

RCVS Accreditation Methodology for Veterinary Programmes

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1. Introduction

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) has a statutory responsibility under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, for regulating the professional education of veterinary surgeons and veterinary practitioners (to include vet nurses). In order to safeguard the interests of the public and animals, the RCVS sets the standards for veterinary education, and ensures only those who have completed a recognised qualification are eligible to practice in the UK.

RCVS accreditation of veterinary degree programmes provides assurance that standards are being met and drives the quality improvement of veterinary education. The accreditation of qualifications is an evidence-based, peer reviewed process that ensures that not only are the published standards being met and maintained by each educational establishment, but also that educational innovation and good practice is recognised and shared with stakeholders. RCVS accreditation activities have been developed to be consistent, transparent, valid, and reliable and the qualifications are subject to a rigorous quality assurance cycle that is flexible enough to respond to the changing demands made of the profession as well as to allow for a variety of programme delivery models.

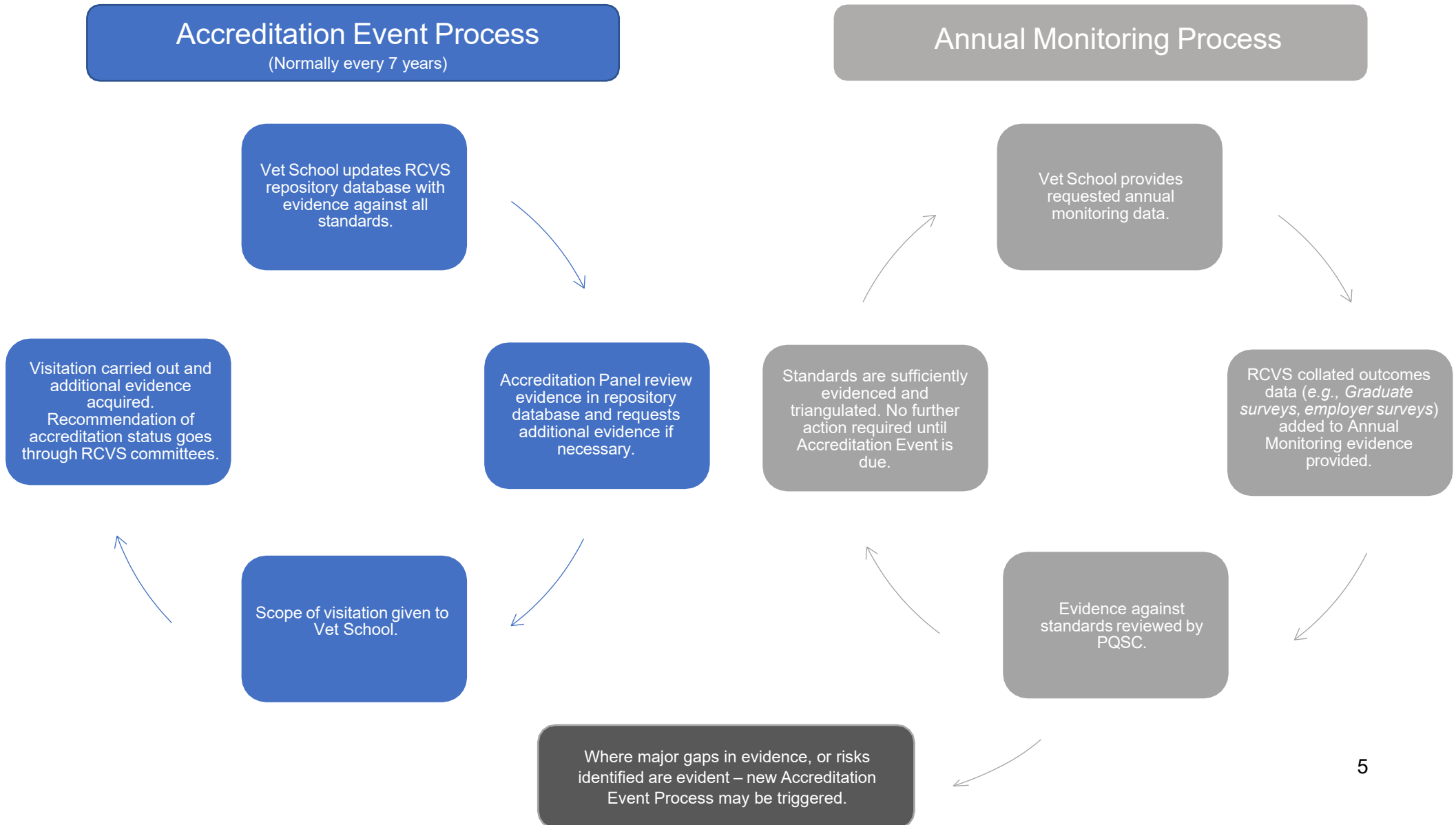
The accreditation process recognises the ways in which veterinary care and professional education have evolved over recent years and continues to develop, and draws upon advances in quality assurance methodology. To provide the best possible assurance on quality, RCVS accreditation of veterinary degrees is moving from a process previously based primarily on the consideration of 'inputs' (e.g. policies and procedures) to a hybrid approach which also considers outcome-focused evidence on how standards are being met. This approach provides the flexibility to assure educational standards are achieved across different models of programme delivery, including 'traditional', community-based, local partnerships and work-based approaches.

Furthermore, the increased assurance provided through evidence demonstrating positive or effective outcomes, enables a more risk-based approach to accreditation to be adopted. Through a combination of annual data monitoring and risk-based accreditation events including bespoke visitations, the accreditation cycle enhances the opportunity to recognise emerging issues early so that attention can be focused on potentially higher risk areas of the education programme and the appropriate support can be delivered in a timely fashion.

