

Minutes of the BCVSp open and members' meeting

February 1 2024 1700- 1845

A list of attendees can be found in the Association records of this meeting.

Trustees in attendance: Celia Marr (CM), Davina Anderson (DA), Richard Hepburn (RH)

Executive Officers in attendance: Mark Bowen (MB), Richard Meeson (RM)

1. Opening remarks (MB)

Future for vet specialists in the United Kingdom (MB)

There are recruitment and retention challenges for specialists in the UK which affects some disciplines more than others. We would really like to know of specific examples where you have had challenges in this area, so that we can prepare shortage reports for the RCVS. Please let us know of this affects your specialist via info@yourvetspecialist.org

Recruitment of interns has also suffered and recruitment of interns from overseas has had challenges. Some of these challenges have been addressed with the Govt authorised exchange scheme (low cost visa scheme), and the RCVS have indicated that they would support temporary registration for interns who are always working under direct supervision of another vet, so they could be exempt from language requirements. Please refer to our news pages on the website for more information. <https://yourvetspecialist.org/hosting-international-internships-and-externships/>. Best practice guidelines for rotating internships developed by BCVS can be found at <https://yourvetspecialist.org/audits-reports/?type=reports>

Update on the recent report from the RCVS Education committee regarding clinical career pathways. This aims to look at development of pathways in general practice, one being a Specialism in general practice and the second is to look at flexible pathways (non residency route) to Specialisms. We will continue to engage with the RCVS on this project. In particular, as our remit is to strive to educate the public on the understanding and application of Specialist care, we would be against the development of another tier of Specialisation or RCVS specific Diplomas as we feel this will cause confusion.

2. EVBS update Julie Ross CEO EBVS

Contact details: ceo@ebvs.eu

Julie gave a presentation on the role of EBVS as an umbrella organisation for the European Colleges across the EU and associated countries, but increasingly, worldwide. She also introduced the executive team at EBVS, including IT and Communications officers, both of whom are available for help. She outlined a current EBVS project that is working on social channels to engage all stakeholders and customers with EBVS, including public awareness and engagement. She also outlined initiatives from EBVS to encourage flexible training pathways, with modular training content that might be useful across multiple Colleges, as well as Erasmus grants. These training modules will be wide ranging, including topics such as ethics, biostatistics, mental health and wellbeing for residents and specialists as well as Clinical Educator training. Other grants have been awarded to look at sustainable practices and EBVS have been conducting surveys around the definition of internships, to be followed up with a similar survey for residents and PhD students. Finally EBVS is very supportive of any initiatives where national recognition of specialist titles is being developed.

3. Use & misuse of terminology: post nominals, registration as a RCVS Specialist (DA)

A reminder on the historical development of recognition of Specialists at the RCVS, and that this is now specifically included in the RCVS code of conduct (<https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of->

professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/supporting-guidance/advertising-and-publicity/). The quid pro quo for this was that Specialists should register with the RCVS. When the BCVSp was set up, we split the registration fee – so your RCVS register fee is £48 and the BCVSp membership is £52. We were also instrumental in developing the streamlined route to RCVS recognition which is now available for all Diplomates of colleges overseen by EBVS. You should see these memberships as synergistic. It is really important you are on the RCVS register if you want to practice as a Specialist in the UK.

Click here to apply for inclusion on the RCVS Specialist register <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/lifelong-learning/professional-accreditation/specialists-status/> (note that if you are an EBVS Specialist this is a very simple process)

There is concern that RCVS does little to protect use of terminology around Specialist status and this has been a recurring topic at every annual meeting held between BCVSp representative and RCVS officers with little progress. The RCVS states that they never have any complaints and it is up to any Specialists qualifying or arriving in the country to make themselves aware of what is in the code of conduct. We have now developed a reporting form for you to report any individual who claims to be a Specialist when they are not – the link is here <https://yourvetspecialist.org/confidential-reporting-of-the-misuse-of-specialist-status/>

4. Member services (CM)

This report began with an apology for the somewhat random emailing which has gone on since October 2023 to promote membership and highlight this meeting. From February 1 2024, we will only contact you if you are a paid up member and in joining have given your permission to be contacted regarding BCVSp initiatives and activities. In order to ensure that our emails get through to you, please 'whitelist' our email address : info@yourvetspecialist.org You may need to speak to your work IT team to add these domains to your whitelist.

