From April this year, employees working in organisations of 250 people or more will be able to request time to undertake study or training in a government initiative called ‘time to train’. From April 2011, this will apply to all employees.

From April 6, employees who work in an organisation with 250 or more employees will have the statutory right to request time for study or training. From April 6, 2011, this right will apply to all employees working in organisations of all sizes.

Employees who already have a system in place with their employer for making training requests can continue to use it.

**Scheme criteria**

To make a statutory request for ‘time to train’, employees must have worked for their employer continuously for at least 26 weeks before they apply. They will not be able to make a request for ‘time to train’ if they are:

- An agency worker;
- A member of the armed forces;
- Compulsory school age (‘school age’ in Scotland);
- A young person who already has a statutory right to paid time off to undertake study or training; or
- Between 16 and 18 years old, and already taking part in education or training.

**Types of training**

Employees will have the right only to request time for certain types of training. This might include training leading to a qualification, or training to help them to develop skills relevant to their job, workplace or business.

There will be no limit on the length of time the study or training might take. The most important requirement is that the training the employee wants should help to improve business performance and their effectiveness in their employer’s business.

The Government advises that, before making their request, employees should decide on the training they need and consider how best to achieve it. They should make their request well before they apply for a course at a college or similar institution.

**Discussing your request**

Once a request has been made, employers have certain responsibilities regarding how they consider it. They should do this within a set period, and arrange a meeting with the employee if they need to discuss the request.

For example, they may need to agree time off work or change their working hours before starting.

The new right will not automatically change any existing arrangements between employer and employee about payment of wages while training, or meeting the cost of course fees. It will be up to the employee to agree with their employer about how to meet any costs. Employers will not have to meet the cost of training although they may decide to do so.

*This article summarises advice provided on the Government’s website www.direct.gov.uk. Search for ‘Time to train’, where more information is available.*
Talking sheep update

THE president of the Sheep Veterinary Society (SVS), Dick Thompson, reports that its ‘Talking sheep’ initiative (Vet Record Careers, January 30, 2010, p i) has enjoyed excellent attendances, particularly of recent graduates, who were the main target audience. Each meeting has featured four or five short clinical presentations, including some case histories given by recent graduates, which have prompted useful, informal discussions.

With dystocia-related problems in sheep costing the UK industry over £30 million annually, and at least 200,000 ewes dying during lambing, caesarean sections in sheep have featured at three of the meetings. Vets hope that high prices paid for breeding females last autumn mean they will be given the chance to do more ovine obstetrics this lambing season.

Another recurring theme has been anthelmintic resistance, particularly an interesting case history of haemonchosis in a hill flock, presented by 2007 graduate Jenny Hull.

Further meetings are planned for Buxton, St Asaph, Kilworth, Preston, Penrith, Perth, Wincanton, Hereford and Devon; for details contact the SVS secretariat through the society’s website, www.sheepvetsoc.org.uk

Ten-minute chat

James Callion established Spires Vet Clinic in Omagh just four years after qualifying from Edinburgh veterinary school. Last year he was runner-up in Northern Ireland’s Eircom Young Entrepreneur Awards.

What made you decide to establish your own practice so soon after qualifying?

Mainly because I was living close to Omagh and spending two hours a day commuting, and having nights away on call. This, coupled with the arrival of our baby, Thomas, meant something had to change! Also, you usually have to be at a clinic for a number of years before being offered a partnership, and I am not the type of person who could have waited for that to happen.

Omagh needed a small animal clinic, and I was certain I could grow a successful business there. Two years ago I found the perfect premises – a bungalow on a great site in the centre of town.

How did you get to where you are today?

Having grown up on a livestock and arable farm, veterinary medicine was my chosen career, as I figured it would enable me to work with animals, while providing a more stable career path than the ups and downs of agriculture.

I met my wife Alison while studying at Edinburgh, and she encouraged me across to Northern Ireland after spending a year in practice. I then moved to Willow Veterinary Clinic in Portadown, County Armagh, where I worked for two-and-a-half years.

A typical day at Spires

The clinic opens early so that owners can drop off animals booked for operations on their way to work. Routine and more complex surgery is carried out between consulting times, as well as home visits for the elderly or infirm. Treatment and routine neutering for a local animal shelter generates a regular volume of work. The clinic also covers the more complicated small animal work for a veterinary clinic 17 miles from Omagh. A full out-of-hours (OOH) emergency service is offered; this is the only down side of a one-man vet clinic!

What do you like about your job?

I am able to spend more time with my family, not spending nights away from home on call. There are also the obvious benefits of making decisions and running the clinic to my standards. Our practice ethos is to make the clients feel special by giving them a warm welcome. We want regular, reliable and loyal clients for years to come.

OOH work for small animals is quieter than that for large animal practice, and this has given me more time at weekends to spend with our small herd of pedigree Limousin cattle, which provide us with a great deal of pleasure and the rarity of a profitable hobby!

What do you not like?

I miss the safety of a wages cheque going in every month. Instead, I have to look at the bigger picture – what I started with, and what I have to show for it at the end of the year. I miss the one-in-four rota for OOH work, but I have the satisfaction seeing my business grow and knowing I have done it myself.

Why is your job important?

We are the only clinic within a 30-mile radius that specialises in the treatment of small animals; this is our unique selling point. The clinic offers full hospitalisation facilities, X-ray, ultrasound and dental treatments. We also offer full blood biochemistry analysis on site.

What advice would you give to someone considering a similar career path?

Seek advice from local business support networks and go for it! Try to identify a niche in the market, and offer something different from your competitors, concentrating on client care.

It is easy to get carried away when setting up a clinic with respect to design of premises, welcome packs, logos and investment in kit. It is important not to burden yourself with too much debt initially, as this will pressurise you further down the line when you open or when interest rates start to rise.

What’s the best piece of advice you were ever given?

‘A recession can be a great time to prosper.’

What is your proudest moment?

Being handed our baby boy after a caesarean section.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

As part of the judging process for the Eircom Young Entrepreneur of the Year Awards, a camera crew visited the finalists to watch them at work and film a short sequence to show on the awards night. Little did I know that they were going to include a number of outtakes, showing a number of ridiculous efforts at giving an interview to the camera without laughing.
Ten-minute chat

James Callion

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