistribution of some activities to the Registration Department, facilitation requirements for assessments had severely decreased,
- There was a need for increased accountability for role specific requirements' encouraging a proactive, cohesive, and dynamic workforce,
- To ensure there was the capability to deliver both the VN Department projects and the RCVS strategic activities.

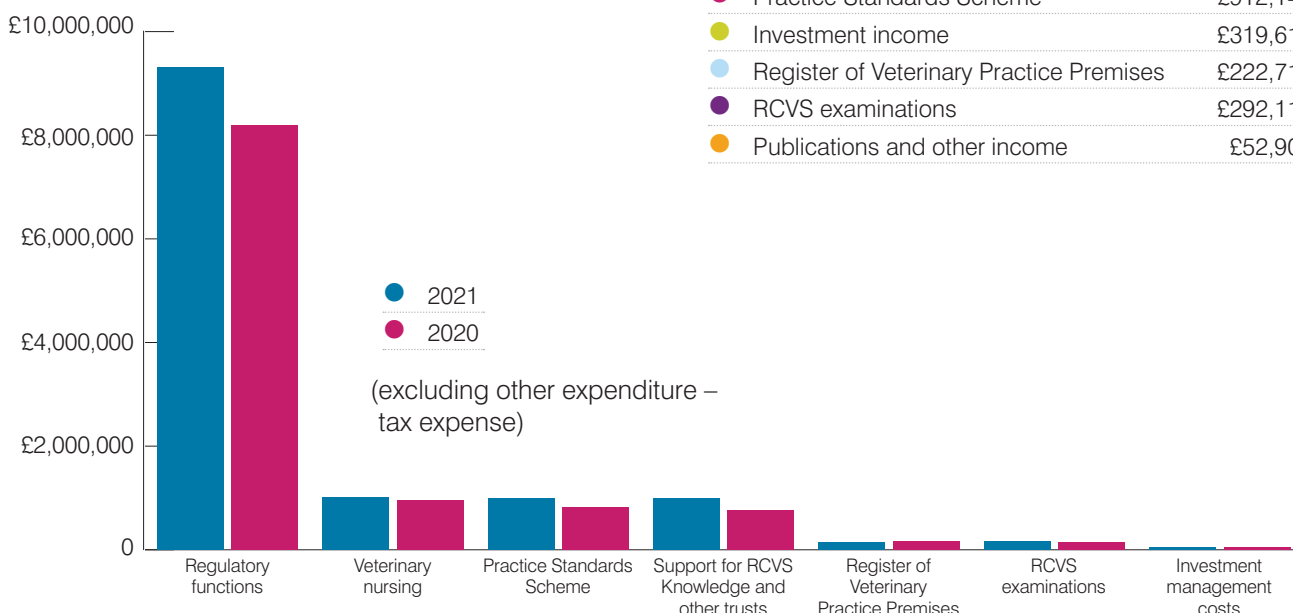
Accreditation panel members are recruited in line with a person specification and the panel member pool is undergoing a recruitment drive to increase members. Recruitment ensures that the skill set is diverse and subsequent training ensures that each accreditation panel can comprise the appropriate number of members who have a good understanding of all the standards. By maintaining such a list, it is possible to ensure that a member of the visitation panel is not a graduate of (or affiliated with) the university being accredited. New panel member applications are welcomed all year around and at any one time there are always new panel members waiting for the opportunity to be trained up to full panel member status.

The RCVS Primary Qualifications subcommittee, Education Committee and Veterinary Nurse Education Committee members are appointed and re-appointed on a three-year cycle (with the option for a second term). Attention is paid to factors such as maintaining appropriate balance between continuity of membership and bringing in new members, between practitioners and academics, and to the skills required by each committee in line with its remit.

### Financial resources

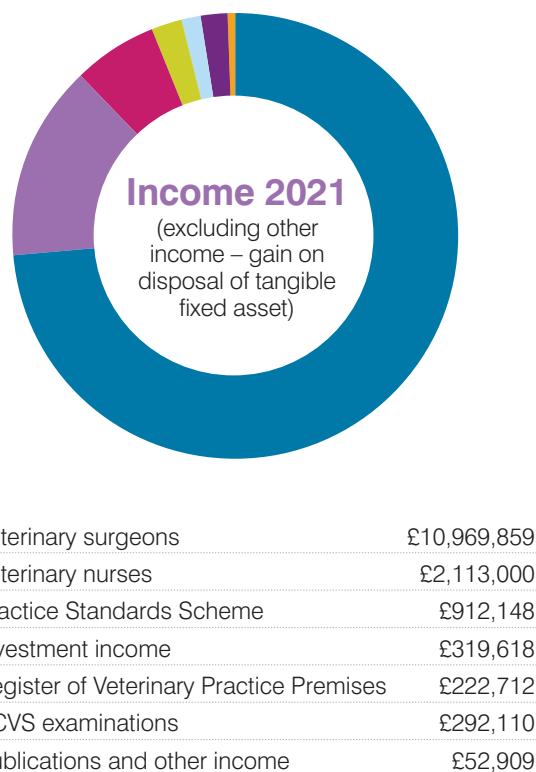
The RCVS is a financially stable organisation, operating with a financial surplus and healthy reserves. It has sufficient financial resource to operate its accreditation activities. Since RCVS is not funded by the UK Government, it is not subject to budget cuts by a higher authority, and thus is able to maintain its core functions via its income, the majority of which is derived from annual registration fees from veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses practising in the UK.

Figure 4: Expenditure



The income and expenditure figures for 2021 exceptionally include the proceeds and tax from the sale of the organisation's office building and investments. Total income £26.9m includes £12m from the sale of the organisation office building and expenditure of £15.7m includes £3m tax on the disposal of the building and investments. The full RCVS [Annual Report and Financial Statements](#) for 2021 can be found on the RCVS website. Figures 3 and 4 show the income and expenditure for 2021.

Figure 3: Income 2021





Accreditation activities are given priority in budget planning, as the maintenance of VS education standards is one of the statutory responsibilities of the RCVS and is not charged in the UK. Overseas veterinary schools are charged an accreditation fee.

Veterinary nursing institutions are charged for accreditation activities.

The College holds unrestricted reserves to ensure its continuity, to enable its ability to discharge its statutory obligations, to cover liabilities that cannot be covered by insurance, to bridge cashflow problems and to fund long-term projects that cannot be quantified, such as introducing new legislation. The formula for calculating the total level of free reserves is reviewed annually, and the method adopted by the RCVS continues to be considered appropriate. The free reserves target is six months of expenditure, a provision for building repairs and provision for risk cover. The figure will change from year to year in line with levels of expenditure and the changing needs of the College. Based on current activity, the target level of reserves is £8.8m and the College currently exceeds this target. At 31 December 2021, the College held total reserves, of £39m including investments at market value. This is higher than the reserves calculation, per the formula, by £30.2m. A proportion of the excess reserves have been used to purchase a new property after the year end and the balance

is being retained to provide funds to refurbish the building, alongside other projects.

### **Other resources**

With the restrictions imposed during the covid-19 pandemic, all staff based at the RCVS offices in Horseferry Road, London started to work from home. Towards the end of 2020, the building was sold, and the RCVS leased it from the new owners and continued to operate from that address. Selling the property had always been part of the strategic plan, irrespective of the pandemic. As the restrictions eased, any staff who wished to or for those for whom it was necessary, returned to the building. Staff continued to work following a hybrid model of working from home and the office. In 2021, the RCVS terminated the lease of the building and operations continued from a leased office space called We Work in Chancery Lane, London. In late 2021, a new permanent office was purchased in Hardwick Street, London, and following refurbishment, should be ready to occupy from 2024. In the meantime, staff continue to work where operationally appropriate between home and the We Work premises. Plans for the way in which the new office space will be used are being discussed with contributions from all staff, and should be finalised towards the middle of 2023. Until the new office building is ready for occupation by the RCVS, the operational base will continue to be the leased office space in Chancery Lane.



## 5.6 ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

**Standard:** Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

### How we meet this standard:

Following the ENQA review in 2018, the RCVS developed its Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Policy for Accreditation Activities. This was reviewed by ENQA as part of the follow up report in 2020 and has been updated in 2022. The policy and updates have also been reviewed and agreed by the ARC as part of the internal process. The policy can be found on the website [here](#) for VN accreditations and [here](#) for VS accreditations. This is the same policy but in the most appropriate places on the website.

The implementation of the policy demonstrates the commitment of the RCVS to ensure its accreditation activities aim to be transparent, fair and free from bias. Both VS and VN accreditation events are subject to the policy in order to maintain their quality and integrity.

The policy provides clear guidance and a framework to enable greater consistency of accreditation practice within the RCVS for both VS and VN programmes.

The focus is on the quality of accreditation activities and decisions, such as to confirm that the accreditation requirements of institutions are being reviewed, so that the required standards are being met. It also provides an opportunity for concerns to be identified and remedied and for the recognition and sharing of good practice.

The IQA process gives confidence to the RCVS and stakeholders that the accreditation processes within the cycle are operating consistently and fairly within the published policies and procedures. The procedures are linked to the IQA activities listed here. The EQIM is responsible for ensuring the activities are completed. This is through the completion of a range of IQA activities within the accreditation cycle to include, but not limited to:

- An audit of the evidence in the repository (VS) or Application Form (VN) in preparation for the accreditation event
- Ensuring the selection of the accreditation panel is free from conflict and training is sufficient to meet the demands of the role to ensure panel members' decisions are consistent, reliable and free from bias
- An audit of the evidence submitted and gathered that contributes to a decision to check for validity and reliability through and triangulation if required

- An audit of measures in place to ensure the security of all potentially sensitive records and activities made available by the educational establishment for the purposes of the accreditation process
- Ensuring the verbal feedback given to the HEI or AEI on completion of a site visit is consistent with the findings and subsequent written report
- Ensuring the decisions within the final report are based on (triangulated) evidence, free from bias and based on meeting the published Standards
- Feedback on the accreditation process from all stakeholders (HEI/AEI staff, students, education providers, panel members, alumni and practitioners)
- Reporting on the outcomes of an accreditation review to enhance future practice.

Once the accreditation event has been completed, an IQA report is written by the EQIM and shared internally with the department conducting the event (either VS or VN). Themes emerging from the accreditation events are addressed and any relevant changes are made to the methodology. For example, in the first virtual visit carried out during the pandemic, it became evident through observation and feedback, that the breaks between meetings were not sufficient to allow the panel members time to make refreshments and to have a sufficient break from the screen. Therefore, the schedule for the next event was adjusted accordingly. The feedback was shared with the VN team, even though the event was for a VS programme, so that they could also ensure that the schedule for virtual visits took the timing of breaks away from the screen into account. This is an example of sharing good practice and making adjustments, based on observations and feedback of accreditation events.

A further example of how the RCVS has implemented this policy can be demonstrated by actions resulting from feedback following an in-person visit in 2021. Feedback highlighted that many of the HEI staff felt uncomfortable with the layout of the room in which the meetings with the RCVS panel took place. They didn't feel that the positioning of the table and chairs allowed for positive interactions between the accreditation panel members and the staff present. The layout of the room was controlled by the HEI and the RCVS had no input to this. Observations by the EQIM and feedback

from the panel members confirmed that the arrangement of the table and chairs did not support a positive relationship. Therefore, for subsequent events, the RCVS coordinate with the HEI to suggest how the room furniture could be arranged to support positive and welcoming meetings.