1.1 Glossary of terms

Accreditation Cycle	This is the whole cycle including the Accreditation Event every 7 years and the annual monitoring process.
Annual Monitoring Process	The annual process of data collection from the Vet School.
Accreditation Event	This encompasses everything outside of the annual monitoring process – the school updating the repository for the accreditation review, the consideration of evidence and the bespoke visitation.
Accreditation Review	This is the initial review of the school's evidence against the accreditation standards which will ultimately shape the scope of the visitation.
Accreditation Panel	The panel that reviews the school's evidence against each standard during the accreditation event; membership is agreed by Education Committee in advance of the school being due to begin the Accreditation Event after 7 years.
Accreditation Visit	The visitation that is carried out; this will be bespoke and the scope decided on by the Accreditation Panel following the initial review of evidence in the repository (i.e., focussing upon standards where more evidence or triangulation of evidence is required).

2. The Accreditation Cycle



3. Accreditation Event

The Accreditation Event encompasses a review of evidence submitted by the vet school against all the accreditation standards (the accreditation review) and, using a risk-based approach, a bespoke visitation to focus on the standards where further evidence is required to demonstrate they have been met (or to triangulate existing evidence).

An Accreditation Event will take place for each veterinary programme every 7 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.

Schools will have been notified when receiving their accreditation status following an Accreditation Event of the planned timeframe for the next event (subject to Annual Monitoring). However, approximately six months before the accreditation of an established veterinary programme is due to lapse, the RCVS will contact the veterinary school to begin the next Accreditation Event.

3.1. Accreditation Panel

The appointment of members of each Accreditation Panel is ratified by RCVS Education Committee, following recommendation from its Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee (PQSC). This will be done in advance of the Accreditation Event.

The members of any Accreditation Panel will be chosen from a list of people that are on the RCVS list of accreditation experts, and who have successfully completed the required training. All panel members will be asked to confirm that they have no conflicts of interest with the school.

The Accreditation Panel will comprise up to six members, plus a student representative, 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, paraclinical, 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). RCVS staff support the accreditation process throughout an accreditation event, including clarification on the RCVS standards, methodology and the visit process. Staff should not be expected to take on any personal assistant roles.

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 already had experience of being an Accreditation Panel member and ideally have recent experience as a committee Chair in addition to having completed the RCVS training.

The Accreditation Panel may also include multiple observers in either a quality assurance role, or in a training role attending with a view to participating as a panel member at a future date.

3.2. Stage 1: School is invited to prepare evidence in support of the accreditation standards

Evidence against the accreditation standards should be submitted into the secure online repository database, where all accumulated data and evidence against each of the accreditation standards will be stored (including any annual monitoring data) for each programme. This will be hosted on RCVS servers and access will be restricted to those involved in the review of evidence as part of accreditation.

Schools will be able to upload documents and evidence to their secure online repository database at any time, to prevent peaks in administrative burden. However, when Schools are formally notified of their upcoming Accreditation Event six months in advance, they will be invited to prepare and upload evidence in support of the accreditation standards.

Guidance around potential evidence for each standard is provided in the separate document ***“Examples of Evidence in support of RCVS Accreditation Standards”***. This guidance is intended to provide a useful resource to Schools when considering the different sources of evidence they may wish to submit. However, it is important to note that the list is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive, and the school should submit any data or documentation which it feels demonstrates compliance. Whilst RCVS can provide guidance on suggested types of evidence which may meet a standard, this will be high-level and not prescriptive, as what is appropriate for one programme or delivery model may not be relevant for another. There are some basic requirements that should be included in the repository, these include; up-to-date staff list as panels may request staff from this list to attend meetings (including names, department, job title, MRCVS/RVN status, teaching qualifications, and FTE); organogram of the school structure, curriculum map, syllabus, campus map, and programme handbooks.

The RCVS is committed to providing an open dialogue with schools, prior to and during an accreditation event regarding the suitability of evidence.

All evidence should be entered directly into the repository and any additional information forwarded through an alternative medium will not be accepted, unless through prior and exceptional arrangement.

All documentary evidence must be itemised by accreditation standard and indexed carefully to ensure ease of retrieval by those carrying out the review during the accreditation event. Each item provided in the repository should also include a short, concise description, to capture what is contained within.

The RCVS will support and supplement the data submitted by schools, with outcomes data gathered through independent surveys of graduates, students, and employers.

Once the school has been through the initial process of supplying evidence, at the point of the next Accreditation Event they will only need to supply further evidence if any significant changes in relation to any standards has taken place, i.e. facilities upgrades, curricula updates etc.

3.3. Stage 2: Review of evidence in the repository

The RCVS Education Department will begin the initial review of the evidence submitted to the repository (stage 1), in addition to the consideration of relevant annual monitoring data and any outcomes data collected by RCVS e.g. graduate or employer surveys. A summary of this evidence review will be given to the Accreditation Panel, noting any standards which appear to have strong evidence supporting them, as well as standards lacking evidence or where additional triangulation is required. All Accreditation Panel members will have access to the full evidence within the repository.

Once the school confirms that all documentary evidence has been uploaded to the repository, by the published date, the Accreditation Panel will begin their consideration of the data against each of the accreditation standards. This will be done using an Accreditation Standards Rubric, using the summary of evidence as a template to check against the information in the repository. Each member will be asked to consider evidence submitted for all the standards, in order to provide a reliable assessment and a balanced approach.

