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Jacqui Garrett is director of Central Qualifications and has worked within the veterinary profession for over 18 years. She initially worked in veterinary practice, before joining AT Veterinary Systems (AT) 13 years ago. In 2011, having led a team of experienced practice managers at AT, Jacqui brought her experience and expertise to Central Qualifications.

A new era for veterinary nursing

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ABSTRACT: The role of the veterinary nurse has expanded over the years and with it the need for a team of well-trained, competent and caring nurses; this, in turn, has placed a great demand on students, colleges and practices. This article explores the developing role of veterinary nurses in practice and explains how the Central Qualifications (CQ) innovative approach to training supports the profession.

Central Qualifications (CQ) is an Ofqual-regulated awarding body, providing qualifications for disciplines related exclusively to the veterinary industry. CQ aims to make training and professional development more accessible and an integral part of veterinary practice.

Training the next generation of veterinary nurses is not only good for the individuals and the practices, but for the future success of the profession as a whole – and ultimately for animal welfare.

Fulfilling the needs of the profession

Motivated by the belief that ensuring animal welfare starts with the continual improvement of the education of everyone working in practice, CQ strives to provide the highest standards of vocational learning and to develop qualifications that reflect the current – and changing – needs of the profession.

In 2010, CQ began the 'New Era for Veterinary Nursing' initiative and carried out a survey to determine whether there was a requirement within the industry for a fresh approach to veterinary nursing training. The survey targeted the veterinary industry as a whole and subsequently enabled the profession to help shape qualifications that fulfilled the needs of employers and students alike.

Following the survey, it was identified that there was significant support from the profession for new veterinary nursing qualifications – in particular, for training programmes that were practice-based, placed an emphasis on

practical competencies and reduced the concentration on administrative paperwork (**Figure 1**).

Consequently, taking into consideration all of the feedback gained from the consultations, a new veterinary nursing qualification was formed – the CQ Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing, in both small animal and equine disciplines (DipVN and DipEVN).

In 2011 – the same year that veterinary nursing celebrated its 50th anniversary – CQ became the first independent awarding body to offer a veterinary nursing qualification. To date, the DipVN is delivered in 13 locations, which have been approved by CQ for delivery of the qualification.

❑ **Figure 1.** CQ strives to provide the highest standards of vocational learning and to develop qualifications that reflect the needs of the profession



With direct input from veterinary practices and experienced education consultants, the DipVN has been designed in response to the current needs of the industry and is deliverable within the working practice in a number of ways. The changes introduced by CQ have all been designed to improve accessibility and quality of training in the profession.

CQ provides flexibility for Centres to use different delivery styles and structures, whilst also providing a greater level of guidance for both students and tutors (Figure 2).

CQ also encourages a team-based approach to training, with multiple coaches and tutors; therefore, dependency of teaching, coaching and mentoring is removed from the individual, and instead, allows students to benefit from the experience of an entire team during their education.

Similarly, students are not disadvantaged should their one-and-only mentor be absent.

Quality assurance & recording of skills achieved

To aid Centre delivery and student learning, CQ has developed an online system for recording clinical assessments. The Central Skills Log (CSL) is a work-based learning and communication tool that forms an integral part of a student veterinary nurse's development.

Every practical task within the DipVN is featured on the CSL and accompanied by explanatory notes, providing clarity and guidance to the student, as well as standardisation across Centres.

The CSL has been designed to take full advantage of the fruits of the digital age. On completion of practical tasks, students are able to upload pictorial and media evidence via smartphone, tablet or web, as well as monitor their progress and record achievements. The system supports and encourages the use of any media form, thereby increasing the quality of evidence recorded. Similarly, the CSL facilitates direct e-mail communication between students and their tutors.

The CSL supports CQ's team approach to learning. All members of the practical teaching team can access a student's record to monitor progress and update

data. For example, a clinical coach/practical tutor can view evidence provided by the student, add comments and view a student's progress – whether at the level of individual tasks as part of larger units or in the context of achievement of the course as a whole.

In addition to this, Verifiers can view interactions between the student and clinical coach/practical tutor, and verify that the evidence uploaded meets the requirements, is of good quality and ensures the student is progressing.

Bright future for veterinary nursing

The 'New Era for Veterinary Nursing' initiative focuses on better care for animals through broader education programmes, as well as providing further opportunities for veterinary nurses in practice.

CQ have developed two pre-veterinary nursing qualifications (Level 2), providing a seamless pathway to veterinary nursing – the CQ Diploma for Veterinary Nursing Assistants (VNA) and the CQ Diploma in Animal Nursing (DipAN). Both qualifications utilise the CSL; experience gained can, therefore, be quality assured and transferred where appropriate.

CQ's equine veterinary nursing qualification – the Diploma in Equine Veterinary Nursing (DipEVN) – can be taken as a stand-alone qualification or as an equine pathway, following completion of the small animal DipVN. Similarly, the small animal DipVN can be taken as



Figure 2. CQ provides flexibility for Centres to use different delivery styles and structures, whilst also providing a greater level of guidance for both students and tutors

a stand-alone or pathway qualification following the completion of the DipEVN.

The current phase of the 'New Era' initiative is now addressing qualifications and training for veterinary nurses after qualifying. CQ is actively developing postgraduate qualifications in companion animal behaviour, dentistry and education, with a number of further developments planned for the future. Centres with specific expertise and facilities will be able to deliver a wider range of training programmes for practices.

If you would like to be part of the 'New Era' initiative or contribute to the development of qualifications, we would like to hear from you at Central Qualifications, Elmtree Business Park, Elmswell, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP30 9HR. www.centralqualifications.co.uk