In 2021, the feedback form that the stakeholders from each accreditation event completed was moved to an online format. Previously a word document was circulated to the staff, students who were interviewed as part of the event process, external stakeholders such as employers and alumni, and the panel members. The document had to be downloaded, completed, and then uploaded and sent to the EQIM. The responses were then analysed manually. By moving to an online format, a link to the relevant questionnaire can be sent directly to the stakeholders, the time required by them for completion is reduced, and the analysis is easier to carry out as the details are already formatted into a spreadsheet. Previous to the online system being introduced, several reminders for feedback to be submitted had to be sent out and responses were very slow in being submitted. The response rate also increased when the feedback became a separate process to the accreditation event, and it was collected by the EQIM, who is independent of the accreditation process.

Feedback is sought following all accreditation events, including the VN pre-accreditation support visits that were instigated in 2022.

The reports of accreditation events are shared annually with the ARC as well as a high-level report to highlight the key themes and trends that have emerged from the accreditation events that have been conducted across both VS and VN programmes. (see annex 7).

The RCVS is committed to providing a diverse and inclusive workplace, and details of this are found on the [website](#). Not only are RCVS staff recruited in line with this policy, but also panel members must abide by the behavioural guidelines which forms part of the online training compulsory for all VS panel members, and the in-person training compulsory for all VN panel members. The VN department is also exploring the use of an online format for panel member training and any appropriate resources from the online VS panel member training will be shared.

Once the accreditation panel has written its programme report (and for VS programmes the completed rubric), the HEI/AEI has the opportunity to check the report for factual accuracy. Following this stage, the process varies slightly for VS and VN programmes.

*For VS programmes:*

Once the school has confirmed factual accuracy, the rubric and report will be considered by the RCVS's PQSC, which reviews the evidence and confirm or amend any recommendations.

The report is then sent to the Vice-Chancellor of the university for a formal response. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 specifies that, for UK schools, the university may, within the period of two months from the receipt of the report, "make observations on or objections to the report" to the RCVS. The university is invited to comment to the RCVS on its responses to the findings of the visitors in the report.

On receipt of a formal response from the university, this is considered alongside the rubric and report by the PQSC, which then makes a recommendation on accreditation status to the Education Committee, having taken the university's response into account. The RCVS will endeavour to make this process as efficient as possible. Following a decision by the Education Committee, the school will be notified of the result and both the outcome and report/rubric will be published on the RCVS website, including all recommendations, suggestions, and commendations. Areas of excellence and innovation will be recognised and highlighted through the most appropriate formats for the schools.

*For VN programmes:*

Once the content of the report has been confirmed as factually accurate, the AEI will be provided with a final version that includes all actions and suggestions. Any lack of compliance will have an attributed action in order for compliance to be achieved, whereas suggestions are included where compliance has been achieved but the RCVS panel has identified an area for further development.

Upon receipt of the final report with the associated actions, the AEI is then required to provide an action plan to the RCVS within two weeks. The action plan must include how the action will be addressed, who is responsible for addressing the action and within what timeframe, as well as what evidence will be provided to demonstrate compliance. The RCVS panel will review the proposed action plan to ensure the required actions will be fully addressed.

The final report and action plan is presented to the VNEC for its consideration of the accreditation decision. Following the decision made by the VNEC, the AEI is required to submit the relevant action completion evidence to the RCVS in accordance with its planned timetable. Feedback and guidance will be provided for all submissions until all actions have been satisfactorily addressed. Accreditation status will

depend upon the satisfactory resolution of the actions, in accordance with their planned timescale. It is accepted that some actions will take longer to address; providing evidence is submitted in an ongoing fashion, this will not impact on the accreditation status or prevent student enrolment.

The final report is published online once the VNEC has made its decision and the AEI has been informed of the outcome.

All RCVS veterinary institution accreditation reports for VS and VN programmes are in the public domain and are published on the RCVS website ([VS here](#); [VN here](#)), so that previous decisions and reports are transparent.

The minutes of [Education Committee meetings](#) and [Veterinary Nurses' Council meetings](#) (including minutes of Veterinary Nurse Education Committee) are published on the RCVS website, so that decision making is transparent. The RCVS is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and must release any further background documents on request. There is an accreditation appeals procedure ([VS procedure here](#); [VN procedure here](#)), and the ultimate check is that RCVS's decisions as a public body may be legally challenged through the process of Judicial Review. This system of checks and balances guards against any risk of inconsistency in decision making.

## 5.7 ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

**Standard:** Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

### How we meet this standard:

In 2018, the RCVS successfully underwent its first ENQA review against the ESG standards and joined as full members. This was followed up with a successful follow-up report in 2020 and the RCVS also took advantage of a progress visit (carried out remotely), also in 2020.

Since gaining ENQA membership, the RCVS has endeavoured to take an active role within the community, with two members of staff participating in successive Leadership Development Programmes; attendance at general assemblies and member forums; membership of a working group and attendance at seminars, including a reviews seminar for agencies planning to undergo a review in 2022–2023.

In 2015, the RCVS underwent a voluntary review by the United States Department of Education (USDE). In order for US students to be eligible to participate in US federal student aid programs, the veterinary medical school's accrediting agency must be approved by the USDE. In applying for approval, the RCVS had to show how its standards and procedures complied with the "Guidelines for Requesting an Acceptability Determination for a Foreign Veterinary Accrediting Agency (Guidelines)". USDE department staff reviewed the processes and accreditation standards used by the RCVS and determined that the RCVS had an acceptable quality assurance system for evaluating the quality of education offered at the veterinary schools it accredits. This was the first time that any external review of RCVS policies and procedures has been required. This process is cyclical, with re-approval occurring every six years, and in 2021 RCVS was successful in gaining re-approval with USDE.

The RCVS works in collaboration with several international organisations who also have an active role in the accreditation of veterinary degrees. Collectively, this group is known as the international accreditation working group (IAWG) and comprises veterinary accrediting agencies from the United States of America, Australasia, South Africa and Europe.

The RCVS is an affiliated member of the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education (ACOVENE). ACOVENE is a voluntary organisation founded in 2007 as a result of a European funded Leonardo Da Vinci project. The RCVS must adhere to the Accreditation Policies and Procedures in order to maintain its affiliation. These policies and procedures include a focus on:

- financial integrity,
- organisation and communications,
- teaching and support staff,
- physical facilities and equipment,
- resources for clinical instruction,
- informational resources,
- admissions and management of students,
- curriculum and practical teaching,
- assessment strategies,
- programme evaluation.

While the ACOVENE accredits veterinary nurse programmes, it also carries out EQA activities for regulatory bodies such as the RCVS and the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI). The higher education institutes accredited by these accrediting



bodies are then regarded as associates of ACOVENE and are subject to audit. The programmes accredited by ACOVENE must meet the requirements as set out in the "[Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(APP\)](#)" and "[Dossier of European Competencies for the Veterinary Nurse.](#)"

VN quality assurance activities take the form of an annual SAR submission detailing how the RCVS continues to meet the APP along with spot checks.

ACOVENE reviews the RCVS once every five years, via application as set out against the "ACOVENE Regulator Accreditation Criteria". The RCVS, as the Secretariat for ACOVENE, is not involved in the quality assurance, visitor selection or review of the RCVS.

In addition to external review by the USDE and ACOVENE, RCVS is now in the second cycle of external review by ENQA.



## 6. Design and implementation of the agency's EQA activities (compliance with Part 2 of the ESG)

### 6.1 ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

**Standard:** External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

#### How we meet this standard:

As part of the regular reviews of internal standards and methodologies, new [RCVS Standards Framework for Veterinary Nurse Education](#) and training were implemented in 2020 and new [RCVS Standards and Guidance for the Accreditation of Veterinary Degree Programmes](#) are implemented from January 2023. Both new standards have associated new methodologies. Previous to the 2023 revised version, the RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees were updated in 2015 and were applied to VS accreditations from 2016 to 2022.

Both the veterinary surgery and veterinary nursing standards for accreditation include a requirement for effective internal

quality assurance processes within the institutions being accredited (VS Domain 3: Educational Governance and Quality Improvement; VN Standard 2 – Governance and Quality). Please see chapter 6.2 for details of the history of the development of the standards for VS and VN programmes.

**Figure 5** below provides a mapping matrix of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse standards to part 1 of the ESG. For comparison, **figure 6** is the mapping matrix of the veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse standards to part 1 of the ESG provided in 2018, which maps against the previous VS and VN standards.



**Figure 5:** Mapping matrix of veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse standards to part 1 of the ESG

ESG Part 1: Internal Quality		RCVS Standards Framework for Veterinary Nurse Education and Training (2019)						RCVS Standards and Guidance for the Accreditation of Veterinary Degree Programmes (2023)					
No.	Title	Standard 1: Learning Culture	Standard 2: Governance and Quality	Standard 3: Student Empowerment	Standard 4: Educators and Assessors	Standard 5: Curricula and Assessment	Standard 6: Effective Clinical Learning	Domain 1: The Learning Environment	Domain 2: Organisation, Culture and Values	Domain 3: Educational Governance and Quality Improvement	Domain 4: Supporting Students	Domain 5: Supporting Educators	Domain 6: Curriculum and Assessment
1.1	Policy for quality assurance	✓	✓			✓				✓			
1.2	Design and approval of programmes		✓			✓				✓			✓
1.3	Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment			✓		✓	✓				✓		✓
1.4	Student admission, progression, recognition and certification		✓								✓		
1.5	Teaching staff				✓			✓				✓	
1.6	Learning resources and student support			✓			✓				✓		
1.7	Information management	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓			✓
1.8	Public information		✓								✓		
1.9	On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes*					✓				✓			✓
1.10	Cyclical external quality assurance**		✓							✓			



\* the ongoing review of programmes is a key expectation of the standards for both veterinary and veterinary nurse programmes. This must include both the programme content and assessment and must include input from all relevant stakeholders.

\*\* Veterinary nurse standard 2.1 states that accredited education institutions (AEIs), together with delivery sites and training practices, must comply with all relevant legal, regulatory, professional and educational requirements. This includes cyclical external quality assurance. The VN accreditation cycle is five yearly

unless triggered earlier as a result of annual monitoring, notification of substantial programme changes or if awarded a shorter period of accreditation. The veterinary surgeon accreditation methodology 2023 states "An Accreditation Event will take place for each veterinary programme every seven years as standard to fit in with the approved period of accreditation, unless triggered earlier as a result of the annual monitoring process or notification of substantial changes to the programme or awarded accreditation for a shorter period as recommended by RCVS Education Committee following the last accreditation event."