Each panel member will carry out their initial review independently, adding to the rubric showing where evidence to support compliance is present, or where gaps in evidence are apparent and further evidence needs to be obtained during the visitation. Each rubric entry will be linked to specific sources of evidence considered to support each standard, and the evidence that triangulated this to ensure that the rationale and transparency of the panel's decisions can be demonstrated. In the majority of cases, for already established programmes, the panel will be looking for triangulation of any input data with evidence on processes and / or outcomes.

Against each standard there will be the option to mark as standard met, partially met, or not met (at this stage). Partially met: Meeting most elements of the standard but not the standard in its entirety. Not met: Is not meeting the standard. For example, Standard 3.3 states '*The head of school or dean must be an MRCVS. They must have appropriate knowledge and expertise of the veterinary profession, academic affairs and leadership, and have control over the budget for the veterinary programme*'. If the head of school is a vet and has expertise in the profession but doesn't have control of the budget, then the standard would be partially met.

Any additional evidence may be requested in documentary format, or it may be more relevant to gather this through the visit to the Vet School.

On completion of the independent reviews, RCVS Education Department will summarise the findings of the panel in a report. The panel will then agree on which standards have already been met and triangulated, and begin to consider the priorities for the accreditation visit.

3.4. Stage 3: The Accreditation Visit

A bespoke accreditation visit follows the initial accreditation review. The accreditation review will determine the scope, focus and duration of the visit.

The Accreditation Panel will have considered the summarised findings and the evidence within the repository and have completed the rubric independently. The panel Chair will then notify the Education Department on the standards to be prioritised during the accreditation visit. All members of the Accreditation Panel will attend the accreditation visit.

Once the scope and focus of the visit has been identified, a date for the accreditation visit (and estimated duration) will be agreed by RCVS in consultation with the veterinary school. This will normally be agreed at least three months prior to the visit.

For established veterinary programmes, it may not be necessary to revisit areas where they have been able to submit sufficient and relevant evidence to demonstrate continual compliance, resulting in a shorter visitation which focusses on areas needing further triangulation of evidence, or where there have been recent changes or new risks. For newer programmes, where outcomes data may be limited and facilities will not be so familiar to the RCVS, a longer and more in-depth accreditation visit would be necessary.

The length and focus of an accreditation visit will be risk-based, depending on the outcome of the Accreditation Review.

Wherever possible, to ensure reliability and coherence, the accreditation panel will work as a group for the visit, to enable each member to see the relationship between the various parts of the curriculum and the degree. Circumstances may arise, however, which justify the Chair delegating specific tasks to a subgroup of the panel.

A visitation will always include meetings with students from each cohort year, meetings with managerial, academic and support staff, tours of facilities as required, plus a representative sample of any off-campus sites responsible for the delivery of core teaching (determined by RCVS). Video evidence of the facilities in off-campus partner practices may also be invited so that in person visits are not necessary. Locations to be visited or that require video evidence will be selected by the RCVS.

Regarding meetings with students, it is suggested that the majority of each year group be able to attend, or a minimum of at least 10 students from each year group, whichever is larger. If possible, meetings should be town hall style within a lecture theatre or communal space (an environment that is familiar to students). Please try to avoid using the panel member base room.

The accreditation panel expects to meet groups of staff who represent a broad range of disciplines and levels of experience, extra-mural and any adjunct staff, students, and external stakeholders. Wherever possible, to promote an open and honest dialogue between staff members and the accreditation panel, senior staff members of the school should not be present at meetings on each standard, unless directly involved in that area. Accreditation panel members may wish to speak to as wide a range of individuals as possible, so repetition of staff members across multiple meetings should be discouraged. When considering who should attend meetings with the panel please limit this to no more than 10 where possible to enable all staff to contribute. Try to avoid repetition where

possible, but recognising where appropriate expertise is required. RCVs will review panel attendance and may request changes. During the visit, the panel may ask the school questions about information presented in the repository. This does not mean they have not read it, this is for additional clarification/triangulation purposes.

Prior to an accreditation event, RCVS will invite a sample of recent graduates to provide feedback on the programme, focused on the student experience and outcomes, which will be added to the evidence gathered through graduate/employer surveys in the repository.

Opportunities will be offered for all students, educators (including any educators within contracted partner practices) and support staff, to meet with the accreditation panel confidentially to discuss any aspect of the programme's achievement of the accreditation standards. These confidential sessions must be advertised by the school to all staff, students and educators within partner practices at least 1 month in advance of the visitation, and the RCVS staff member's contact details provided so that individuals can communicate privately with the visiting panel if they wish. These meetings will be arranged to take place virtually over a two-week window prior to the visit if needed. There will also be the opportunity for all students, managerial, academic and support staff and educators within partner practices to provide feedback on the standards anonymously through an online tool.

Visitation schedules will be structured so that the visit can be an iterative process, allowing for on-site changes if required, and including additional time to allow further consultation with key individuals and groups if necessary.

3.5. Accreditation Standards Rubric

The Accreditation Standards Rubric completed during the Accreditation Review, will be used by the accreditation panel as a starting point for the further evaluation of evidence on the visit.

During the visitation, the rubric will be considered by the whole panel at the end of each day, so that areas which need further exploration with the school can be identified, as well as agreeing on areas of compliance.

Any area of deficiency must be 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 will also be highlighted as a commendation, and also cross referenced to supporting evidence. Each standard has been developed to be as independent as possible, to avoid a situation whereby a deficiency and / or recommendation would be applicable across multiple standards. Therefore, a deficiency or recommendation made against one standard would not also need to be repeated against another standard.

At the end of the visitation, the accreditation panel will then agree their decision on areas of compliance and recommendation.

The completed Accreditation Standards Rubric will be published on the RCVS website once finalised

and agreed by RCVS Committees.