On the website member-only hub there are a number of tools that you will find useful. There are discussion forums, resources and reports, reporting misuse of terminology, vacancies. We also report whenever we have had a meeting with BVA or RCVS to be as open as possible to our members. Note – these minutes have to be approved before we can post them, so may be delayed.

In our public pages, there is a "specialist finder tool" along with general information seeking to explain what specialists are and how they can help. A public profile is only available to those members who are RCVS registered Specialists. Members can update their profile by clicking on the "reach animal owners" banner that appears at the top of the website when you log in. Remember that these details are on the public facing profile and you must tick the box giving us specific consent to share your profile with the public. For all full and associate members, personal contact details provided for BCVSp use, along with information on your specialism are shared with other members but not the public.

Note that we are always open to suggestions on what else you might like to have on this website both in terms of the public facing page (for non-Specialist vets and general public) as well as in the community facing pages (members hub)

DA : added that we really need non client facing Specialisms to be represented in our association.

Please click here to join: <https://yourvetspecialist.org/membership/>

5. Current BCVSp initiatives (CM & DA)

Surveys: We are currently surveying members to explore Residents training conditions (particularly in terms of support for learning opportunities, mentoring, punitive employment contracts). Please complete the survey here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ResidentsPh1>

These data will help us lobby RCVS and BVA regarding manpower challenges in the Specialist sector.

We are also considering repeat of previous surveys (impact of Brexit, nationalities of Specialists in UK, resident and intern training programmes) to see what developments there have been.

Meetings: we want to organise meetings that are very much tailor made for our community and address needs across discipline boundaries. Previously we have hosted meetings on clinical auditing and mentoring. If there is

interest, these are likely to be repeated and we are also beginning to develop plans for associates and early career specialists. We are calling for members who are keen to run one of these projects to get in touch and we can facilitate initiatives. If you are interested please contact us via info@yourvetspecialist.org

6. BCVSp rebranding (CM)

A survey was conducted in November 2023 and results indicated a preference to change the name (with some aversion to 'British' and/or 'College'). The best suggestion has been Veterinary Specialist Association. If no objections are received, we will go through the process with the Charities Commission to change the name and look to rebranding our website in coming months.

7. PSS scheme update (CM)

Attendees were reminded that work on a practice standard scheme extension to include provision for specialist referral hospitals started in 2018, with Terry Emmerson and CM putting together a team of BCVSp members to contribute to the scheme. The simplest way to progress the scheme was where the definition was obvious – i.e. the companion animal (including equine) multidisciplinary specialist hospital [ie VSH(M)] and we were advised by RCVS staff that developing a similar scheme for single-discipline hospitals [ie VSH(SD) or similar] should follow once the VSH(M) strand was up and running. Early on, discussions with the PSS team indicated that they would be keen on this initiative and a great deal of work went into the detail and how it would work, the idea being that it was an aspirational but achievable scheme. The aim being to drive standards up and our strand was designed to be an add on to the Hospital Standard and PSS Awards– so clearly building on and not undermining anything that already exists. This is the original news report on this : <https://yourvetspecialist.org/a-new-pss-strand-for-multidisciplinary-specialist-hospitals/> and further details are available in the members' hub.

Numerous BCVSp members contributed to the development of a comprehensive scheme and following several meetings with PSS assessors, in particular Pam Mosedale and with the PSS sub-committee, the PSS sub-committee endorsed the scheme but when it went to the RCVS Standards Committee in February 2020, it was rejected. The RCVS committee reported that they thought it was elitist and exclusive, and also on the basis that the general public do not need to know the difference between one hospital and another as their primary care vet would advise them on the best pathway to care, despite the PSS sub-committee telling us that many vets want to know what services were available in individual referral hospitals. The RCVS also criticised the specialist community for failing to engage with the existing PSS scheme (although it is not designed for specialist hospitals). In our research we worked out that the standard would be achievable by approx. 27 SA hospitals and 14 equine hospitals – which the RCVS thought was an insignificant number. It is likely to be much higher than that now. The question remains where we go with this. Maybe back to PSS or we use it in some other way. Work has yet to begin on a parallel scheme of single-discipline services.