**Figure 6:** Mapping matrix of the veterinary surgeon and veterinary nurse standards to part 1 of the ESG provided in 2018, which maps against the previous VS and VN standards

	VN Standard 1 The organisation	VN Standard 2 Sustainability	VN Standard 3 Qualification design and delivery	VN Standard 4 Qualification quality management	VN Standard 5 Qualification and quality assurance	VN Standard 6 Centre approval and reporting	VN Standard 7 Self evaluation and reporting	VN Standard 1 Organisation	VN Standard 2 Facilities and equipment	VN Standard 3 Animal resources	VN Standard 4 Information resources	VN Standard 5 VN Students	VN Standard 6 Admission and progression	VN Standard 7 Academic and support staff	VN Standard 8 Research programmes, continuing and higher degree education	VN Standard 9 Assessment	VN Standard 10 Curriculum	Outcomes assessment	VN Standard 12
<b>Part 1 of the ESG</b>																			
1.1 Policy for quality assurance			x	x	x	x		x			x					x	x	x	x
1.2 Design and approval of programmes			x	x	x	x				x						x	x		x
1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment			x		x					x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification			x	x	x								x			x			
1.5 Teaching staff				x	x									x	x			x	
1.6 Learning resources and student support			x		x	x			x	x	x	x	x					x	
1.7 Information management							x												x
1.8 Public information				x										x				x	
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes*							x						x		x	x			x
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance**				x															x

- \* The RCVS expects an evidence-based decision-making process in the development and review of every aspect of the qualifications. For instance, changes in the practical examinations for the end-point assessment for veterinary nurses must be subject to an agreed validity and reliability model such as Angoff (pass-mark setting).
- \*\* Veterinary nurse standard 4(a) states that awarding organisations and higher education institutions must be compliant with all criteria stipulated by their accrediting national regulatory authority. This includes cyclical external quality assurance. The veterinary surgeon accreditation process (“RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees”, Chapter 3) states that “a full site visit will be undertaken approximately every seven years. The RCVS may elect to undertake a full visit to an HEI or AEI on a shorter timescale if significant changes are identified by annual monitoring reports, or if any new risks come to light during the normal cycle.

The accreditation activities for both VS and VN programmes is a cyclical review process that not only encompasses the accreditation events, but also the annual/quality monitoring cycles. Both cycles have maximum periods stated (seven years for VS and five years for VN) however, for both, an accreditation event can be triggered if major gaps in evidence or risks are identified through the annual/quality monitoring processes. The outcomes of the accreditation events are decided by committees for both VS and VN programmes.

Further details are discussed in chapter 5.1

The EQIM attends a sample of the accreditation events for both VS and VN programmes as part of the IQA procedure. Feedback from the relevant stakeholders at all events is also collated by the EQIM and the observations and feedback are used to improve internal process.

## 6.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

**Standard:** External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

### How we meet this standard:

As the sole accreditation agency for veterinary degrees in the UK, the RCVS has full statutory authority under the Veterinary Surgeons Act to set educational standards and monitor through an accreditation process. The RCVS has developed its standards for the accreditation of veterinary and veterinary nurse education over a number of years and these have been periodically reviewed and revised through a multi-layered, established committee process involving elected vets, veterinary nurses, educationalists and lay people who are key stakeholders in the professions, as well as extensive consultation with the wider professions and other interested parties. The most recent revision of standards for veterinary surgeon degree programmes comes into effect from January 2023, and the most recent version of standards for veterinary nursing programmes was introduced in June 2020. This process ensures that our quality assurance activities remain current and fit for purpose.

At all stages throughout the design and continuous improvement of standards for VS and VN programmes, stakeholders are involved. This can be as members of a working group, member of a committee, a profession wide consultation or direct feedback following an accreditation

event. The specific details of stakeholder involvement are detailed in the following descriptions of the reviews and design of standards for VN and VS programmes.

#### *Design and continuous improvement of standards for veterinary programmes:*

The most recent review of the standards for veterinary surgeon degree programmes was started in 2019 and is launched from January 2023. It has been driven by a working group comprising an independent external chair, and a variety of stakeholders including members of the profession (both qualified and students), academics from vet schools and representatives from external quality assurance agencies.

The review started with the commissioning of a literature review of accreditation in professional education, in the context of both quality assurance of veterinary education and curricular innovation and improvement. The key objective was to gather an understanding of the impact and relative success of different models of accreditation of professional qualifications, with a particular focus on various risk-based models and the different approaches of input vs outcomes models.

The next stage was a full review of all existing accreditation standards and methodology carried out by the working group, and subsequent review by two different committees (PQSC and EC) and the RCVS Council, all made up of members of the profession, academics, students and lay persons. The draft agreed by the RCVS Council underwent a profession wide consultation with over 100 respondents, including joint responses from professional associations within the UK and internationally.

UK veterinary schools often seek accreditation by international agencies, so that their graduates may register and work elsewhere in the world. This means they are subject to visitations by multiple accrediting bodies. By conducting joint visitations with other international accreditors, the RCVS minimises the time, cost and burden of these visits on the universities. Visitors and observers representing all international accreditation agencies involved are included in joint visitation teams, who then report back to their own agencies regarding whether the evidence available meets their own standards. They are also invited to feedback to the RCVS on the joint visitation process for events in the UK. The new accreditation standards were mapped to the standards of other veterinary accreditation agencies worldwide (EAEVE, AVBC, AVMA, SAVC) and shared with the IAWG to enable any similarities and differences to be clear and allow for the continuation of joint accreditation visits.

During the development of the new standards, The RCVS considered feedback from HEIs that completion of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) places an increased workload burden upon vet schools. Therefore, the new methodology requires vet schools to upload the evidence relating to each standard into a secure repository administered by the RCVS. The repository is open to vet schools throughout the period between accreditation visits and there is no requirement to write a full SER. This provides the option for vet schools to upload evidence at any time, and not just in the short period leading up to and including the visit.

To support stakeholders prior to the implementation of the new accreditation standards in 2023, the VS Education team delivered webinars to the VSC and subsequently to the senior staff at each of the vet schools to share the content and guidance of the new standards. This was followed up with invitations to each HEI to have further individual meetings to discuss the specific requirements of their programmes and the evidence they have to support compliance with each standard. Individual meetings were also held with the members of IAWG to further clarify how joint working relationships could continue.

The HEIs and accreditation event panel members have the opportunity to feedback on the RCVS accreditation

processes via online questionnaire following each accreditation event. This feedback is gathered by the EQIM who acts independently of the review process. The data is then analysed and feedback internally to the review process for any amendments which would strengthen or clarify either the standards of accreditation used by the RCVS or the way in which it conducts accreditation events.

#### *Design and continuous improvement of standards for veterinary nursing education*

The accreditation standards for veterinary nurse education and training were reviewed and updated in 2019 and this process was triggered by a recommendation made by ENQA in the 2018 report. To this end, the Veterinary Nurses' Council (VNC) started by considering the standards for accreditation of veterinary education programmes, as well as education accreditation standards of other healthcare providers.

The development process was driven by a small working group comprising three members of VNC, the Director of Veterinary Nursing and the VN Qualifications Manager. In January 2019, the working group conducted a full review, starting with the initial feedback from the 2018 VNC meeting. The resulting proposals were based on the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) standards framework for Nursing, Midwifery and Education, provided a greater focus on equality and diversity along with the student experience and journey. The proposed framework provides flexibility for AELs to develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The NMC granted permission for the RCVS to base its standards on their framework.

Once the standards framework for veterinary nurse education and training had been drafted, a profession wide consultation was conducted with responses from the profession, AELs and professional associations. In July 2019, in-person meetings were held with a cross section of AELs, educational providers and students. During development of the new education standards framework, the RCVS took into account feedback from AELs, accreditation panel members, veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and students. The new standards framework came into effect in 2020 and was further updated in 2021, following feedback from all stakeholders after a period of twelve months implementation.

The VN application for accreditation was identified as not being particularly user friendly for the AELs, so in consultation with selected programme leads an application spreadsheet was developed that clearly separates the standards and indicates the type of evidence and where it should be uploaded. AELs are encouraged to cross reference and hyperlink where appropriate, with online access to evidence in virtual learning environments also provided to panel members.

The new standards for VN education were launched with a series of webinars to AEIs. However, following their introduction, it became evident that many AEIs were still not clear on the evidence that was required to demonstrate compliance with each standard. Therefore, in 2022, the accreditation visits were suspended, and AEIs were given the option to have a pre-accreditation support visit in advance of their next accreditation event. This has already been discussed in chapter 5.1. The pre-accreditation support meetings are face to face with at least two members of the VN Education team visiting

the AEI. There is the opportunity for unlimited further meetings to be requested by the AEI, to be carried out virtually.

Feedback is collected by the EQIM following each accreditation event. The online questionnaire provides the opportunity for panel members, AEI staff and other related stakeholders to rate various aspects of the event, and to provide their view of the strengths and the areas for improvement. This data is analysed independently and is used to improve processes.

## 6.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

**Standard:** External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

### How we meet this standard:

The accreditation cycles for education programmes for both veterinary and veterinary nursing are shown in chapter 5.1.

#### *Implementing VS processes*

Evidence for each standard is submitted by the HEI through a repository database. The repository is accessible at any time, and uploading evidence is not limited to a specified period before an event is scheduled to take place, in order to reduce administrative burden on the institutions undergoing accreditation. Evidence may include documents, photographs, videos, and other appropriate media. Three months before the visit to a veterinary programme is due to take place, the panel will review the evidence both independently and collectively and will decide on the scope and length of the visit based on their initial review and the need to triangulate evidence (risk-based approach).

For brand new programmes, the process will differ from that stated above. HEIs considering offering a veterinary degree must liaise with the RCVS concerning its plans at an early stage. Draft curriculum and assessment plans must be submitted together with a timeline for implementation, plans for facilities, staffing and an indication of the intended student numbers. Once the formal decision has been made by the HEI to offer a veterinary programme, a series of six-monthly meetings will be arranged with the RCVS to consider the development of the degree, leading up to the initial interim visitation in year three of the first cohort of students. During

the period of informal meetings, and before students are enrolled, a curriculum review group is set up by the RCVS. The role of the group is to provide comment on the draft curriculum with a view to advising the HEI whether there appear to be any significant gaps in their plans which could lead to non-compliance with RCVS requirements. The role of the curriculum review group is not to act as consultants, nor to provide proactive advice on how the HEI should structure their course, as they should have their own external advisory group to help with this. This provides an independent expert review of the curriculum to support the HEI to interpret the RCVS criteria, as well as to feedback to the RCVS.

Following the interim visit, the HEI receives feedback on the element of the programme that has been delivered. The plans for the clinical year are reviewed and if the proposed actions are implemented, are the panel assured that the programme will meet the standards for veterinary surgeon degree programmes by year five. At this stage, an accreditation decision cannot be made because the clinical years have not yet been delivered. For these standards, the term “reasonable assurance” is used by the panel to indicate that the plans are in place for the standard to be met, but there is not yet evidence of the plans being implemented as specified. The rubric is amended to include “reasonable assurance” as a decision option.

A further accreditation event including a full site visitation will be undertaken during the programme's final year of operation, in order to make a recommendation to the [Privy Council](#) on recognition. Graduates of UK veterinary schools are not automatically entitled to RCVS membership until the degree has received the Recognition Order from the Privy Council.

