

Consultation Report

Level 5 Diploma in Advanced Veterinary
Nursing (Medical)

Level 5 Diploma in Advanced Veterinary
Nursing (Surgical)

Level 5 Diploma in Advanced Veterinary
Nursing (Practice Nurse)

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Introduction

Building on the recent launch of the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing (Companion Animal), VetSkill has moved forward with the development of a series of new advanced Level 5 qualifications for those Registered Veterinary Nurses who are looking to develop more advanced technical skills.

A consultation on the three advanced Level 5 qualifications in advanced veterinary nursing was conducted to allow feedback from the profession on whether these qualifications were felt to be necessary and fit for purpose, and to allow constructive feedback on the content and appropriateness of the level of these proposed qualifications.

As part of the consultation, VetSkill acknowledged that the veterinary professions' original concept of creating separate Medical and Surgical Advanced Diplomas in Veterinary Nursing had stood the test of time, and that to this day many Advanced Medical and Surgical Veterinary Nurses wear their Advanced Veterinary Nurse (AVN) badges with considerable pride. The consultation advised that the new qualifications were built on advanced technical skills and that their development reflects advances made within the profession.

VetSkill also expressed that they would also provide a Register for Advanced Veterinary Nurse Practitioners for those who are suitably qualified to be recognised, and asked participants to indicate their views through the consultation.

Proposed Qualifications

The proposed qualifications were Level 5 Advanced Diplomas in Veterinary Nursing with the first three covering Medical, Surgical and Practice Nurse skills. The consultation acknowledged the intention to seek support to develop a more extensive range of advanced qualifications covering various advanced specialist technical skills in the future.

All three proposed qualifications comprise of 60 credits at Level 5 with a series of assessments including assignments/ case studies, OSCE examinations and MCQ examinations alongside a skills portfolio. These qualifications are designed to be completed, on average, in a twelve-month period.

All three qualifications are intended to be nationally recognised qualifications conforming to Ofqual and CCEA requirements, and will be available for a wide range of colleges and training providers to offer throughout the UK and overseas.

Respondents

The consultation questionnaire was sent via email to 80 members of the veterinary professions including Heads of Centre at five colleges, key stakeholders in the major veterinary employees, RVN and MRCVS representatives in education, referral and general practice, the RCVS, the BVNA, the BVA, and the BSAVA. The email contained the link to the questionnaire in Google Forms and attached the qualification handbooks for all three qualifications. Participants were given a two-week period in which to respond.

Responses were received from 28 individuals with three participants also providing additional constructive feedback via email.

The response rate for this consultation was thirty-five percent which is above the industry standard for an educational consultation of this kind.

89% of the respondents were Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVN) and 11% were members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (MRCVS).

67% of responses did not represent the views of the organisation the individuals were affiliated to, and 33% did represent the views of the organisation.

89% of individuals confirmed that their responses represented their own views, whilst 11% of individuals confirmed that their responses did not represent the individual's own views.

Respondents were asked to confirm their primary role, i.e. the main capacity under which they answered:

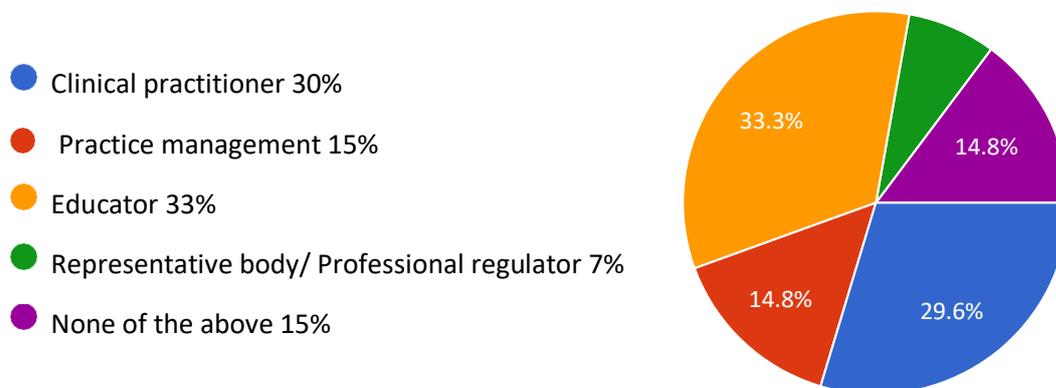


Figure 1 – Respondents primary role

Consultation Responses on the Qualifications

Will skills based qualifications in these subjects be necessary and/or useful?

74% of respondents strongly agreed, 22% tended to agree, and 4% tended to disagree.

Qualitative narrative responses included: 'all three qualifications are excellent;' 'I feel they are necessary to further expand the role of the RVN;' 'they will fill a gap for subject specific, specialised, advanced qualifications not currently being delivered in the UK;' and 'to provide evidence of practical and not just theoretical knowledge'.

Is it important that the qualifications allow the practice of higher skills and career progression?

