



**Jacqui Garrett DMS CVPM**

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.

The final element of the insight to VN training series covers the works of the Awarding Organisations from the perspective of Central Qualifications; as yet we are still awaiting a response from City and Guilds but will include their viewpoint in a later issue.

## The role of an awarding body – a perspective

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**ABSTRACT:** Central Qualifications (CQ) was developed by those working in practice as a not-for-profit awarding body dedicated to the veterinary profession. Here, director Jacqui Garrett explains the position of CQ in the industry and explores the qualifications available to future generations of veterinary nurses.

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) sets the standards that awarding organisations (also referred to as examination boards, awarding bodies or awarding institutions) in England and Northern Ireland need to meet when designing, delivering and awarding regulated qualifications. CQ is an Ofqual-regulated awarding organisation.

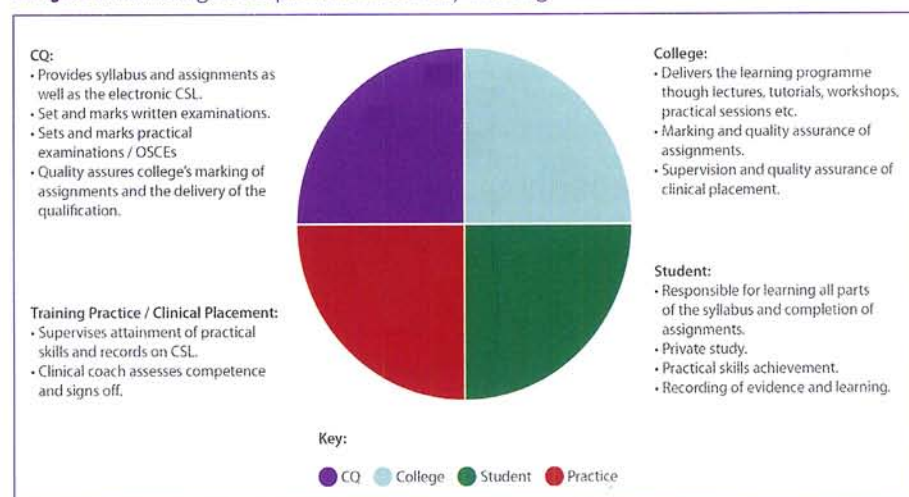
Those institutions recognised by Ofqual as an awarding organisation benefit from a mark of high quality and high standards in their qualifications. Students and employers alike can therefore be confident in the knowledge that qualifications from an Ofqual-recognised awarding body have been independently checked for high levels of integrity and competence, [www.ofqual.gov.uk](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk)

Awarding organisations perform a key role in the education sector by developing and quality assuring qualifications, setting examinations, assessing achievements, and recognising accomplishments in the issuing of certificates and post-nominal letters.

Training providers are those that design and deliver courses in order to ensure students acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve a particular qualification or set of qualifications.

An external examination body negates issues of bias and conflicts of interest, as well as ensuring standardisation across multiple and differing training providers. It can also bring considerable financial benefits to training providers as they do not incur the cost of developing and

**Figure 1. Achieving the Diploma in Veterinary Nursing**



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Figure 2. Achieving a veterinary nursing qualification is a significant achievement validating their own assessment material, nor are they required to employ a team of external examiners (Figure 1).

## Why study for a veterinary nursing qualification?

A qualification validates the competencies of a student and acts as a 'passport' to a successful career and fulfilling life. It is a demonstration to employers, customers, further and higher education institutions, professional bodies, peers and many others that the holder has achieved the required level of knowledge and skill to fulfil a professional role.

Central Qualifications currently offers four qualifications for the veterinary nursing team:

- The Diploma for Veterinary Nursing Assistants (DipVNA)

Figure 3. An explanation of qualification levels and units

Level	QCF and NQF Qualifications (Examples)	Framework for Higher Education (Examples)
Entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entry level awards, certificates and diplomas</li> <li>• Functional Skills at Entry level</li> </ul>	
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GCSEs graded D-G</li> <li>• Functional Skills level 1</li> </ul>	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GCSEs graded A*-C</li> <li>• Functional Skills level 2</li> </ul>	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A levels</li> <li>• International Baccalaureate</li> </ul>	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certificates of higher education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certificates of higher education</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher national diplomas</li> <li>• HNCs and HNDs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diplomas of higher education and further education, foundation degrees and higher national diplomas</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bachelor degrees, graduate certificates and diplomas</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced professional awards, certificates and diplomas</li> <li>• Postgraduate certificates and diplomas</li> <li>• Fellowships and fellowship diplomas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master degrees, postgraduate certificates and diplomas</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Award, certificate and diploma in strategic direction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctorates</li> </ul>

- The Diploma in Animal Nursing (DipAN)
- The Diploma in Veterinary Nursing, Small Animal (DipVN)
- The Diploma in Veterinary Nursing, Equine (DipEVN)

Achieving a CQ veterinary nursing qualification is a significant personal and professional achievement to be acknowledged in employment and celebrated with family, friends, colleagues and tutors (Figure 2).

## Qualification levels and units explained

Within the qualification and credit framework (QCF) in England and Northern Ireland as devised by Ofqual, a qualification is built up from a series of units. Each unit is assigned a level (from entry level to level 8) based on the complexity and difficulty of its content, and a credit value; which is an indication of the total number of learning hours required to complete the unit – one credit represents an estimated 10 hours of learning (Figure 3).