The evidence in the repository and the evidence gathered during the visit by the panel is used to ascertain compliance against each standard and is entered into a rubric (see annex 12) and is evaluated as either "met", "partially met" or "not met". The panel does not make the final accreditation decision. The completed rubric is supported with a short report stating a series of commendations, recommendations and suggestions, aimed to assist the HEI in meeting the published standards, as well as highlighting and celebrating areas of good practice and innovation.

The HEI is sent the report and rubric to check for factual accuracy and their comments are returned to the RCVS. Once the final report and rubric is factually correct, the HEI has two months to respond to the rubric and report and to indicate how it will address the recommendations and suggestions. This response is then shared with the accreditation panel for review and comments. The panel has the opportunity to check the evidence provided against the responses from the HEI for validity. The HEI responses, along with the panel review of the responses are considered by the committees when making the final decision on accreditation outcome. The RCVS Council receives the accreditation outcomes for established programmes reported through the minutes of the Education Committee.

The evidence and recommendations are reviewed by committees with the process taking approximately three – six months from visitation to published report. The committee will decide on the classification of the accreditation outcome – this is detailed in chapter 6.5. The RCVS Education Committee has the delegated authority from the RCVS Council to make decisions regarding veterinary degree accreditations. However, in the case of a new veterinary degree, the report will also be presented to the RCVS Council on its first accreditation, as it needs the ratification of Council prior to going to the Privy Council for a Recognition Order.

In between accreditation events, the RCVS requires HEIs to submit a range of data relating to each accredited programme in annual reports. For UK vet schools this is done in accordance with Section 5(5) of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. Within the online repository database hosted by RCVS for each school, there is a section for annual monitoring data to be submitted. Annual monitoring data is entered into a standard spreadsheet sent to all HEIs. See annex 13.

Annual monitoring data will be required to be submitted annually in the same month as the date of decision on accreditation following their most recent accreditation visitation. For example, a programme awarded full accreditation for seven years in November 2021 following a visitation in March 2021, will be required to submit annual monitoring data annually each November until their next accreditation event takes place. The annual monitoring data will be initially reviewed by personnel within the RCVS Education team and then reported to the PQSC for consideration, following which a recommendation of further action could be made to the HEI. Data is considered by the PQSC on a school-by-school basis, in order to monitor trends and changes at each school. If there are major changes to the programme, or risks identified, a new accreditation event process may be triggered.

#### *Implementing VN processes*

The AEI will submit evidence against each standard through a spreadsheet to be submitted no less than eight weeks before the visit is due to take place. The evidence submitted is reviewed by the accreditation panels initially independently of each other and then collectively via an online meeting. This ensures that all standards are reviewed by all panel members. The visit element of the accreditation event typically takes place over two days and includes meetings with key staff involved in the delivery of the programme as well as a review of the facilities. In advance of the visit to the AEI, selected training practices will be visited and at this point, students will be interviewed to gather their thoughts and feelings about the programme being accredited. Their feedback is made available to the panel members in advance of the visit, so that they can add this evidence to that already submitted and reviewed.

A new AEI considering offering a veterinary nursing qualification must contact the RCVS to provide an initial proposed timeline at least 18 months prior to the proposed qualification start date. All AEIs, whether new or currently accredited, are required to submit a Notification of Intent to the RCVS at least 12 months prior to the proposed qualification start date. The Notification of Intent will detail draft plans for market research, programme design, proposed approach to the assessment of the RCVS Day One Competences, Skills, and Professional Behaviours (to include the practical assessment methodologies) and funding and sustainability. All new AEIs are required to have a support meeting prior to submitting a Notification of Intent to discuss the standards and how they can be evidenced. Providing that the application is accepted in principle, the RCVS will confirm that the timetable/timeline for accreditation is appropriate and that there is sufficient time for the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee (VNEC) to consider the final report before the

recruitment of the first cohort. The VNEC has delegated authority from the VNC to make this decision.

The evidence in the spreadsheet and the evidence gathered during the visit by the panel is used to ascertain compliance against each standard as either “met” and “not met”. The panel does not make the final accreditation decision. AEIs are provided with a report indicating commendations, areas for improvement and actions required, and they are asked to check the report for factual accuracy. The report is aimed to assist the school in meeting the published standards, as well as highlighting and celebrating areas of good practice and innovation.

The VN accreditation panel returns the report to the AEI for a factual accuracy check within three weeks of the visit. The AEI has one week after receipt of the report to return the report with any comments. Once any corrections have been made, the report with the actions required is returned to the AEI and the AEI must provide the completed action plan to the RCVS within two weeks. The action plan must include how the action will be addressed, who is responsible for addressing the action and within what timeframe, as well as what evidence will be provided to demonstrate compliance. The RCVS panel will review the proposed action plan to

ensure the required actions will be fully addressed. The final report and action plan is presented to VNEC for its consideration of the accreditation decision. Following the decision made by VNEC, the AEI is required to submit the relevant action completion evidence to the RCVS in accordance with its planned timetable. The RCVS Council will receive accreditation outcomes for established programmes reported through the minutes of the VN Council.

VN programmes are subject to a range of annual quality assurance activities, as well as review of the action plan to ensure that the agreed timelines are met.

In between accreditation events, the RCVS requires annual reports for accredited programmes from each AEI which is done in accordance with the Standards Framework with the completed self-assessment report (SAR) requested annually. VN programmes are also subject to a process of quality monitoring between accreditation events. The type of activity will depend on the format of the programme (three or four year), the perceived risk of the programme and the length of time since the accreditation event. The table below indicates the general schedule that is followed, but this can be adapted depending on the risk:

**Table 5**

Year zero	Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four	Year five
<b>HE three-year programme</b>					
Accreditation	Progress Review & Assessment audit	Mock OSCE & DOS audit	Final OSCE & assessment audit	Stakeholder feedback	Accreditation
<b>HE four-year programme</b>					
Accreditation	Progress Review & Assessment audit	DOS audit	Mock OSCE & Stakeholder feedback	Final OSCE & Assessment audit	Accreditation

The tables below summarise the steps in an accreditation event for VS and VN programmes.

**Table 6:** Timeline for VS Accreditation Events

Time	Activity
<b>Month 0</b>	HEI notified by the RCVS of an upcoming accreditation event and invited to prepare and upload evidence in support of accreditation standards into the secure repository, if not already done so. Accreditation panel appointed and checks on potential conflicts completed.
<b>Month 3</b>	Repository closed. HEI can no longer upload evidence. RCVS and panel review evidence.
<b>Month 4</b>	Scope and focus of accreditation visit decided by panel and communicated to HEI. Repository opened for additional evidence to be uploaded by HEI if requested by panel. Liaison between RCVS and HEI to agree the visit schedule. RCVS arrange accommodation and transport for panel.
<b>Month 7</b>	Accreditation visit. Feedback requested from panel members, HEI staff and students and other associated stakeholders on completion of the visit.
<b>Month 8</b>	The completed rubric and short report are sent to the HEI for a factual accuracy check.
<b>Month 9–10</b>	Once the HEI has confirmed the report and rubric are factually accurate, they will be considered by the RCVS's PQSC, which will review the evidence and confirm or amend any recommendations. The report and rubric sent to the Vice Chancellor of the HEI for a formal response.
<b>Month 12</b>	The report and rubric are returned to the RCVS with a formal response from the HEI. The formal response is considered by the accreditation panel and then presented to the PQSC for a recommendation on accreditation status. At the next sitting of the Education Committee the report, rubric and recommendations from PQSC will be considered and a formal decision made on the accreditation status of the HEI. The HEI is notified within one week of the EC meeting. The report, rubric and outcome of the event are published on the RCVS website.



**Table 7:** Timeline for VN Accreditation Events

Time	Activity
<b>Month 0</b>	New providers: contact RCVS to discuss potential new qualification, dates for pre-accreditation support identified. Existing providers: RCVS contacts AEI to arrange pre-accreditation support dates.
<b>Month 1</b>	Pre-accreditation support visit undertaken, providing guidance on the RCVS Standards Framework for Veterinary Nurse Education and Training.
<b>Month 6</b>	Notification of Intent submitted by the AEI to the RCVS.
<b>Month 7</b>	Meeting with AEI to discuss the viability of the proposed programme and any potential areas of compliance concern.
<b>Month 8</b>	Accreditation Panel appointed and checks on potential conflicts completed.
<b>Month 12</b>	AEI submit application for accreditation. Accreditation panel consider the evidence submitted. Agenda for visit confirmed.
<b>Month 13</b>	Accreditation panel meet to review the evidence and further evidence may be requested as necessary. Training practices are visited by RCVS representatives and feedback provided to the panel.
<b>Month 14</b>	Accreditation visit carried out. Feedback requested from panel members, AEI staff and students and other associated stakeholders on completion of the visit.
<b>Month 15</b>	Draft report submitted to AEI for factual accuracy check. AEI to return to RCVS within one week of receipt. The final report is returned to the AEI including all actions and suggestions. AEI provides the RCVS with an action plan within two weeks.
<b>Month 16</b>	VN education committee considers the final report and action plan and decides on the accreditation status of the AEI. Decision communicated to AEI by the Chair of the Committee.
<b>Month 17/18</b>	Memorandum of Understanding drawn up between the RCVS and the AEI and between the RCVS and each delivery site approved by the AEI to deliver the qualification. RCVS accredited qualifications list updated on the website. Programme commences.

## 6.4 ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

**Standard:** External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

### How we meet this standard:

Accreditation events for both VS and VN programmes are undertaken by expert teams with clear criteria for appointment, training and policies for managing conflict of interest. The VS degree is a Level 7/Masters level qualification (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications – England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or equivalent in other nations and encompasses a broad range of basic science, para-clinical and clinical subjects and prepares graduates for a wide range of potential post-graduate careers. Similarly, the VN degree encompasses all elements of animal care and welfare, including minor surgery and medical treatment with inclusion of client care and development of communication skills. The VN degree is a level 5 or 6 qualification (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications – England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or equivalent in other nations and has a mandatory component of 1800 hours in a clinical setting ensuring students are fully prepared for their role as a registered veterinary nurse.

The accreditation panel for VS programmes comprise up to six members, plus a student representative (who is within the period of the final year of their qualification or up to two years post qualification), with the necessary combination of educational and subject expertise, clinical and academic experience. Between them, panel members will have a mix of expertise to cover the basic sciences, pathology/VPH and clinical sciences in order to be able to consider all aspects of the curriculum. At least one panel member must be a practitioner with a background in clinical practice outside of academia (with up-to-date knowledge of current general practice), and at least one panel member must be an educationalist (either from a veterinary or healthcare-related profession, i.e. someone with further expertise on higher education curricula, assessment standards and educational delivery models). However, all panel members are trained to consider all standards and domains in addition to bringing their own particular area of expertise. The panel must include someone who holds, or who has recently held, a senior academic position and who understands the organisation and funding of universities and the complex requirements for veterinary education. The Chair of the panel must have experience of being an Accreditation Panel member and have recent experience as a committee Chair in addition to having completed the RCVS training for Accreditation Panel Chairs. The Accreditation Panel may also include observers in either a quality assurance role, or as a new member of RCVS staff as part of their training.