85% of respondents strongly agreed, 15% tended to agree.

Key themes revealed from the qualitative responses included the need for career progression and recognition and that currently there are limited opportunities to develop higher-level skills. Furthermore, qualifications of this type will aid retention and career satisfaction.

Qualitative narrative comments included: 'the qualifications need to allow the nurses to develop their skills in practice and be able to do more;' 'career progression is vital as are higher skill sets in order for nurses to specialise, encourage learning and training;' and 'need progression in the career to help RVNs to develop and to help with retention'.

Is it important that the qualifications allow academic progression to other qualifications?

67% of respondents strongly agreed, with 33% tending to agree.

Qualitative narrative comments included: the need to ensure that qualifications 'meet the QAA benchmarks;' 'career progression can only benefit from recognised pathways to higher levels of learning;' 'it is important to progress academically as well as clinically;' 'makes the qualification flexible and more inclusive and a springboard for future academic progression;' and 'each qualification level should be pitched to target audience but should also be building the foundation for further qualifications'.

Is it important that the qualifications assist with preparing learners for employment/ supporting an advanced role in the workplace/ supporting personal growth?

82% of respondents strongly agreed, 15% tended to agree and 3% tended to disagree.

Key themes from the extensive qualitative narrative included: the need for career progression/ direction; little current availability for career progression; advanced qualification needed to move the profession forwards; important for personal growth and improvements in mental health and confidence; and to enable promotion.

Is the objective of the qualifications and subject matter appropriate?

33% of respondents strongly agreed with 56% tended to agree, 7% tended to disagree, and 4% strongly disagreed.

Qualitative narrative comments included: 'within each of these qualifications is very appropriate subject matter;' 'the overall objectives/ subject matter look good;' 'is there a conflict with a level 6 post-registration certificate?;' 'potentially a few tweaks but largely yes;' 'I would like to do these courses;' some areas are more interesting than others;' 'overall the content is great;' 'it supports level 5 skill development and offers something different to what is currently available;' 'some of the subject matter is similar to that found at level 3;' and 'I think these are an excellent start'.

Is the level and size of the proposed qualifications appropriate including the credit value, guided learning hours and total qualification time?

44% of respondents strongly agreed, 44% tended to agree, and 12% tended to disagree.

Qualitative narrative comments included: 'the GLH/TQT seem light to me;' 'all seem achievable;' 'I think there will be industry confusion;' 'with plans for an RCVS AVN cert and diploma, again confusion may occur. Will applicants prefer a course that one day may lead to AVN RCVS status?;' 'It is achievable for many and this makes it attractive for educators and nurses alike;' and 'a year is a manageable amount of time to support a colleague with further studies'.

Which assessment methodologies would you like us to include?

All respondents to this questions indicated that they wished college assignments to be included.

Skills portfolio – Yes 83%, Maybe 13% and No 4%;

College exam - Yes 60%, Maybe 32%, No 8%;

VetSkill exam - Yes by 71%, Maybe 25%, No 4%;

Practical/ OSCE exam - Yes 80%, Maybe 12% , No 8%.

Qualitative narrative comments included: 'In order for it to be highly recognised, I feel the assessment process needs to be rigorous;' 'many types provide a good range and can appeal to a wide range of learners;' 'practical exams based on scenarios may be effective;' the range of assessment methodologies identified in the handbooks are suitable to meet the needs of a range of learners. I question the use of MCQs to demonstrate a learner's ability to evaluate/analyse at level 5;' 'assessment should include the academic writing required at level 5;' 'a robust method of assessment from a range of methods is vital;' 'people do not like OSCEs, feel too stressed;' and 'varied assessment is useful to show all skills and cover all topics appropriately'.

What other subjects could be offered as skills based Level 5 Advanced Veterinary Nursing Diplomas?

Responses are only listed below where more than one respondent has listed the subject area.

Diagnostic imaging – listed by eight respondents;

Emergency and critical care - listed by seven respondents;

Anaesthesia and analgesia – listed by seven respondents;

Oncology – listed by four respondents;

Laboratory diagnostics – listed by four respondents;

Neurology – listed by four respondents;

Exotics – listed by three respondents;

Rehabilitation/ physiotherapy – listed by three respondents;

Mentoring/ clinical coaching/ teaching qualifications – listed by two respondents;

Equine – listed by two respondents;

Cardiology – listed by two respondents.

Do you consider that colleges and other training providers will be able to recruit learners for this qualification?

37% agreed strongly, 59% tended to agree, and 4% tended to disagree.

Key themes revealed from the qualitative responses included: it would depend on cost, whether the qualification would attract funding, competition from other courses, and accessibility of the qualifications.

Other comments included: 'Colleges will be able to recruit for these qualifications as there is a demand for higher level, clinical qualifications;' 'I don't think there will be any issues with recruitment;' 'Confusion regarding levels and whether RCVS approved AVN will be more attractive;' and 'we know there is a demand for these qualifications as we are asked about them'.

