Learning to teach – teaching to learn

A Masters in Veterinary Education and other courses offered by the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) aim to develop individuals as professional veterinary and paraveterinary educators. RVC course administrator Faye Davies explains how the programmes can be followed via distance learning or face-to-face.

The RVC offers a postgraduate certificate and a diploma as well as the Masters in Veterinary Education. Following the launch of the Masters course in September 2009, the programme team developed the postgraduate certificate course in August 2010, and launched a distance learning programme a year later.

The MSc in Veterinary Education is a programme that has been designed to address a growing need in the veterinary and paraveterinary sectors for educator training. The programme encompasses a wide range of topics that are relevant to educators, to enhance their knowledge, skills and practice in a rapidly changing environment in education.

Since its inception, 20 students have completed the certificate, and are accredited as Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA); seven of these graduates have chosen to continue on to this year’s diploma course.

A number of MSc research projects have also been completed in the past year.

The certificate programme uses the RVC’s ‘Learn’ platform (previously known as Moodle). The new distance learning students are studying in various parts of the world, including Canada, the USA and Australia, and we were lucky enough to welcome some of them to the RVC on the launch day.

These global students work alongside the on-site students, all using the online learning platform and various online conferencing software to encourage participation and discussion between students and course tutors; so far, this method of delivery has proved to be a big success.

Associate level
Additionally, the RVC is set to launch a brand new level, the ‘associate’ level, in September 2012. The associate level is ideal for early career researchers with some teaching responsibilities, PhD students, staff new to teaching with part-time academic responsibilities, and staff who support academic provision such as learning technologists, learning developers, library staff, demonstrators and laboratory technicians.

It seems that word has spread, and we already have a list of potential new students who are keen to start the programme. The aim is to continue running the certificate online, and to launch the diploma and associate levels as distance learning options in September this year.

Who the programme is aimed at
The MSc in Veterinary Education is designed for professionals who are involved in the delivery of veterinary or paraveterinary education and training at either undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Practising veterinary surgeons and paraveterinary professionals involved in workplace training may also benefit from the course, as the programme aims to devel-
op individuals as reflective practitioners, enabling them to offer an enhanced learning experience to anyone they teach or train.

All courses can be studied through a variety of delivery methods:

- **Distance learning** – the programme is delivered entirely online and makes the most effective use of virtual learning tools, including online conferencing software to encourage participation and discussion between students and course tutors. Candidates are not required to attend the campus for any workshops.

- **Blended mode** – the delivery mode is mixed; participants can come to the RVC in Hawkshead to participate in some of the monthly workshops, combined with studying using distance learning materials.

- **Face-to-face** – students attend and participate in monthly workshops at the RVC’s Hawkshead campus.

More information on the courses is available at [www.rvc.ac.uk/Postgraduate/Courses/MScVetEducation/Index.cfm](http://www.rvc.ac.uk/Postgraduate/Courses/MScVetEducation/Index.cfm) or by contacting the administrators directly: ljackson@rvc.ac.uk or fdavies@rvc.ac.uk.

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**Ten-minute chat**

**Rebecca Parkes has just returned from spending six months volunteering at Animal Care in Egypt (ACE) in Luxor. She recently ran the 19th Egyptian Half Marathon in Luxor to raise funds for an isolation facility for the charity.**

**What made you volunteer?**

I have been interested in the welfare of working equids for some time, as they are essential for the livelihoods of poor families. I first heard about ACE (www.ace-egypt.org.uk) via the overseas section of the BVA’s website. I visited for a month, loved it and decided that I would return when circumstances allowed.

**Why now?**

I decided I wanted to be a vet when I was about six years old! I first took a BSc in veterinary sciences at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), then the BVetMed. From there, I completed an internship at the Animal Health Trust, Newmarket, working for Sue Dyson. When thinking about what to do next, it occurred to me that there would probably be no better time to take six months out, so I contacted Kim Taylor (ACE’s English manager) and asked to be the clinic’s vet for six months.

**What activities were you involved in?**

ACE treats predominantly working horses and donkeys, but it also sees dogs, cats and even the occasional camel or buffalo. The days begin at 8 am checking in-patients, followed by ‘rounds’. ACE employs three Egyptian vets and has volunteers from Europe, the USA and Australia, so case discussions can be interesting as everyone contributes.

Clinical work could be anything from checking the teeth of outpatients and treating hoof abscesses, to managing colics and field surgery (such as removing bone sequestrae or neutering cats). Most of our patients came to us, but we did go out to emergencies too – one memorable occasion involved collecting a mare with a lacerated heel bulb from outside a hotel, with crowds of people trying to ‘help’! I was also responsible for supervising European and Egyptian students, keeping clinic records up to date, and helping to organise fundraising events. I was involved with some teaching, raising awareness of animal welfare at the Rababah Community School programme, which was fantastic, and in a harnessing project that ACE is developing with the World Association for Transport Animal Welfare and Studies (TAWS) and Harness Aid.

**What did you like about the work?**

Aside from the obvious rewards associated with the clinical work, I love the opportunity to work in a different culture and the challenges that presents. Working at ACE gave me a fascinating insight into Egyptian culture.

**What did you not like?**

While cultural differences are fascinating, at times they can be incredibly frustrating! For example, vets often don’t see cases involving septic joints or fractures for several days as there is no sense of urgency, and, at times, persuading owners that euthanasia is the best option can be difficult.

**Why is the job important?**

Having a long-term volunteer vet helps to keep things running smoothly, and frees up the Egyptian vets to concentrate on clinical work. From a clinical perspective, volunteer vets tend to have different areas of experience from the Egyptian vets and from each other, which helps the learning process for all involved. Practically, having a long-term volunteer also means there is someone living here to help the shorter-term volunteers and students.

**What advice would you give to someone considering a similar opportunity?**

Go for it! As well as helping a really worthwhile charity, you will meet some amazing people and learn a huge amount.

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

Take advantage of any opportunity that comes your way.

**What is your proudest moment?**

My proudest moment so far was probably graduating, as it seemed to take an awfully long time for me to get there!

. . . and your most embarrassing?

My most embarrassing moment in Egypt was out running one morning. I took one of the boarding dogs, a great dane named Diesel; as I crossed a sugar cane field, Diesel and I had a difference of opinion about an irrigation ditch, and I ended up in it! The Egyptian who was ploughing the adjacent field thought it was hilarious.
Ten-minute chat

Rebecca Parkes

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