The accreditation panel for VN degrees is composed of up to five members to include an education representative, currently involved in the development and delivery of the relevant programme type, or has been in the last five years; an employer representative who has relevant experience with veterinary nurse training or recruitment of registered veterinary nurses; a student representative who is within the period of the final year of their qualification or up to two years post qualification, the RCVS examinations manager and a chair. There may also be RCVS representatives as required in attendance, for example, qualifications assessors and other staff for training purposes. Due to their different professional roles, the panel members will collectively offer a unique viewpoint in order to thoroughly review all aspects of the proposed programme against the RCVS Standards Framework for Veterinary Nurse Education and Training. The chair must be an RVN and will have undergone specific training by the RCVS for this role. Occasionally it is necessary for an RCVS representative to act as chair in order to remove any conflicts of interest or potential bias.

Potential panel members apply through notification of their interest in the role. They are asked to complete a questionnaire to explore their past experience and professional roles and this information is used to ascertain their suitability as well as to maintain details of potential conflicts of interest for each individual panel member. Once a potential panel member has completed their training, they are accepted as a full panel member. Recruiting new panel members has been given a high profile since the launch of the new standards. Methods have included direct requests to each HEI/AEI to promote the role amongst educationalists and promoting the opportunity amongst stakeholders through the RCVS newsletter. These efforts have succeeded in 40 new individuals declaring an interest in becoming a VS panel member, to add to the current list of 30, thus widening the pool. These individuals will next be required to complete the new e-learning training package. This places the RCVS in a much stronger position with an increased range of panel members. Please note, the training package will be ready to view during the visit by ENQA.

Training for VS panel members is delivered through a series of online modules covering each of the standards in detail, as well as reflecting on how the attitudes and behaviours of panel members can impact on the information collected and decision making, in particular unconscious bias, collaborative working, question styles and body language. There is also a specialist module for panel chairs. This has replaced the

in-person training that was delivered over a day to make the training more accessible for the range of experts required as panel members and to make the training more comprehensive. All panel members will review all standards and the training package will support this through promoting consistency across all panellists. The training is relevant to all individuals, regardless of their background (ie educationalist, practitioner, etc) and can be delivered flexibly to enable panel members to revisit areas of the training for any of the standards at any time so that they can remain up to date just before participating in an accreditation event. The training also includes more detail on “what good looks like” in different programme delivery models, thus reducing any bias if a particular panel member is only familiar with one type of programme.

The online training is being developed to coincide with the launch of the new standards and methodology in January 2023 so that panel members are ready to undertake the new accreditation events. The RCVS is committed to the collection of feedback from those undertaking the training to ensure continual quality improvement.

Once a VN expert has expressed an interest in becoming a panel member at accreditations, they are provided with the role description and person specification. They are also provided with an evidence sheet matching the person specification which they are required to complete and return to the RCVS Qualifications Manager along with their CV and CPD record. The RCVS Qualifications Manager will then review the submission and determine whether they have the relevant experience and expertise to assist with accreditations. In the event of an industry representative submitting an application, this is provided to VN Education Committee for review in order for them to determine to which types of programmes the expert may best be suited.

Upon acceptance as an expert, the individual is invited to attend a full day online training session, to include a background to accreditations and why they are required; how a typical accreditation is run; the application process; a thorough review of the Standards; and behaviours expected of a panel member including clarification and guidance on the conflict of interest and confidentiality policies. Following the session, the participants have some independent learning to be completed and submitted as a check on learning. Panel members are required to attend annual refresher training.

Having successfully completed the training the attendees are then added to the list of panel members and will be contacted directly for their availability once accreditations are being planned.

If a panel member expresses an interest in chairing the accreditation panel, their suitability and experience will be

reviewed and considered and they will be provided with further training and support as required. The RCVS will also encourage individuals who have excelled during previous accreditation panel events to put themselves forward for Chair positions.

There is a ‘no conflict of interest’ policy (see Annex 11) for the appointment of all VS and VN panel members. Potential conflicts of interest involve official, professional, or personal relationships which may, or could reasonably be viewed as influencing or impairing the panel members’ judgements. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Recent collaborative research, teaching or service interests with a key administrator or faculty members of the university being visited;
- Having graduated from or a current student at the school being evaluated during the last five years;
- Having been employed full time or part time by the school being accredited during the last five years;
- Having recently successfully applied for employment with a university under discussion (this information may be requested to remain confidential if it is not appropriate to share);
- Being engaged by the vet school as an external examiner within the last three years;
- Having provided consultancy advice on accreditation matters for the university being visited – either voluntarily or for a fee, in the last three years;
- Having published statements or opinion which could be perceived as evidence of bias;
- Having a close family or personal relationship with a key member of the university being visited;
- Having a financial or other personal or business interest in the outcome of the visitation.

If a member of the proposed panel has reason to believe that a conflict of interest might exist, they should seek the advice of the relevant department at the RCVS (Education or Vet Nursing). All panel members are asked to read the policy and sign the declaration at the point at which they are invited to join a specific panel. In practice, the VS and VN teams who propose the panel for each accreditation event will initially check CVs to ensure there are no potential conflicts of interest already declared.

The accreditation events for both VN and VS programmes commence with the panel members reviewing the evidence that has been submitted by the HEI/AEI. VN events have a brief online meeting prior to this to allow the panel members to meet each other and to run through the process, checking meeting dates, etc.

For VN programmes, an application spreadsheet and all supporting evidence will be submitted at least eight weeks in advance of the planned accreditation visit, which is then shared with the panel members. The panel members review the evidence for all Standards individually and add comments and questions to the application spreadsheet which is submitted to the Qualifications Manager. This ensures that all members of the VN panel review all standards and all evidence independently. The panel members meet virtually three weeks before the planned visit to discuss their reviews and to decide collectively on any other evidence required from the AEI. They will also focus on the line of questioning to be taken during the visit to triangulate the evidence and establish the level of compliance against each standard. This level of preparation before the visit ensures that the visit is focussed and that the panel members are ready with their questions. All documentation related to the accreditation event, including all supporting evidence from the AEI, is accessible for the panel via the RCVS OneDrive. On completion of the visit, the panel members will be allocated standards to write up for the report and they will produce individual chapters, which they add to the master draft report started during the event. The Qualifications Manager reviews the report for tone and style and the first draft is shared with the panel to check for accuracy.

For VS programmes the secure database repository will be open for access by the vet school until four months before a planned visit. The repository will then close for further uploads whilst the panel members review the evidence that has been submitted against each standard. Like the VN panel members, all members will review all the evidence, but the VS panel members will also be provided with a structured summary of the evidence submitted in advance against each standard that has been prepared by the RCVS Education Department. Using an iterative process, the panel members review the evidence collected throughout the accreditation event (ie that was submitted in advance to the repository and that which is collected during the visitation) and record this in the accreditation standards rubric. This enables all panel members to see how the evidence is building, and where triangulation is needed or there are gaps, at any point during the accreditation event. Each entry in the rubric is linked to specific sources of evidence in support of the standard to ensure that the transparency and rationale of the panel's decisions can be demonstrated. On completion of the independent reviews by panel members, the RCVS Education Department will summarise the findings of the panel in a stage 1 report. The panel will then agree on which standards have already been met having triangulated evidence and begin to consider the priorities for further evidence collection during the accreditation visit. All panel members attend the visit, regardless of the focus of the visit, and they will work as a group. Circumstances may arise, however, which justify the Chair delegating specific tasks to a subgroup of the panel.

During the visit, the panel complete the rubric daily so that the process is iterative. This ensures that areas that need further exploration with the school can be identified in a timely manner, as well as agreeing on areas of compliance.

Within both VS and VN reports, any areas of deficiency are supported by commentary. 'Recommendations' are actions which the school must address in order to retain accreditation, whereas 'Suggestions' are provided to support programme improvement and not mandatory for accreditation purposes. Any suggestion or recommendation must be linked to a specific deficiency and cross-referenced with specific evidence (or lack of).

Areas of excellence or innovation with the programme are also highlighted, and also cross-referenced to supporting evidence. The longer-term objective is to develop platforms through which innovation and good practice identified within VS and VN programmes can be shared, such as conferences, seminars, etc. This will be explored in greater depth once the new standards and methodology for VS programmes have been launched and the VN pre-accreditation support programme has been completed, and there are actions to share.

At the end of the visitation, the accreditation panel agree their decision on areas of compliance, recommendations, actions and suggestions.

The inclusion of student representatives on the accreditation panels has enhanced the review process by incorporating another stakeholder group. Panel chairs are trained to ensure that the opinion of the student representative is actively sought and that they are encouraged to take their part in all discussions. Throughout the accreditation events, the student representative is treated as a full panel member. Student representatives are appointed either through self-application or recommendation by teaching staff.

The new VS accreditation methodology (2023) has established a more inclusive role for panel members, whereby all panellists review all standards. Previously, the standards were allocated to two panel members to take the lead on review, however, by ensuring each member considers evidence submitted for all the standards, the assessment will be more reliable, balanced and less prone to bias. This approach is already undertaken by VN accreditation panels, and the VS methodology has now come in line with this.

## 6.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

**Standard:** Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

### How we meet this standard:

Veterinary surgeon (VS) and veterinary nurse (VN) degrees are accredited against standards that are published on the RCVS [website](#).

*The VS degree criteria for outcomes:*

- The methodology for accreditation of VS degrees is published on the RCVS [website](#) and details how judgements are made through an accreditation event. To support the launch of the new standards and methodology, all vet schools have individual meetings with the RCVS to work through the documents and the changes to a focus on outcomes evidence rather than inputs alone. Each vet school has the option to request as many further meetings as they wish in order that they have sufficient information to be able to apply the new standards and methodology to their own establishments and programmes.
- Each panel member reviews all the evidence for each standard provided by the vet school during the accreditation event. The training for panel members is developed to ensure consistency of review of evidence against the standards enhancing reliability.
- As evidence is reviewed, both before and during the visit, the accreditation standards rubric is completed. This is an iterative process and is reviewed by the panel throughout the accreditation event. The rubric requires details of the type of evidence for each standard, whether it was in the repository or established during the visit, whether the evidence was input, process or outcomes evidence, how the evidence is supported or triangulated, and a recommendation of the outcome in terms of the standards being met, partially met or not met.
- The completed rubric is agreed by the panel on completion of the visit, before leaving the site (or completion of a virtual visit).
- Following the visitation, a report comprising the completed rubric highlighting the triangulated evidence supporting each accreditation standard and panel commentary will be returned to the school for a check of factual accuracy, usually within one month. Once the school has confirmed factual accuracy, the rubric will be considered by the RCVS's PQSC, which will review the evidence and confirm or amend any recommendations.
- The report is then sent to the Vice-Chancellor of the university for a formal response. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 specifies that, for UK schools, the university may, within the period of two months from the receipt of the report, "make observations on or objections to the report" to the RCVS. The university is invited to comment to the RCVS on its responses to any recommendations in the report.
- On receipt of a formal response from the university, this is considered again by the RCVS's PQSC, which will then make a recommendation on accreditation status to RCVS's Education Committee, having taken the university's response into account. The RCVS will endeavour to make this process as efficient as possible.
- Following a decision by the RCVS Education Committee, the school will be notified of the result and both the outcome and report/rubric will be published on the RCVS website, including all recommendations, suggestions, and commendations. Areas of excellence and innovation will be recognised and highlighted.
- The accreditation decisions are classified as:
  - **Accreditation for seven years** subject to the annual monitoring of evidence/data. If annual monitoring remains satisfactory, re-accreditation will be subject to a full Accreditation Event in the seventh year.
  - **Accreditation for a shorter period** of fewer than the usual seven years may be granted where there are either (a) one or more standards not being met, and/or (b) a series of standards being partially met which, taken together, could have a significant impact on students' education. Crucially these deficiencies are deemed not [immediately] seriously detrimental to student education and to be rectifiable within a shorter period of accreditation. The accreditation period will be dependent on which standards are not met or only partially met, the impact these have on student education and the time frame required for the issues to be addressed. When accreditation for a shorter period is granted, the exact period of time will be specified and rationale for the decision conveyed to the veterinary school. Progress will be monitored through periodic reports and an accreditation event at the end of the specified period.