Discussion

Mrak Patteson : discussion on multisite options for a PSS for referral services standards and how this could be incorporated. The original scheme chose single hospital multi-disciplinary as a clear way to start and had not yet looked at all the other viable ways of defining hospital standards at referral level for single discipline units, nor was any attention specifically given to multisite units although the implication in the plans were that a "hospital" might be a more than one site locally but where coporates or other businesses owned multiple hospitals, each would be enrolled separately. Further wording would be needed to tighten this. Also raised single discipline units: The existing PSS scheme does not serve this community so finding a platform to build on within PSS is more challenging.

Tim Charlesworth: College's standpoint on alternative routes to specialisation. Our response was that we have not done any members' survey and therefore do not have a clear position on this issue, but as individuals, current trustees broadly support general practice specialisation and regarding alternate route training pathways, EBVS are encouraging all Colleges to look at this, but we would be very averse to any initiative by the RCVS to introduce another tier of Specialists or set of discipline specific specialist qualifications. Recommendation that we engage with RCVS to promote alternate route training, but not towards a new RCVS qualification. Julie Rosser confirmed that EBVS would be keen to work with the RCVS on modular training so that alternate route pathways would enable credentials for EBVS qualifications. It is likely that once RCVS produces details of plans, BCVSp members can be canvassed for opinion to develop a positions.

Patrick Pollock: poor engagement of English based veterinary organisations to represent and support Scotland specific and based, initiatives. We have numerous Scottish members and some Welsh and Northern Irish together with a small group of members from other countries. MB proposed and CM seconded PP for trustee.

Chris Pearce: Concern regarding the mission statement of BCVSp and whether the organisation is national or international. Clarification is that we are a national organisation but with some international members, so our aim to provide clarification on what a specialist is to improve animal care, and that has no global boundaries, Noted also that you will not have a public profile with us unless you are a current [ie dues paid up-to-date] full member and are listed with the RCVS, and that you cannot be a member unless you are eligible to work in the UK or are a MRCVS. We have extensive publicly-orientated information which can be viewed via our website <https://yourvetspecialist.org/> & <https://yourvetspecialist.org/what-is-a-specialist/>

Roger Smith: interested in how many international members – est. less than 10%. If we wanted to open up to members outside UK, we would have to remove the constitution requirement to be eligible to work in UK/MRCVS. However EBVS are trying to develop a network of national organisations that will be able to liaise with each other and this may be a better way to promote specialists internationally.

Members only

1. Financial report (RH)
 - a. Current account has £10,125
 - b. No outstanding commitments
 - c. Payment system (STRIPE) has £7,700 and paypal £44
2. Endorsement of new trustees: proposer Mark Bowen, seconder Davina Anderson
 - a. Simon Girling, <https://yourvetspecialist.org/vet/simon-girling/>, proposer Mark Bowen, seconder Davina Anderson,
 - b. Richard Meeson – <https://yourvetspecialist.org/vet/richard-meeson/>, proposer Mark Bowen, seconder Davina Anderson, taking on International Outreach
 - c. Amanda Paul <https://yourvetspecialist.org/vet/amanda-paul/>, proposer Mark Bowen, seconder Davina Anderson
 - d. Bob Partridge, <https://yourvetspecialist.org/vet/bob-partridge/>, proposer Mark Bowen, seconder Davina Anderson, taking on Treasurer
 - e. Caroline Prymak, , proposer Mark Bowen, seconder Davina Anderson, taking on Public Outreach
 - f. Renata Stavinochova, <https://yourvetspecialist.org/vet/renata-stavinochova/> proposer Mark Bowen, seconder Davina Anderson
 - g. Sophie Keyte
 - h. Patrick Pollock – see above
3. Endorsement of new president (MB)
 1. Davina Anderson, <https://yourvetspecialist.org/vet/davina-anderson/>, proposer Celia Marr, seconder Mark Bowen
4. Any other business

RH suggested we look into digital credentialling of Specialists, which would allow confirmation of the validity of a Specialist chosen for referral. This could be a member benefit.

Roger Smith suggested that email signature links could be sent out to all members to use which would help to increase exposure and expand public profile.

NOTES

Best way to communicate with the Trustees and Executive officers is via info@yourvetspecialist.org

The meeting was closed at 1845

British College of Veterinary Specialists CC number : 1158171