Do you anticipate employers will support this qualification for their staff?

19% strongly agreed, 62% tended to agree, and 19% tended to disagree.

Key themes revealed from the qualitative responses included: that it would depend on cost, that VN education is often not invested in by employers, and that it would depend on the method of delivery and overall benefit to the employer.

Comments included: 'I think the practical element is very important but also vets need to have faith in it and trust the nurses will be trained to a higher skill level;' 'Yes if such qualifications are marketed well, they appear to meet the needs of the industry and if they are offered at competitive prices by colleges and training providers;' 'with the widespread acquisition of practices by corporate companies proclaiming their intentions to fully utilise their nurse's skills, it seems likely advanced qualifications will be encouraged;' 'I feel if accreditation by the RCVS is gained then this will help, clinical recognition is probably ,most important to employers;' 'On the whole absolutely yes;' and 'not sure it stands out above other advanced qualifications'.

VetSkill recognises public confidence as critical, and is therefore looking to create a register of Advanced Veterinary Nurse Practitioners. This would encompass those who qualify with Advanced Veterinary Nursing qualifications based on advanced skills, as well as a career commitment to maintaining their higher skills and competences.

Would you support VetSkill to achieve this?

85% strongly agreed;

7% tended to agree;

4% tended to disagree;

4% strongly disagreed.

Other comments to help improve these qualifications and/or more accurately meet user needs.

Comments included: 'Enable a mix of online and face to face learning;' 'Make it clear the expected time frame of completion;' 'Clarify clearer for centres a range of RVN advanced qualifications that would be accepted for teaching, assessment and IQA of course;' 'I am unable to find details about the re-registration process and what it entails. As this will be a new concept to many nurses/providers, additional information is needed to clarify.;' 'Lots of work has gone into them and they look very well thought out;' 'I feel theatre design and maintenance is fairly basic for an advanced course, also sterilisation;' 'I think the practice nurse route is a great addition which will encourage 1st opinion nurses to progress I like them;' 'the need to be a L5 qualification holder to be an assessor might restrict some practices in putting their nurses through this. I understand the rationale, but think it is very restrictive.;' 'The surgical nursing qualification is loaded towards theatre practice, I think there needs to be more reference to nursing surgical cases;' and 'I like the structure and range of assessment methods'.

Considerations Following the Consultation:

Following the consultation, VetSkill have shown that the strategy adopted for these qualifications is sound and that the development of skills based qualification at this level is supported by the industry. VetSkill will now move forward to further development with these qualifications to allow timely upload to the Ofqual portal, and allow them to be offered to colleges and training providers for delivery.

The feedback received has resulted in a review of the following areas:

- Total qualification time and guided learning hours;
- The assessment criteria descriptors to ensure a true reflection of level five taxonomies;
- The assessment of level five criteria by multiple choice questions;
- The use of long case scenarios to demonstrate mastery of skills and application of higher level thinking;
- The addition of further skill requirements;
- The requirement of a level 5 qualification for assessors of this qualification;

- The content of the medical and surgical qualifications.

Changes to the Qualifications following Consultation:

VetSkill have reviewed and changed the following as a direct result of this consultation:

- Increased the total qualification and guided learning hours to more accurately reflect the proposed number of credits and qualification level;
- Reviewed the assessment criteria descriptors to ensure that the qualifications clearly evidence level five requirements;
- Reviewed the examination method and replacement of a multiple choice exam with a written exam for each qualification;
- Replaced the OSCE component in all qualifications with long case scenarios to better demonstrate mastery of skills and higher level thinking and problem solving;
- Reviewed the practical skills and addition of skills to be achieved.

Consideration and Justification for not acting upon other user feedback:

- A review of the qualification required to assess work has resulted in no change to this requirement for written work. VetSkill feels that a Level 5 or above qualification is necessary to assess written work at this level. For practical work, VetSkill has elected to follow the precedent set by comparable qualifications, i.e. the Veterinary Technician Specialist, that require the assessor to hold an equivalent qualification to that being assessed;
- A review of the surgical and medical qualifications in light of some comments, i.e. 'The surgical nursing qualification is loaded towards theatre practice, I think there needs to be more reference to nursing surgical cases,' and 'The subject matter is too vague and general for medical nursing, it is repetitive of what you do as a level 4 diploma nurse and it does not differ enough from what you learn doing a DipAVN - for a medical nursing qualification I would like to see specific medical nursing criteria set e.g. prepare for, assist with and discuss a rhinoscopy.' VetSkill has considered these comments and concluded that a change to the learning outcomes is not required. The aim remains for these advanced qualifications to be achievable to nurses in both general and referral practice. Making the criteria too highly specialised would prohibit many nurses from achieving these qualifications, in the same way that the Veterinary Technician Specialist Qualifications currently do.
- The review of the assessment criteria has sufficiently demarcated the difference between the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing and the Level 5 Advanced Diplomas in Veterinary Nursing within the confines of Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966), the current RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurse, and supporting guidance.