**Conditional accreditation** This category applies where the RCVS considers the levels of unmet standards are seriously impactful on student education and correction of these inadequacies is urgently required. The unmet standards must be rectified within a specified period, with the priorities for correction of the deficiencies, the time frame required and the rationale for the decision conveyed to the veterinary school. Progress will be monitored through periodic reports and an accreditation event at the end of the specified period. Conditional accreditation is, in effect, a final warning to a school that if urgent action is not taken RCVS will move to terminal accreditation.

**Terminal accreditation** may apply if the school is unable to meet RCVS standards, and/or if a school voluntarily closes. The procedures for terminal accreditation must be followed by the veterinary school (see below). For previously-accredited UK veterinary schools, where accreditation is denied by RCVS, the final decision to revoke or suspend their Recognition Order would be made by the Privy Council (see below). For non-UK schools, if accreditation is denied for a programme that was previously accredited, the school may be placed on “terminal accreditation” and it will be the responsibility of the school to present an immediate plan to RCVS for approval showing how the deficiencies will be addressed to allow adequate progress of the existing students to meet RCVS Day One Competences.

**Accreditation is denied.** This option would be relevant where neither ‘Conditional accreditation’ nor ‘Terminal accreditation’ would be applicable. It applies when RCVS considers that the deficiencies are sufficiently serious that the school should not receive accreditation. The RCVS will inform the veterinary school of its concerns and the grounds on which they are based. The veterinary school would be able to request a re-Accreditation Event once it had addressed the deficiencies identified.

- For a new programme, a recommendation will be made to the Privy Council, who will then issue a Privy Council Recognition Order. This is after a full accreditation event during the fifth year of the programme’s operation.

*Veterinary nurse degree criteria for outcomes:*

- The methodology for accreditation of veterinary nurse (VN) degrees is published on the RCVS [website](#) and details how judgements are made through an accreditation event.
- Each panel member reviews the evidence provided by the AEI and adds comments and questions to the application spreadsheet to be shared with the other panel members during the accreditation event. (see Annex 8)
- The panel reviews the evidence before the accreditation visit and during the visit, coming together at key points during the visit to review the evidence and to establish what further evidence is required. This is an iterative process.
- The outcome of each standard is determined by the panel at the end of the visit, before leaving the site, but is not formally reported back to the AEI until they have been reviewed by the VNEC. The outcome can either be met or not met.
- Within three weeks of the event, a draft report is prepared by the RCVS panel. Each standard will be evaluated in a section of the report. The report indicates ways in which the AEI complies, or does not comply, with the accreditation standards.
- The draft report is provided to the AEI for factual accuracy confirmation; the report must be reviewed and returned to the RCVS within one week at which point any amendments are made as necessary.
- Once the content of the report has been confirmed, the AEI will be provided with a final version which includes all actions and suggestions. Any lack of compliance will have an attributed action in order for compliance to be achieved, whereas suggestions are included where compliance has been achieved but the RCVS panel has identified an area for further development.
- Upon receipt of the final report with the associated actions, the AEI is then required to provide an action plan to the RCVS within two weeks. The action plan must include how the action will be addressed, who is responsible for addressing the action and within what timeframe, as well as what evidence will be provided to demonstrate compliance. The RCVS panel will review the proposed action plan to ensure the required actions will be fully addressed.
- The final report and action plan is presented to Veterinary Nurse Education Committee (VNEC) for its consideration of the accreditation decision.
- Following the decision made by VNEC, the AEI is required to submit the relevant action completion evidence to the RCVS in accordance with its planned timetable. Feedback and guidance will be provided for all submissions until all actions have been satisfactorily addressed. Accreditation and RCVS enrolment of students will depend upon the satisfactory resolution of the actions.
- The final report is published online once VNEC has made its decision and the AEI has been informed of the outcome.
- New AEIs and/or new license to practice qualifications that have made substantial progress towards meeting the accreditation standards is afforded ‘Provisional Accreditation’. Once provisionally accredited, students undertaking the qualification can enroll with the RCVS and commence training. Quality monitoring of the provisionally

accredited programme takes place annually and includes, but is not limited to, delivery site and training practice audits, stakeholder feedback audits, self-assessment reports, assessment audits and in-person audit of the required final summative assessment (OSCE). Providing auditing does not indicate any concerns, once the first cohort of students completes the qualification the AEI can apply for 'Full Accreditation status.' Where there is cause for concern and an AEI is not afforded 'Full Accreditation' students will be required to achieve the RCVS Pre-registration examination prior to applying to enter the RCVS Register of Veterinary Nurses.

- The awarding of provisional accreditation allows for enrolled student nurses to undergo training as a veterinary nurse at an approved training and assessment centre or a veterinary practice approved by such a centre.

The options for decisions on accreditation of veterinary nursing qualifications (subject to annual quality monitoring) are:

- o **Full accreditation for five years** is given to qualifications that meet, or exceed, all the accreditation standards.  
**Full accreditation for a shorter period** is applied where significant deficiencies are identified in an existing programme; accreditation will be subject to

the deficiencies being addressed within a set period. The RCVS will normally undertake a full programme review before the end of the agreed accreditation period.

**Provisional accreditation** is granted for AEIs with new qualifications that have made substantial progress towards meeting the accreditation standards. Once the first cohort of students completes the qualification, a provisionally accredited AEI may apply to the RCVS for full accreditation. Students undertaking provisionally accredited qualifications will be required to pass the RCVS pre-registration examination should the programme not successfully achieve full accreditation status by the point students are completing their training. Provisional accreditation will not normally exceed five years.

**Terminal accreditation** is instigated where a programme is significantly non-compliant with the standards and has been unable to address the concerns within a timely manner. Students completing a programme that is assigned terminal accreditation will be required to pass the RCVS pre-registration examination, as well as all qualification requirements. VNEC will communicate additional conditions to the AEI as required, depending on the rationale for the decision being taken.

## 6.6 ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

**Standard:** Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

### How we meet this standard:

Full reports of each accreditation event for both [veterinary surgeon \(VS\)](#) and [veterinary nurse \(VN\)](#) programmes are published on the RCVS website along with a summary of the [RCVS accreditation status](#) for all institutions accredited by the RCVS who deliver a veterinary degree. Also published on the website are lists of RCVS accredited [higher](#) and [further](#) education qualifications in veterinary nursing. The summary in each report details the findings and outcome of each standard. These are only published once they have been formally agreed through the committee processes. The links to the accreditation status in the above paragraph state the formal decision of the accreditation event.

Overseas programmes that are jointly accredited by the RCVS are not published because the parent organisations (AVMA and AVBC) classify their reports as confidential.

The agenda and minutes of Education Committee and VN Council meetings are published on the RCVS website, demonstrating transparency in decision making. Terms of Reference for each committee are also published on the website.

The RCVS is subject (under UK Law) to the Freedom of Information Act (2000), which means that any request for background documents must be complied with. The RCVS is also subject to the Data Protection Act (2018) meaning that there are restrictions on sharing and using personal data.

Ultimately, decisions of the RCVS as a public body may be legally challenged through the process of Judicial Review. This system of checks and balances guards against any risk of inconsistency in decision making and ensures that our activities and accreditation decisions are open and transparent.

From January 2023 accreditation reports for VS degrees comprise the full completed rubric and a brief summary report. Previous to this, the reports followed the same structure, listing the members of the panel, and introduction, a summary of the findings and then a detailed analysis of each standard, to include the commendations, suggestions and recommendations that need to be fulfilled by the institution.

The VN reports also follow a standard format, listing the panel members, a summary, the programme details and then a detailed analysis of each standard, including commendations, suggestions and actions.

The commendations for each programme are always highlighted in order to reflect on what the institution is doing well. The RCVS is looking for ways of sharing any areas of innovation and good practice amongst other institutions and this will form part of the plans for the future.

Both VS and VN programme reports are submitted to the HEI/AEI for a factual accuracy check. For VN programmes this is within three weeks of the accreditation visit, and for VS programmes this is within one month of the accreditation visit. VN programmes must return the report within one week having checked for accuracy; and VS programmes must return the report within two weeks. Although if this is not achievable, the HEI/AEI can request an extension.

For VN programmes, once the content of the report has been confirmed, the AEI will be provided with a final version which includes all actions and suggestions. Any lack of compliance will have an attributed action in order for compliance to be achieved, whereas suggestions are included where compliance has been achieved but the RCVS panel has identified an area for further development.

Upon receipt of the final report with the associated actions, the AEI is required to provide an action plan to the RCVS within two weeks. The action plan must include how the action will be addressed, who is responsible for addressing the action and within what timeframe, as well as what evidence will be provided to demonstrate compliance. The RCVS panel will review the proposed action plan to ensure the required actions will be fully addressed.

The final report and action plan is presented to the VNEC for its consideration of the accreditation decision. Following the decision made by VNEC, the AEI is required to submit the relevant action completion evidence to the RCVS in accordance with its planned timetable. Feedback and guidance will be provided for all submissions until all actions have been satisfactorily addressed. Accreditation and RCVS enrolment of students will depend upon the satisfactory resolution of the actions, in accordance with their planned timescale. It is

accepted that some actions will take longer to address; providing evidence is submitted in an ongoing fashion, this will not impact the accreditation status or prevent enrolment.

The final report is published online once VNEC has made its decision and the AEI has been informed of the outcome.

For new programmes, a contract, i.e. a Memorandum of Understanding, will be drawn up between the RCVS and the AEI and between the RCVS and each delivery site approved by the AEI to deliver the qualification.

For VS programmes, once the school has confirmed factual accuracy, the rubric and report will be considered by the PQSC, which will review the evidence and confirm or amend any recommendations.

The report is then sent to the Vice-Chancellor of the university for a formal response. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 specifies that, for UK schools, the university may, within the period of two months from the receipt of the report, "make observations on or objections to the report" to RCVS. The university is invited to comment to RCVS on its responses to any recommendations in the report.

On receipt of a formal response from the university, this is considered again by the PQSC, which will then make a recommendation on accreditation status to RCVS's Education Committee, having taken the university's response into account. The RCVS will endeavour to make this process as efficient as possible.