3.6. Verbal feedback to the school

After the visitation has concluded, the accreditation panel will meet the Vice Chancellor of the university (or equivalent), and the head and senior staff of the school, to provide a factual summary of the strengths and opportunities for improvement of the programme in relation to the RCVS standards.

Any areas of commendation, suggestions, and recommendations from the panel will be communicated, and the next steps of the process outlined. The Chair will confirm that the panel are not the decision makers, and that the completed rubric showing their findings will be considered by RCVS committees, before the decision on accreditation is taken and the Accreditation Event formally ends.

3.7. RCVS committee process

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 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. The university response should also include a timeline of expected actions to address the recommendations and suggestions.

On receipt of a formal response from the university, this is first considered by the accreditation panel for comment before being presented again to RCVS's PQSC, which will then make a recommendation on accreditation status to RCVS's Education Committee, having taken the university's response and panel comments 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.

Accreditation will start from the date of the accreditation decision by the Education Committee. For example, if a school was granted '*accreditation for a shorter period of 3 years*' the 3 year term will start from the date of the Education Committee where that decision was made.

3.8. Dashboard

Hosted on the RCVS website will be a dashboard of accreditation reports. Alongside reports from veterinary school accreditation events, detailing the programmes achievement of the RCVS accreditation standards, there will be the results of thematic analysis reviews.

4. Annual monitoring

The RCVS requires annual reports for accredited veterinary programmes from each school as standard. For UK 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 will be a section for annual monitoring data to be submitted.

4.1. Annual monitoring process within the accreditation cycle

Annual monitoring data will be required for each accredited programme, to be submitted annually. All schools should submit their student numbers (annual monitoring form tab 1) in January of each year, with the rest of the annual monitoring form to be submitted in the same month as the accreditation decision. For example, a programme awarded full accreditation for 7 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 Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee (PQSC) for consideration, following which a recommendation of further action could be made to Education Committee (see section 4.2 below). Data is considered by RCVS's PQSC on a school-by-school basis, in order to monitor trends and changes at each school.

The data required of each school for annual monitoring purposes will comprise the following:

- Standard data sets (see Appendix 2)
- Details of any significant changes to the programme (itemised by Domain / Standard), and evidence relating to these changes and how standards continue to be maintained
- Data required to demonstrate progress towards addressing any recommendations or suggestions made at the most recent accreditation event (until PQSC consider these to have been achieved).

Annual monitoring data will be reviewed, alongside any RCVS collated outcomes data (e.g. employer surveys, graduate surveys), or any new risks identified during the normal cycle, and then considered by PQSC. If PQSC considers that further action is required as a result, this will be recommended to RCVS Education Committee, which will decide whether further evidence needs to be requested or an Accreditation Event needs to take place earlier in the cycle for an accredited programme.

Feedback on the review of Annual Monitoring data will be provided to the school within 1 month of the review date by PQSC, or in the event that a recommendation for further action is made to Education Committee, within 1 month of the decision by Education Committee.

Data collected through the annual monitoring will not be published, other than limited data around student numbers, which forms part of the annual RCVS report, "RCVS Facts". The full dataset will however be available internally to other RCVS committees for consideration if required.

4.2. Accreditation Event triggered by Annual Monitoring Data

In the result of further action being required as a result of the review of annual monitoring data, an Accreditation Event will commence, regardless of when the next event would have been scheduled to take place. The process would follow that as laid out in section 3. If an accreditation visit is required, schools will receive at least three months' notice following the review of evidence.

5. Classification of accreditation

Options for decisions on accreditation of veterinary degrees are as follows:

- a) **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.
- b) **Accreditation for a shorter period** of fewer than the usual 7 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.

- c) **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.

- d) **Terminal accreditation** may apply if the school is unable to meet RCVS's 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.

- e) **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.

5.1. Revisits

If a school is granted *Accreditation for a shorter period*, a revisit timeframe will be agreed in advance by the RCVS Education Committee. This timeframe will be communicated to the school by letter. A

revisit can comprise of either a *full revisitation*, which will look at all Standards, or a *focused revisitation*, which will focus on the recommendations and suggestions from the previous visitation, plus any additional requests as agreed by PQSC and EC based on new evidence since the last visit. The panel also have a duty to investigate any additional areas of concern regarding any standard if evidence presents itself during the accreditation event.

5.2. Procedures for schools with the classification of Terminal Accreditation

The classification of terminal accreditation is intended to protect the interests of students who enrolled before accreditation was withdrawn. Terminal accreditation may continue no longer than necessary to protect the educational interests of such students. Provided the school complies with the conditions for terminal accreditation, students enrolled on the programme before terminal accreditation was assigned will be able to graduate with an accredited degree that will entitle them to register as Members of RCVS. If the school recruits students after terminal accreditation is assigned, those students will graduate with a non-recognised degree and may not be able to practise in the UK unless they sit the RCVS examination.

The head of the school and the Vice-Chancellor of the university are notified in writing of the classification of terminal status and the reasons for this.

During the first six months after the assignment of terminal accreditation, the school must submit a detailed plan describing how it will ensure that the educational interests of currently enrolled students will be met.

Each year that the school holds terminal accreditation status, the school will provide a detailed report to the RCVS describing how the plan is being followed and how it has been altered with respect to students who entered before terminal accreditation was assigned.

To maintain terminal accreditation status, the school must:

- a) Immediately cease enrolment of additional students.
- b) Commit resources adequate to complete the education of currently enrolled students.
- c) Ensure that deficiencies cited do not worsen.

During a period of terminal accreditation, representatives from RCVS may visit the school and report on whether the school is meeting the conditions for terminal accreditation. The reported information and that furnished in writing by the school will be considered by RCVS to determine if terminal accreditation should continue.

