

The closure of the RCVS Awarding Body: your questions answered

At its meeting on 11 October 2011, the RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council decided that, pending agreement by RCVS Council on 3 November 2011, the RCVS will cease to operate as an Awarding Body for veterinary nurse qualifications. We hope the following will help answer some of your questions. If you have more, please contact vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk.

What is happening to ownership of the Awarding Body?

The RCVS owns its awarding body. Accreditation as an awarding organisation cannot be transferred or sold. The RCVS is electing to cease to be an awarding organisation and to work with a major external organisation to place the current Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing in alternative safe hands

Why is this happening right now?

In 2011, new legislation came into force regulating awarding organisations. Aspects of the new Conditions of Recognition will be difficult for the RCVS Awarding Body to address satisfactorily in its current form. This relates mainly to the conflict of interest that exists within an organisation that both regulates and offers qualifications. In addition to this factor, three other awarding organisations have expressed an intention to offer veterinary nursing vocational qualifications. The market for VN qualifications is limited and any significant reduction in the number of students undertaking RCVS qualifications would adversely affect costs, and may even threaten the viability of the Awarding Body. The College is keen to avoid a situation in which the VN qualification is potentially compromised and has decided to take proactive action.

Has there been a conflict of interest in the past?

Potentially there has, however, until now this has been managed well and has not presented any practical difficulties.

Has the College been forced to make this move?

No, the College has appraised the current situation and has decided to take this step in advance of any difficulties that might arise.

What is the time frame for completion?

Ideally, the transfer should take place in time for the new academic year in 2012, and an alternative awarding organisation will be approved to register students from that time. However, the RCVS is likely to continue to run examinations for a time after this in order to effect a smooth transfer.

Is it a 'done deal'?

Although the decision made by the Veterinary Nurses Council (which is pending approval by RCVS Council) has been made to relinquish the Awarding Body status, no formal decisions have been made yet as to the organisation who will take over the qualification.

Will there be consultation among course providers and the profession?

This is a decision about an RCVS business and therefore, whilst the interests of the profession and our centres are major concerns and drivers, this is not an issue about which we can consult. The VN qualification itself will remain the same, and will only be awarded by organisations that fully meet RCVS approval criteria.

What is the benefit of this change?

The primary reason for this change is to remove a significant conflict of interest within the RCVS. The College's primary role is that of a professional regulator that safeguards standards within the veterinary professions. This includes the regulation of education and training leading to the veterinary and VN registers. The College cannot exercise this role effectively if it is also an awarding organisation, and might be suspected of treating its internal qualifications more favourably, or of obstructing competitors.

What will happen to students currently studying for the NVQ?

The NVQ qualifications are due to 'run out' in 2013. The RCVS will continue to service these students and there will be no change for them.

What will happen to students currently studying for the Level 3 Diploma?

At some point (yet to be determined) these students will be transferred to an alternative awarding body. This transfer will not cost anything and, as far as students are concerned, should not have any major practical impact. They will still gain a Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing and will still be able to enter the Register.

Will the awards change format/content?

The RCVS will negotiate to keep the format and structure of the qualification the same. Much of this is pre-determined within the accredited units and cannot be changed in any case.

Will the RCVS continue to run the exams?

In the medium term, yes. We will continue to run NVQ exams until the qualifications run out in 2013. We will also run Level 3 Diploma exams until the alternative awarding organisation has established and tested its systems. From then on, we will continue to monitor the delivery of examinations by all approved awarding institutions. We also plan to continue our very successful examiner training programme so that all awarding institutions will have access to suitably-trained practical examiners.

How will quality control be maintained for these awards?

We already quality assure all qualifications leading to the Register and will continue to do so. This will entail rigorous approval processes and ongoing quality monitoring visits, as now.

Will veterinary practices have a say in the future of these qualifications?

Yes, it is a condition of accreditation that qualifications have a valid market. This means consulting with employers and ensuring that qualifications meet their needs, as well as those of the professional regulator (the RCVS). The growth of choice in VN qualifications means that employers will have more choice in the future.

Will the RCVS have any control of the future of these awards?

Yes, we regulate all qualifications leading to registration. The RCVS is likely to alter the remit of its VN Continuing Education Subcommittee to embrace all veterinary nursing education, and to co-opt expertise from the awarding institutions and centres, as it does now within the Awarding Body Board.

Will the costs to students go up?

They should remain about the same. Students will probably have to pay more at the point of entry because they will pay an award registration fee (to their awarding organisation) and a regulatory enrolment fee to the RCVS. The enrolment fee pays for the quality assurance of their qualification ie RCVS visits, exam monitoring etc. However, a large awarding organisation will be able to deliver multiple choice question (MCQ) exams more cheaply than we do, so there is likely to be a balancing, meaning costs should be the same.

Will the costs to Colleges go up?

It is not possible to say at this stage. However, it is likely that which ever large awarding organisation is chosen, many of our centres will already be working with them.

Will the costs to practices go up?

No, there is no reason why they should.

Will RCVS cease to give certificates?

The College will cease to provide vocational qualification certificates. However, we will still issue VN Certificates (and badges) to all nurses entering the Register.

Will this affect VN Council and the regulation of VNs?

No.

What will happen to staff employed by the Awarding Body?

The RCVS VN Department will still have a significant role to play. Our regulatory role, in setting and maintaining standards of education within the growing numbers of awarding institutions (universities and other organisations offering qualifications that lead to the Register) is growing and will need to be serviced. This includes the monitoring of examinations and assessment within these qualifications, which will remain a major part of our work in the future.