As vocational qualifications, CQ Diplomas use the credit framework. The



Figure 4. Qualifications should be delivered by approved training centres

Diploma in Animal Nursing comprises 13 units at level 2 and five units at level 3, equating to a total number of credits of 165, representing 1,650 learning hours.

Similarly, the Diploma in Veterinary Nursing (both small animal and equine disciplines) consists of 18 level 3 units and one level 4 unit, calculated as 180 credits and 1,800 learning hours.

In order to achieve a CQ qualification, a student must achieve a pass in all assignments and examinations; there is no cross-compensation between units. Furthermore, students are required to complete an online ePortfolio of practical competencies – the Central Skills Log (CSL).

## CQ approved centres

CQ qualifications are delivered by approved training centres – that is, those that have been recognised as having the necessary processes, skills and facilities available to deliver CQ Diplomas. Training centres can be private providers, publicly funded schools, colleges or universities (Figure 4).

In order to become an approved centre, CQ's education consultants evaluate applications based on a set of requirements for each of the individual qualifications and approve those who meet the criteria.

## Quality assurance

CQ and its education consultants oversee the quality assurance of centres, the marking of assignments and the recording of practical competencies within the CSL. Students on the DipVN, DipEVN and DipAN programmes that have successfully completed all tasks

in the CSL and passed all assignments and examinations are required to take a final practical examination or Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), which is conducted by CQ examiners.

The OSCE is recognised as a standard approach to assessment of clinical competence across a range of health sciences, including veterinary nursing. This process allows for the examining of more students over a broader range of subjects in a planned and structured way; each student must perform a series of standardised clinical tasks within a circuit of short stations in order to assess practical competencies.

Professor Ronald Harden, a leading international authority in medical education who pioneered this method of practical examination, has independently reviewed and accredited CQ's veterinary nursing OSCE strategy.

Quality assurance within centres is conducted by internal verifiers (IVs), who also carry out visits to training practices or places of employment. Traditionally, the process of quality assurance was conducted under the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) code of practice. Although the NVQ code of practice is no longer applicable, quality assurance remains innate to CQ qualifications.

## CQ post-nominal letters

It is common practice for awarding organisations to differentiate the qualifications they offer through post-nominal letters. From the inception of the Diploma in Veterinary Nursing and the

recognition of an industry need for a fresh approach to veterinary nurse training, CQ has implemented the use of the post-nominal letters DipVN to identify students' achievements (Figure 5).

Prior to this, post-nominals were only awarded to qualified veterinary nurses on registration with the RCVS.

The use of DipVN and DipEVN post-nominal letters brings CQ-qualified veterinary nurses in line with the same protocol used by veterinary surgeons, who typically have post-nominals – such as BVM&S – to indicate attainment of their degree, as well as their MRCVS upon registration.

Registered veterinary nurses that have been awarded the CQ Diploma in Veterinary Nursing (Small Animal or Equine), will thus have two sets of post-nominal letters:

- **Either DipVN or DipEVN** – to indicate that students have been assessed by CQ and recognised as achieving the necessary skills and knowledge to have been awarded the Diploma in Veterinary Nursing (Small Animal or Equine); and
- **RVN** – awarded upon registration with a professional body, such as the RCVS, to indicate that the Diploma holder agrees to abide by the code of professional conduct for veterinary nurses.

CQ post-nominal letters are also awarded on completion of the Diploma in Animal Nursing, DipAN, and the Diploma for Veterinary Nursing Assistants, DipVNA.

These qualifications do not, however, allow for registration as a veterinary nurse.

## Why choose CQ?

CQ originated in veterinary practice and has both veterinary and veterinary nursing expertise on its board of governors. CQ's staff comprise qualified veterinary nurses and veterinary surgeons; many of whom have over 25 years experience in practice – not forgetting our key advisors and education consultants.

Drawing upon this wealth of experience, CQ has developed qualifications and assessments that meet the requirements of employers, and ensure that holders of its awards possess highly valued qualifications that are recognised by the profession. Further, this 'clear-line-of-sight' to employment ensures that those holding a CQ qualification are well placed to succeed in a competitive job market.

With a strong technology and practice management base, CQ also brings innovations and a modern approach to education and learning. The Central Skills Log utilises the latest web technology to facilitate student learning, effective student/clinical coach and clinical coach/internal verifier communication, a team-based approach to teaching and clinical skills assessment.

## Future developments at CQ

CQ is now addressing qualifications and training for veterinary nurses following qualification. Postgraduate qualifications in companion animal behaviour, dentistry and education are currently in development, with a number of further programmes planned for the near future.

## Getting involved

Those who are passionate about animal welfare, veterinary nursing and the veterinary profession are encouraged to establish contact and become involved in working with CQ. We value independent-minded professionals who wish to join us in improving the quality and standards of veterinary and veterinary nursing vocational qualifications.

If you would like to contribute to the development of CQ qualifications, we would like to hear from you. Please write to me at Central Qualifications, Elmtree Business Park, Elmswell, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP30 9HR. [info@centralqualifications.co.uk](mailto:info@centralqualifications.co.uk)

Figure 5. It is important that veterinary nurses receive recognition