If a veterinary school on terminal accreditation fails to abide by this procedure, RCVS may terminate its accreditation immediately, such that no further graduates will be eligible to register with RCVS.

5.2. Process for Voluntary de-accreditation

Voluntary de-accreditation may apply if the school voluntarily withdraws from RCVS accreditation. The procedures for voluntary de-accreditation must be followed by the veterinary school (see below). For previously accredited UK veterinary schools where accreditation is voluntarily withdrawn, the final decision to revoke or suspend their Recognition Order would be down to the RCVS, and Privy Council will be informed of this in writing. For non-UK schools, if voluntary de-accreditation is requested, it will be

the responsibility of the school to inform the RCVS and present an immediate plan to RCVS for approval showing how the current deficiencies will be addressed to allow adequate progress of the existing students to meet RCVS Day One Competences.

The classification of voluntary de-accreditation is intended to protect the interests of students who enrolled before the notification of intention to withdraw was received from the school. Voluntary de-accreditation may continue no longer than necessary to protect the educational interests of such students. Provided the school complies with the conditions for voluntary de-accreditation, students enrolled on the programme before voluntary de-accreditation was assigned will be able to graduate with an accredited degree that will entitle them to register as Members of RCVS. If the school recruits students after voluntary de-accreditation is assigned, those students will graduate with a non-recognised degree and may not be able to practise in the UK unless they sit the RCVS Statutory Membership Examination.

The head of the school or the Vice-Chancellor of the university must notify the RCVS in writing that the school requests voluntary de-accreditation with a detailed plan and proposed timeline describing how it will ensure that the educational interests of currently enrolled students will be met.

The School must inform the students in a timely manner that they have requested voluntary de-accreditation. The School must reassure students currently enrolled onto an RCVS accredited course that they will support them in their studies to remain eligible for RCVS registration and they must inform new students that the degree will no longer be RCVS accredited.

A school cannot request voluntary de-accreditation during the following:

- a) Within 6 months before or after a scheduled accreditation event. This is to avoid complications during an accreditation event and reporting period.
- b) Whilst a school is on terminal accreditation.

Once a school requests 'voluntary de-accreditation', the decision cannot be reversed unless a full RCVS accreditation event occurs and the Primary Qualifications Sub Committee and Education Committee approve of this reversal.

Each year that the school holds voluntary de-accreditation status, the school will provide a detailed report to the RCVS describing how the plan is being followed and how it has been altered with respect to students who entered before voluntary de-accreditation was assigned. The RCVS may also visit the School if considered necessary.

To maintain voluntary de-accreditation status, the school must:

- a) Commit resources adequate to the completion of education and achievement of Day One Competences of currently enrolled students.
- b) Provide evidence that cited deficiencies are not worsening.

During a period of voluntary de-accreditation, representatives from RCVS may visit the school and report on whether the school is meeting the conditions for voluntary de-accreditation. The reported information from any visitation and any evidence provided in writing by the school will be considered by RCVS to determine if voluntary de-accreditation should continue. If a veterinary school on voluntary de-accreditation fails to abide by this procedure, RCVS may terminate its accreditation immediately, such that no further graduates will be eligible to register with RCVS. Additionally, schools may choose to

withdraw from RCVS accreditation with immediate effect at any time (with the exception of during an accreditation event as noted the above paragraphs)

5.3. Requesting an earlier accreditation event

If a school would like to have an earlier accreditation event this may be possible. All requests for an earlier accreditation event should be put in writing to the Education Department.

6. Consultative Accreditation Event

The purpose of a Consultative Accreditation Event is to assess the overall compliance of a veterinary school based outside of the UK with RCVS standards and to provide feedback to the school. A school may request a Consultative Accreditation Event in preparation for applying for accreditation from RCVS.

Consultative events are advisory and the results are not published or made public. The Consultative Accreditation Event and processes are linked and consultative events follow a similar process to that in place for accreditation events. However, any outcome from a consultative visit may not reflect the outcome of a full, formal visit.

6.1 Requesting a Consultative Accreditation Event

The Head of the Veterinary School must write to the RCVS with a formal request for a Consultative accreditation event. RCVS will discuss the request for the consultative event through its Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee (PQSC) and will provide a formal response to the request, together with suggested dates.

6.2 The Consultative Accreditation Event Panel

PQSC will recommend the appointment of an Accreditation Panel, to include a Chair and two additional members. PQSC's recommendations will be ratified by Education Committee. Names of panel members will be shared with the Head of the Veterinary School, who may ask for reconsideration of an appointment where a nominated panel member has a conflict of interest that cannot be managed during the event process. Education Committee has the final authority on the appointment of panel members.

6.3 Consultative Accreditation Event Timetable

The duration and scope of a consultative event will be agreed between RCVS and the school in advance.

6.4 Consultative Visit Report

The report of the consultative visit will include comments against the RCVS standards and highlight any areas which are considered exemplary. It will also be explained that any outcome of the consultative visit may not reflect the outcome of a full formal accreditation event. The report is not published.

The report is signed off by the Chair of the accreditation panel and passed back to the veterinary school for a factual accuracy check. The report is then considered by PQSC, which provides feedback to the school and to Education Committee.

6.5 Fees for Consultative Events

RCVS may charge a fee for a consultative accreditation event. The fee is reviewed annually. This covers the full event (review of evidence and any visitation to the school), together with up to 5 days for visit preparation. In addition, the RCVS will charge Loss of Earnings plus travel, subsistence and accommodation costs for the accreditation panel. This fee must be paid prior to the event.