Following a decision by the RCVS Education Committee, the school will be notified of the result and both the outcome and report/rubric will be published on the RCVS website, including all recommendations, suggestions, and commendations. Areas of excellence and innovation will be recognised and highlighted on these website pages, as well as at quality improvement events hosted by the RCVS, where vet schools will be invited to present their innovative practices to a wider audience.

## 6.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

**Standard:** Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

### How we meet this standard:

#### *Appeals*

The appeals procedure is detailed on page 24 of [the RCVS Accreditation Methodology for Veterinary Programmes](#) and is a standalone document on the [VN area of the website](#).

Both procedures follow a similar format whereby an appeals procedure will apply where an institution questions the formal outcome of the accreditation process, where it can:

- demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence; and/or
- that published standards have not been correctly applied; and/or
- that published processes have not been consistently implemented.

The appeal is initially considered by the PQSC for VS appeals, and for VN appeals, is initially considered by the VNEC.

The outcome of this review is to decide if the appeal is to be dismissed or if it is to proceed to the next stage. The basis for dismissal is on one of the following grounds:

- It relates to the individual comments made by the accreditation panel;
- It gives insufficient information to enable any judgement to be made;
- It is frivolous, vexatious or relates to a minor irregularity in the conduct of the accreditation process;
- It is unnecessary because deficiencies in the accreditation process have already been acknowledged and appropriate action taken.

If the appeal is accepted, then it is referred back to the Education Committee for VS accreditations, or to the VNEC for VN accreditations. These committees will then re-consider their original decisions and may decide to amend it.

If the appeal is dismissed in the first stage, the HEI/AEI has the right to have the appeal considered by an appeals panel. The appointment of the appeals panel is coordinated by the registrar. One member should be appointed from the Council officer team (e.g. current President or Vice-President), one member from Council and one lay member [should be nominated from the list of RCVS visitors]. The meeting will normally be held within two months of receipt of the request by the appellant institution for consideration of the appeal by an appeals panel. The panel will select its own Chair.

Until the end of the appeals process, the accreditation report won't be published and the appellant institution will hold its current accreditation status.

#### *Complaints*

Complaints can be received and dealt with at any stage of the accreditation process. They must be made in writing and will be dealt with in liaison with the Chairs of the relevant subcommittees or committees, whichever is appropriate depending on the nature of the complaint. Details of the RCVS Complaints procedure is available on the [website](#)

If the complaint is about a member of RCVS staff, the individual will first be directed to speak with that person, or with their head of department. If the complaint is about a member of the panel, the individual should first raise this with the panel chair. If they feel the matter remains unresolved, then there are details on the website to contact the HR and Training Manager at the RCVS.

## 7. Opinions of stakeholders

The key stakeholders of the RCVS are the veterinary profession and their clients, ie the animal-owning/animal-keeping public. Specifically associated with the education of veterinary professionals, the stakeholders are programme providers who are accredited, the students enrolled in these programmes and the employers of VS and VN graduates.

Through the work of the RCVS, stakeholder feedback is embedded into the way in which it operates, ranging from large stakeholder events to the integration of stakeholders within all committees, working groups and accreditation panels and gathering feedback from specific events. Indeed, the operation of the RCVS is such that it would not be able to fulfil its role without the involvement of stakeholders at all levels.

Recent large stakeholder events have been:

- [Graduate outcomes consultation Nov 2018.](#)
- [EMS Stakeholder meeting Nov 2021.](#)
- [Workforce summit Nov 2021.](#)
- [RCVS consultation on proposals for new accreditation standards and accreditation methodology for veterinary programmes Oct 2021.](#)
- Regional question times.
- Online stakeholder meetings.
- Monthly meetings with Vet Schools Council (VSC).
- Annual meetings between RCVS officers and the officers of veterinary and veterinary nursing associations at including BVA, AVS, etc.
- Standards Framework consultation on proposals 2020.
- Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing Educator meeting 2018 and consultation on proposals 2019.
- DOC/DOS/PB consultation on proposals 2022.
- Legislation Working Party Report and Recommendations 2021.

During the recent consultation on proposals for new accreditation standards and accreditation methodology for veterinary programmes, responses were received from 107 stakeholders and members of the profession, including 25 veterinary organisations such as Association of Veterinary Students (AVS), the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and

the Veterinary Schools Council (VSC). The outcomes of the consultation were shared with the Education Committee, who then agreed any changes to the standards and methodology. The stakeholder involvement in this process was key to understand the needs of the profession balanced with the opportunities in educational settings.

All the RCVS committees and working groups are composed of a prescribed range of stakeholders. The RCVS Council is made up of 24 members: 13 elected members (all veterinary surgeons), three members appointed by the Veterinary Schools Council, the body that represents the eight universities with an RCVS-accredited veterinary degree programme (Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Nottingham, and Surrey), two appointed veterinary nurses, and six appointed lay members. In addition, the Chief Veterinary Officer is an ex-officio observer. All other committees and subcommittees have a range of stakeholder representatives, to include educators, employers and students. Thus, at all levels, stakeholders are involved in the decision making of the college.

The accreditation panels for both VS and VN events are made up of educators, employers and students. This is to ensure that the evidence provided by each HEI/AEI is considered from all perspectives of the profession in order that the compliance to each standard is robustly determined.

Furthermore, following each accreditation event, feedback is formally sought through online questionnaires, from all participants in the event, to include the panel members, the staff at the HEI/AEI, the students whose opinions were sought, employers, alumni and any other stakeholders involved in the event. Through this feedback, best practice can be shared and areas of concern reduced or eliminated.

Although the RCVS is independent in its operations, it works in cooperation with the Veterinary Schools Council (VSC), which comprises the Heads of Veterinary Schools in the UK, and also the individual veterinary nursing institutions. Through this organisation, the collective views of the institutions which RCVS accredits are fed into RCVS committee meetings, where any issues presented are considered.



## 8. Recommendations and main findings from previous review and agency’s resulting follow-up

This table demonstrates how the RCVS has addressed the recommendations from the review in 2018:

**Table 8**

Standard	Recommendations	Actions implemented	Evidence
3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance.	<p>Add a more comprehensive QA policy to the next strategic plan or develop a separate QA policy document that would help stakeholders outside the RCVS to understand the aim and scope of its QA activities.</p> <p>Engage students from both veterinary surgeons and nurses’ programmes to the decision-making bodies of the RCVS.</p>	<p>The Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures has been developed and is available on the website. The policy details how accreditation activities are quality assured for both veterinary surgeon (VS) and veterinary nurse (VN) programmes. This is detailed further in standard 3.1.</p> <p>All standing, statutory and appeals committees, subcommittees, panels and working parties are composed of council members and other appointed individuals, including student representatives. All accreditation review panels must have a student representative.</p>	<p><a href="#">Link to IQA policy on website.</a></p> <p>Terms of reference for all committees are published on the RCVS website.</p>
3.4 Thematic analysis.	<p>Develop a clear concept and plan for thematic analysis.</p> <p>Set clear roles and responsibilities among staff members for analysing and publishing general findings of the College’s external quality assurance activities.</p>	<p>A thematic analysis policy has been adopted along with a plan of proposed reports. More details are provided within the narrative of standard 3.4.</p>	<p>See Thematic Analysis Policy in Annex 6.</p>

Standard	Recommendations	Actions implemented	Evidence
3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct.	Apply a systematic approach for collecting feedback and align the procedures at accreditations of veterinary and veterinary nursing degrees whenever possible.	<p>All feedback from accreditation events is collected and analysed by the EQIM. This is carried out via an online questionnaire and is circulated to members of the accreditation panel, staff at the HEI/AEI, students at the HEI/AEI and other relevant stakeholders such as alumni and employers involved in the accreditation event.</p> <p>Through the involvement of the EQIM in both VS and VN accreditation events, links are being made between the procedures to align these as far as is practicable. This has included the method of implementation of new standards and procedures; links between training of new panel members; sharing of good practice between accreditation events.</p> <p>Further details are included in standard 3.6.</p>	<p>VS and VN Feedback surveys will be available to view during the review, but due to the content must remain confidential.</p> <p>Example IQA reports in annex 5.</p>
2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance.	Develop veterinary nursing accreditation methodology closer to the one of veterinary surgeons and, through this, increase the focus on IQA in veterinary nursing reviews, with especial attention to student-centred learning, also in VN reviews.	<p>The quality assurance policy and procedures is equally applicable to both VS and VN accreditation events.</p> <p>Both VS and VN accreditation panels include a student representative.</p>	<p><a href="#">Link to IQA policy on website.</a></p> <p>Examples of IQA reports in annex 5.</p>

Standard	Recommendations	Actions implemented	Evidence
2.4 Peer review experts.	At VN accreditation, pursue the widening of review pools and avoid relying too heavily on the senior staff of the RCVS.	All VN accreditation panels must include a representative from industry, one from academia and a student. More frequently, the panels have been chaired by a member of the RCVS VN staff. However, from January 2023, all undergraduate programme accreditation events will be chaired by an external expert.	
2.5 Criteria for outcomes.	Accreditation decisions should be justifiable. Therefore, the review panel recommends to:  consider whether the complex system of decision-making could be simplified;  make the option "Full accreditation for a shorter period" more precise.	In 2022, the VS accreditation decisions have been simplified to make the definitions more precise. These are detailed in the Accreditation methodology on the website.  The decision-making process is legally bound within the Veterinary Surgeons Act.	<a href="#">RCVS Methodology for the accreditation of veterinary degree programmes.</a> (Page 16 details the accreditation classifications and has simplified "accreditation for a shorter period").
3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct.	As there is no one document describing the IQA policies and responsibilities, the RCVS is invited to consider developing a formal policy document. It is suggested that this document includes formal procedures of IQA, articulation of responsibilities and formalised feedback structures to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose. This would allow for greater transparency and recording of formalised IQA systems.	Quality Assurance policy developed and implemented.	<a href="#">Link to IQA policy on website.</a>

Standard	Recommendations	Actions implemented	Evidence
2.3 Implementing processes.	As an area of good practice, expert panels of VN accreditation can see the university's response and action plan, and comment on the reply if necessary. It is suggested that expert panels of VS accreditation are also provided the opportunity to view the university's responses.	As part of the decision-making process, once the university has responded to the accreditation report, the response is shared with the review panel for their comments, and these comments along with the response from the university is shared with the PQSC.	<a href="#">RCVS Methodology for the accreditation of veterinary degree programmes.</a> (See Page 13 for details of the process).
Other.	It is recognised that RCVS is not a typical QA agency but is a very experienced QA provider, although an inexperienced member of the European QA community. The review panel would encourage the RCVS to become more active participants of the relevant discourse and community activities.	Attendance at General assemblies and member forums; two participants in leadership development programme; one member of staff has undergone relevant training and is now included in the ENQA pool of experts; one member of staff is engaged on the working group for academic integrity; providing a poster display at the 2022 members forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">ENQA members forum.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Academic integrity working group.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">List of participants for LDP 2019.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">List of participants for LDP 2020/21.</a></li> <li>• Certificate of attendance for reviewer training in annex 9.</li> </ul>

Board suggestions from follow-up report:

**Standard 2.1** the Board notes that peer learning with the ENQA community on the interlinkage between internal quality assurance and external quality assurance should be strengthened. See chapter 6.4