7 Mock Accreditation Event

A Mock Accreditation Event can be requested by existing RCVS accredited UK schools. A Mock Accreditation Event would follow a similar process to that in place for actual accreditation events. A school may request a Mock Accreditation Event in preparation for an upcoming accreditation event. There would be no formal findings from a mock event and for that reason there would be no formal report or recommendations made, although feedback would be provided.

Mock events can only take place once a school has been through the full cycle at least once.

7.1 Requesting a Mock Accreditation Event

The Head of the Veterinary School must write to the RCVS with a formal request for a Mock Accreditation Event. RCVS will discuss the request for the mock event through its Primary Qualifications Sub-Committee (PQSC) where the reasons for the request will be considered. A formal response to the request would then be provided to the school by PQSC, together with suggested dates if the mock event is agreed to.

7.2 The Mock Accreditation Event Panel

PQSC will recommend the appointment of an Accreditation Panel, to include a Chair and two additional members. PQSC's recommendations will be ratified by Education Committee. Names of panel members will be shared with the Head of the Veterinary School, who may ask for reconsideration of an appointment where a nominated panel member has a conflict of interest that cannot be managed during the event process. Education Committee has the final authority on the appointment of panel members.

7.3 Mock Accreditation Event Timetable

The duration and scope of a mock event will be agreed between RCVS and the school in advance.

7.4 Fees for Mock Accreditation Events

RCVS will charge a fee for a mock accreditation event. The fee is reviewed annually. This covers the full event (review of evidence and any visitation to the school), together with up to 5 days for visit preparation. In addition, the RCVS will charge Loss of Earnings plus travel, subsistence and accommodation costs for the visiting team. This fee must be paid prior to the event.

8 Accreditation of overseas veterinary programmes

To be considered for accreditation by RCVS, an overseas veterinary degree must satisfy the following:

- The level of clinical instruction must be comparable to that required of veterinary schools in the United Kingdom. Overseas veterinary degrees must meet the same accreditation standards as UK schools; including the requirement for students to meet the RCVS Day One Competences by the time they graduate. However, local or geographical context or legislation may be taken into account.
- The degree of the overseas veterinary school must be recognised as a professional veterinary qualification by the relevant authorities (government and/or veterinary licensing body) in its own region/country.
- The overseas veterinary school must normally have been producing graduates for at least five years or a sufficient number of its graduates must have submitted themselves for the RCVS statutory membership examination to allow a judgement of the standard of the overseas school to be reached.
- RCVS will appoint an Accreditation Panel to undertake a formal Accreditation Event for the overseas veterinary school, this fee does not include revisits as the time/cost would be the same for a revisit. As part of the accreditation event, the visitation will be at the expense of the overseas school. Before the visitation, the university must pay the RCVS accreditation fee applicable at the time of the application, as well as paying for full travel, accommodation and loss of earnings allowance for all the RCVS visitors, including business class air fares for flights of seven hours or more. Accreditation cannot be granted until RCVS's fees and costs have been reimbursed in full.
- The first Accreditation Event of an overseas veterinary school not previously recognised by RCVS should normally be undertaken wholly by RCVS, although some joint working with another accrediting body may be considered, depending on the circumstances, at the discretion of RCVS's Education Committee.
- An overseas university whose veterinary degree is accredited by RCVS will be required to submit annual monitoring reports to RCVS. RCVS reserves the right to undertake further accreditation events during the period of accreditation to ensure that any recommendations made are being implemented, and also to exchange quality assurance and monitoring information about the degree programme with the university's national accrediting body where applicable. Costs for any such events will be charged to the university.

9 Accreditation for new veterinary programmes

The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, Section 4, includes provision for veterinary graduates of UK universities that do not have a Privy Council Recognition Order (i.e., new veterinary degrees or existing veterinary degrees that have lost their recognised status). The Privy Council may:

- a) *After consultation with the Council of the College; and*
- b) *If it is of the opinion that the training provided to students of veterinary surgery attending at that university satisfies the requirements of Article 38 of the directive... direct the College to hold examinations in veterinary surgery for the students... attending at that university; and any such student passing any such examination shall be entitled to be registered in the register and shall on being so registered become a member of the College.*

Any UK university that is considering offering a professional veterinary degree and applying to the Privy Council for a Recognition Order must liaise with RCVS concerning its plans for the programme 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 university 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. The process will follow similarly to an Accreditation Event for an existing school as detailed in section 3.4, with an Accreditation Panel formed to review the initial evidence described above has been submitted, before the Accreditation Visitation Team being formed for the interim visit.

Following the initial interim visit, RCVS will provide feedback to the university on the draft programme, in terms of whether it appears to meet the current RCVS standards and policies. Any obvious gaps will be identified, but it will be for the university to determine how such gaps might be rectified. RCVS can provide advice on its standards and accreditation methodology but does not offer any form of provisional approval at this stage, as it is not within its power to do so. Recognition, if granted, comes from the UK's Privy Council, on advice from the RCVS.

RCVS will make arrangements for one or more accreditation events encompassing full or short interim visitations to evaluate the programme and will discuss options for examinations with the university. Depending on its evaluation of the curriculum and assessment arrangements, RCVS may decide to either set a separate qualifying examination for final year students or, alternatively, may make arrangements for the joint examination of students with the university through the appointment of RCVS External Examiners.

If it is agreed to appoint RCVS External Examiners and run a joint qualifying examination, the university will need to agree that the RCVS appointed External Examiners will have the final decision-making power over the eventual pass list, so that the examination may count as the RCVS qualifying examination for registration purposes.

Having consulted on the draft curriculum and delivery plans before the first student intake has started the programme, RCVS will aim to undertake its first Accreditation Event and full site visit when the programme has reached its third year in order to make an assessment of how the plans are working, and to evaluate the progress of the new school towards achieving the RCVS standards. A further Accreditation Event and full site visitation will be undertaken during the programme's fifth year of

operation, in order to make a recommendation to the Privy Council on recognition. Additional accreditation reviews and visitations may be undertaken in the meantime by one or more RCVS visitors to observe examinations and other assessments. As part of each accreditation event, before each site visit, the school will need to provide RCVS with documentation relating to each standard, recognising that some of this evidence will allude to future plans rather than outcomes assessments.

Graduates of UK veterinary schools are not automatically entitled to RCVS membership until the degree has received the Recognition Order from the Privy Council, and this may take a number of months even after a positive recommendation from RCVS. In the absence of a Recognition Order, graduates will be able to register and practise in the UK only if they pass the RCVS qualifying examination (or joint examination overseen by RCVS External Examiners as described above). The university must ensure that students applying to join the programme understand the status of the degree and that, whilst there is a route to registration for them, there is no automatic entitlement.

10 RCVS Accreditation of Veterinary Programmes appeal procedure

Scope of Appeals

1. This appeals procedure applies where an institution questions the formal outcomes 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.
2. No appeal will be entertained in respect of the individual comment(s) made by the visiting team and contained within the visitation report.

Definition of terms

3. In these rules:
 - "appeals panel" means a panel of the Committee constituted to hear an appeal;
 - "College" means the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons;
 - "Committee" means the Education Committee;
 - "lay person" means a person who is not a veterinary surgeon or a registered veterinary nurse and has never been entitled to be registered as such;
 - "registrar" means the registrar of the College;
 - "the Council" means the Council of the College;
 - "formal outcome of the accreditation process" means the category of accreditation into which the institution has been placed **and/or** the period of accreditation that has been granted
 - "published standards" means the standards contained within the version of the "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees" that applies to the accreditation event in question
 - "published processes" means the processes contained within the version of the "RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of veterinary degrees" that applies to the accreditation event in question
 - "accreditation of veterinary programme appeals panel" means the panel appointed by the Registrar to consider accreditation decision appeals.

Lodging of an appeal

4. An institution must inform the registrar of its intention to appeal not later than two weeks from receipt of the letter confirming the formal outcome of the accreditation process. The appeal must then be made in writing by the Dean or Head of School no later than six weeks from receipt of the letter confirming the formal outcome of the accreditation process.

Initial consideration of appeals

5. The first stage of the appeal process will involve a review of the process that had been followed by RCVS in reaching its accreditation decision, together with the argued basis for the appeal, by PQSC at their next scheduled meeting. The Chair of the relevant accreditation panel may be asked to participate in the review process. The outcome of this review will be to either proceed with or dismiss the appeal. If accepted, PQSE will refer the matter back to the Education Committee which will review its original decision and may decide to uphold or amend it. If the decision is amended, then the appeal need not proceed any further. It should be noted that acceptance of the appeal may not necessarily result in a change to the original decision.
6. An appeal will only be dismissed on one or more 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
7. If the appeal is dismissed on any of the grounds mentioned, the institution may nevertheless elect to have the appeal considered by the Accreditation of veterinary programme appeals panel within six weeks of receipt of the letter confirming the decision of the Education Committee. The institution must pay a fee of £5000, but this will be refunded if the appeal is upheld.

Accreditation of Veterinary Programme Appeals Panel

8. The appointment of the 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.
9. The panel will select its own Chair. All three members must sign a declaration confirming that they have no conflict of interest with the appellant institution and a statement to indicate that they will strictly adhere to the *“RCVS standards and procedures for the accreditation of*

veterinary degrees” as well as the “*Policy on managing potential conflicts of interest for visitation team members*”.

10. The appellant institution will be provided with copies of any information, apart from legal advice, which is made available to the appeals panel and will be given a reasonable opportunity to comment and make any further representations before the panel considers the appeal.
11. The appellant institution has the right to nominate an observer to attend the meeting of the panel. An observer may respond to questions from the panel; however, they will not have voting rights when it comes to decision making. The Chair of the accreditation panel may also be requested to attend the meeting as an observer to assist with any points of clarification.
12. An appeals panel will not include a person who has been involved in the initial assessment of the appeal, had any involvement in the accreditation event of the appellant institution or has any personal connection with the appellant institution which might bring that person’s independence or impartiality into question.
13. The proceedings of an appeals panel will take place in camera and will remain confidential after the conclusion of the appeal.
14. The appeals panel may:
 - a. uphold the appeal and direct Education Committee to overturn and reconsider its decision
 - b. uphold the appeal, but confirm that the decision should remain unchanged
 - c. dismiss the appeal
15. Once the panel has reached a decision, by majority vote, its Chair will inform the registrar of its decision by submitting an adjudicating statement, including its reasoning. The registrar will arrange for the outcomes of the appeal to be communicated to the appellant institution, PQSC and Education Committee.
16. The decision of the panel shall be conclusive for all purposes.
17. Until the end of the appeal process, the accreditation report will not be published and the appellant institution holds its current accreditation status.

11 Training for Accreditation Panel Members

Accreditation panel members will be trained using RCVS' Accreditation panel member training programme. Where a panel member has not undertaken a visitation for three years, refresher training must be undertaken and completed before participation in a future accreditation event.

12 Quality Assurance of the Accreditation Process

Feedback

RCVS seeks feedback from the veterinary school staff, students and stakeholders involved in the visitation, as well as the Accreditation Panel members, immediately after the visit. Feedback surveys are sent to the Vet School by the Education Quality Improvement Manager for distribution to all staff, students, alumni and stakeholders who took part in the accreditation visit, and to the Accreditation Panel members. These are followed up with a selection of verbal feedback opportunities. All feedback (verbal and written) will be collected up to a month after the end of the accreditation visit.