**Standard 3.6** Internal quality assurance and professional conduct, the Board calls for further support for stakeholder involvement to facilitate development of quality culture at the agency. See chapter 7

## 9. SWOT analysis of Education Department activities

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder engagement and consultation is extensive.</li> <li>The team is open to change and actively seeks to be innovative.</li> <li>Leading the way for global veterinary education; the change to outcomes-based accreditation has already been replicated by other international veterinary regulators.</li> <li>The compassionate approach to changes ensures that vet schools are offered a lot of help and support to manage changes.</li> <li>The RCVS has legal status as sole accreditor in the UK for veterinary education.</li> <li>Experienced in accreditation work nationally and internationally.</li> <li>The RCVS is in a strong financial position.</li> <li>The RCVS is internationally respected in terms of delivering a quality veterinary education, making RCVS accreditation a sought-after recognition.</li> <li>The RCVS is successfully accredited by ENQA and US dept of Education.</li> <li>The introduction of an evidence repository ensures consistency across all schools.</li> <li>The RCVS rapidly responded to the activities of vet school during the pandemic to ensure consistency of application of standards.</li> <li>The education department has positive and collaborative relationships with the PQSC, EC and with other departments within the RCVS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To ensure significant stakeholder engagement means that making changes takes longer.</li> <li>A small profession means it can be difficult to manage Conflicts of Interest of panel members.</li> <li>Challenges to recruit panel members within a small pool.</li> <li>Workforce challenges has led to a temporary dependency on the recognition of other regulators' outcomes.</li> <li>There is a lack of diversity within the profession and the student body.</li> <li>The profession and education are bound by outdated legislation detailed in the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966).</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder engagement provides an external voice and allows for a wide range of considerations to be taken into account.</li> <li>There are proposed changes to the legislation that applies to the profession and the College is involved in a lobbying process to engage with relevant stakeholders within the parliamentary system to achieve change.</li> <li>The RCVS is the first and only regulator to collect robust outcomes data from graduates/early career vets and employers to allow for evaluation of the impact of veterinary education on the profession.</li> <li>The introduction of e-learning for panel members will facilitate multi-agency accreditation events.</li> <li>Through further engagement with the ENQA community, there is the opportunity to share best practice through this platform.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is an uncertainty of who will carry out the role of Designated Quality Body for Higher Education providers with resignation of the QAA from the position.</li> <li>When particular stakeholder groups have polarised opinions on some issues implementing change without alienating some groups can be challenging.</li> </ul>



## 9. SWOT analysis of Veterinary Nurse Department activities

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewed and revised Day One Competences (DOC) and Day One Skills (DOS) to meet needs of the profession.</li> <li>Support for AElS to understand and apply the new standards before accreditation through the pre-accreditation support package.</li> <li>The VN Futures initiative identifies the current barriers and opportunities for growth for the VN profession.</li> <li>Development of online portals for student enrolment to streamline the process.</li> <li>The VN department is made up of a wide range of staff with both clinical and non-clinical qualifications and experience to enable AElS to be fully supported.</li> <li>The VN department team has positive and collaborative relationships with the Veterinary Nurse Council (VNC), Veterinary Nurse Education Committee (VNEC) and other departments within the RCVS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships with external stakeholders can always be strengthened; a relevant example would be the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA), with whom we could work more collaboratively.</li> <li>Internal recruitment to specific roles is challenging and has left some roles unfilled for a period of time.</li> <li>Challenges to recruit accreditation panel members leading to a small pool of panel members and an increased burden on those in the pool.</li> <li>Issues with the VN workforce in relation to retention of current staff and lack of incentive to return to work after a career break.</li> <li>The format of the final practical summative assessment has to be in the form of an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), which may stifle AElS to use other methods of assessment for fear of overassessment.</li> <li>Lack of a national standardised approach for clinical supervisors.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that the relationships with external stakeholder organisations are further developed to be collaborative and coordinated.</li> <li>A potential change to the legislation to allow the development of the VN practitioner/prescriber role.</li> <li>Although the Nursing Progress Log (NPL) was developed by the RCVS and is used widely it is not exclusive, providing an opportunity for development of the package.</li> <li>Opportunity to review the requirement for an OSCE as the final practical summative assessment to allow new and innovative assessment methods to be utilised.</li> <li>Development of standardisation for clinical supervisors through the RCVS Academy.</li> <li>Develop online accreditation panel member training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When particular stakeholder groups have polarised opinions on some issues implementing change without alienating some groups can be challenging.</li> <li>Proposed Legislative reform may not be accepted by the Government.</li> <li>The perception by some stakeholders that the regulatory body is slow to change, which is an issued mainly linked to legislative processes.</li> <li>The high demands on other RCVS teams that provide support to the VN department means that some improvements and projects implemented by the team may not progress at the pace required to benefit the AElS.</li> <li>With a growth in veterinary programmes (VN and VS), there is potentially a shortage of appropriate training practices (TPs) in the future.</li> </ul>

## 10. Key challenges and areas for future development

In 2020, the RCVS sold the premises it had occupied since 1995, however, the RCVS continued to work from these premises under a lease agreement with the new owners. In 2022, the college took the decision to leave the premises and move into a temporary office space, whilst the purchase of a new building was completed. The new premises will be ready to move into in late 2023/early 2024 and coincides with changes to working practices as a result of the pandemic. The increase in remote working will continue, with the creation of new common practices, and the change to a new space provides the opportunity to develop an environment to facilitate these practices. Details of the office changes and working practices are detailed in chapter 5.5 under “other resources”

As with many businesses, the pandemic was a time of rapid change for working practices, especially with the way in which we communicate and collaborate. In order to continue with the accreditation of programmes, those scheduled were carried out remotely in order that the programmes remained accredited. As well as changes to the way in which the RCVS conducted its work, the HEIs and AEs also adapted to remote learning and assessments and ensured that all their students graduated at the right time, with the appropriate experiences and qualifications. This was a huge undertaking, with the whole profession working together to overcome the challenges that lockdown brought.

The RCVS Standards framework for veterinary nurse education and training were re-written in 2019 and have undergone an additional update in 2022. However, since their introduction in 2020 there was a noticeable change in the quality of accreditation applications and supporting evidence being submitted. Therefore, the Veterinary Nurse Education Committee approved the introduction of a pre-application engagement system to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of applications and to improve the quality of the accreditation events and the likelihood of success. If an AEI wanted this opportunity, their accreditation date was postponed by 12 months. Only one AEI has not wished to have a pre-accreditation support visit, and those who have used this option have fed back that they found the visit to be supportive and helpful. In 2023, those AEIs who had support visits in 2022, will have their full accreditation events. These will be carefully reviewed and analysed to assess the impact of the pre-accreditation events.

The standards for accrediting veterinary degrees have undergone a significant change, whereby all aspects of the process have been reviewed, including not just the standards, but a move towards a more risk-based approach, an updated methodology, changes to how the HEI presents their evidence, the role (and training) of the accreditation panel and how the outcomes of the accreditation event are reported. This process was commenced in 2019 and is activated from January 2023. The process involved significant input from stakeholders across the profession and consideration by committees and the

RCVS Council. The new standards and methodology are ground-breaking within veterinary accreditation agencies worldwide, and there is no doubt that the impact of these changes will be carefully monitored by our peers in America, Australia, South Africa and Europe. Knowing that the launch of the new standards and methodology will be watched provides its own set of challenges, but the RCVS is ready to embrace this opportunity and is confident in its approach.

In October 2021, a paper was published by the RCVS detailing the [recommendations for future veterinary legislation](#). This was the outcome of a four-year wholesale review of the legislation that governs the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions and is the most substantial review since the Veterinary Surgeons Act (VSA) was introduced in 1966. The key recommendations are:

- The expansion of the veterinary nurse role to allow them to fulfil their potential, to further support veterinary surgeons and encourage professional growth, including the statutory protection of the title ‘veterinary nurse’;
- The regulation of additional paraprofessionals by the RCVS to become ‘allied professions’ alongside veterinary nurses. This will allow for regulation of the whole vet-led team as well as giving statutory protection to the professional titles of all allied professionals regulated by the RCVS;
- The RCVS should be granted statutory authority to regulate all veterinary practices (currently this is a voluntary scheme);
- The introduction of provisions for limited licensure, which would allow people with disabilities to join the professions when they might otherwise be unable to meet the criteria to graduate or gain a full licence to practise;
- The separation of registration and licence to practise – currently this is not possible under the VSA and this is not in line with other regulators. It would allow those who are restricted from performing the full range of veterinary activities to still join the Register of Veterinary Surgeons and become Members of the RCVS with limited or restricted licence to practise;
- Underpin mandatory continuing professional development (CPD) – currently the RCVS has no power to enforce mandatory CPD except through a disciplinary process. If a member does not fulfil their CPD requirement, there is currently no power to refuse renewal of registration;
- Introduction of a revalidation regime to ensure that veterinarians remain up-to-date and continue to meet the requirements of the RCVS, as they are now, rather than when they first qualified;
- The RCVS continues to be a ‘Royal College that regulates’.

Many of these proposed legislative changes will impact on the quality assurance role of the RCVS with respect to undergraduate education and they are viewed as an opportunity to modernise and update the way in which the veterinary professions are educated.

# Glossary of terms

ACOVENE	Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education	RCVS	Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
AEI	Accredited Education Institute	RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
APP	Accreditation Policies and Procedures	RVC	Royal Veterinary College (London University's veterinary school)
ARC	Audit and Risk Committee (RCVS)	SAVC	South African Veterinary Council
AVBC	Australasian Veterinary Boards Council	SER	Self-Evaluation Report
AVMA	American Veterinary Medical Association	SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
AVS	Association of Veterinary Students	SSPCA	Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
BVA	British Veterinary Association	TP	Training Practice for student VNs
BVNA	British Veterinary Nursing Association	UCAS	University and Colleges Admissions Service
CPD	Continuing professional development	VetGDP (RCVS)	Veterinary Graduate Development Programme
D1C	Day One Competence (VS)	VETNNET	Veterinary European Transnational Network for Nursing Education and Training
Defra	Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs	VN	Veterinary Nurse
DfE	Department for Education	VNC	Veterinary Nurses Council (RCVS)
DOC	Day One Competence (VN)	VNEC	Veterinary Nurses Education Committee
DOS	Day One Skill (VN)	VSC	Veterinary Schools Council
EAEVE	European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education		
EC	Education Committee (RCVS)		
EMS	Extramural Studies		
FRCVS	Fellow of the RCVS		
FTE	Full time equivalent		
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education		
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation		
HE	Higher Education		
HEI	Higher Education Institute		
IAWG	International Accreditors Working Group		
MRCVS	Member of the RCVS		
NAVLE	North American Veterinary Licensing Examination		
OfS	Office for Students		
OSCE	Objectively Scored/Structured Clinical Examination		
OSPVE	Objective structured practical veterinary examination		
PDP	Professional Development Phase (RCVS). Can also refer to Personal Development Plan (as used in schools & universities) – replaced with VetGDP		
PQSC	Primary Qualification Subcommittee (an RCVS committee that reviews the vet schools and reports to Education Committee)		
PSS	Practice Standards Scheme (RCVS)		
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for HE		