Thematic Report

Feedback is collated by the RCVS Education Quality Improvement Manager and summarised in a thematic report which is presented to the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) and noted by PQSC. The findings are considered, and any appropriate recommendations are made to Education Committee, should any changes in the RCVS accreditation methodology be necessary. The ARC monitors the quality assurance of RCVS' accreditation activities and a further review of quality assurance is carried out by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) every 5 years.

All feedback remains confidential and will not be shared with vet school staff or students but is used to develop the RCVS accreditation procedures.

Appendix 1 – Accreditation Standards Rubric Template Example

Standard		Repository Evidence						Further evidence needed on visitation?	Visitation Evidence						Recommended Outcome		
		Type = Input, Process or Outcomes							Type - Input, Process or Outcomes						Standard Met	Partially Met	Not Met
		Supporting evidence # 1		Type	Supporting evidence # 2		Type		Supporting evidence # 3		Type	Supporting evidence # 1		Type			
1.1	The spaces, infrastructure, physical and digital resources across the programme must provide an effective learning and teaching environment, support student welfare, and meet the needs of educators and support staff.	Student numbers broken down against lecture and seminar room capacity	Input	strategy for development / maintenance of digital and physical infrastructure	input			Yes	Tour of new facilities	outcome	discussion with staff and students to establish how the space is used and if it is fit for purpose	outcome			X		
1.2	The learning environments across the programme must ensure the health and safety of students, staff and animals and comply with all relevant jurisdictional legislation including health, safety, biosecurity and UK animal welfare and care standards.	Health and Safety Policy Biosecurity Policy Procedure for staff and student inductions to include health and safety and animal welfare	Input	Incident logs for on-site farm	Outcome	Detailed audit reports of health and safety committee meetings with actions and responses (with photo / video of new safety measures implemented)	process	No							X		
1.3	All learning environments (within the School and off-site) should be quality assured to ensure they are conducive to learning and teaching, and support the achievement of learning objectives.	Details of student facilities available at off-campus locations including mitigation of barriers to learning	Input					Yes (need process / outcomes evidence for triangulation)	Verbal feedback from students confirmed dissatisfaction of outside learning environments - poor internet connection, lack of quiet study area, dangerous practice standards	Process and outcome	Practice QA checklist not sufficient	Process	Student feedback and evaluations not yet acted upon	Outcome			X
1.4	The learning environments across all aspects of the programme must demonstrate good practice standards and promote high standards of animal husbandry and care at all times.	PSS Certification of all IMR practices (in-date)	Input	Results of School internal QA Audits	Process			No							X		
4.1	The school must have a strategy for widening participation which considers all aspects of diversity, and engages students from different ethnic and social backgrounds. The school must be proactive in their marketing to attract a diverse cohort of applicants and regularly review, and provide evidence of, their progress towards targets.	Detailed admissions policy and strategy documents, the contents of which detail appropriate and ambitious targets for widening participation across relevant groups	Input	Demographic data across recent years on admissions, progression and graduation demonstrates targets on increasing diversity are being met	Outcome	Committee minutes record consistent reviews whether targets being met, and identifies action plans to improve outcomes where progress is limited	Process	No							X		
4.2	The school must provide accurate and current information regarding the educational programme easily available for prospective students. The information must include the accreditation status of the degree course (whether by RCVS or other relevant accrediting bodies) selection and progression criteria the demands of the course and the requirements for eventual registration/licence, including fitness to practise	Marketing and other information available and readily accessible, with all the necessary information included. All information is current and reviewed regularly (updated versions evident in repository)	Input					Yes (need process / outcomes evidence for triangulation)	Review of attrition data (inc. associated reasons for leaving the programme)	Outcome					X		

4.3	Selection and progression criteria must be clearly defined, fair, defensible, consistent and free from discrimination or bias. The criteria should also include relevant factors other than academic performance. The academic requirements for entering the programme should be sufficient for the student to cope with the demands of the programme upon entry	Selection and progression policy and strategy documents, including rationale	Input	Data analysis on admissions, progression and attrition rates, with a focus on any trends associated with different grades / criteria at the point of selection	Outcome			No								X		
4.4	The school must demonstrate their selection and progression criteria and processes are effective in identifying students with the potential to achieve the RCVS Day One Competences. This must be achieved through regular and effective training for staff involved and the routine collection and analysis of selection and progression data, to enable them to evaluate, reflect and adjust the selection and prog	Training programme content for staff, including selection data analysis, selection methods (if appropriate) and standardisation	Input					Yes (need process / outcomes evidence for triangulation)	Longitudinal data on trends / correlations between selection criteria and progression rates	Outcome	Verbal accounts / answers from relevant staff describing process for (and example of) when criteria have been adjusted as a result of data analysis / reflection	Process & outcome				X		

Appendix 2 – Standard data required for Annual Monitoring purposes

The following datasets will be required as standard for annual monitoring purposes. Detailed tables will be provided to schools for this purpose.

- Student numbers for each cohort within the programme, including:
 - UK, EU and overseas student numbers
 - Admissions and progression data
 - Diversity data
- Staff numbers, including FTE, roles (including educators within partner practices)
- Student achievement data for each cohort, including diversity data, progression, final outcome, attrition and exclusion data.
- Clinical caseload per student (by species, with % cases where students directly involved in the work up of the case, and % in a first opinion, general practice context identified).
- EMS weeks completed per cohort.
- Student appeals data – total numbers, unsuccessful / upheld, basis for appeal.