Kelly Lawless gained a place on Medivet’s new graduate support programme and was offered a job before she sat her finals. Two years on, she is still enjoying her first job.

I FIRST heard about Medivet’s new graduate programme at a vet school careers fair. It was a horrible rainy day, and after a long day of lectures all I wanted to do was to go home. I mean, how do you think about a job when you haven’t even sat your exams? My options were limited by my ‘small animal only’ and ‘in London’ rules. Medivet was one of the few available opportunities, so I grabbed some literature and got out of there.

Once I’d had time to research various options (I had realised that I did actually have to think about a job after qualifying), I was very taken with what they had to offer. The company seemed to have a strong focus on continued support and learning, and this prompted me to apply to its Graduate Support Programme. I have now worked for them for two years and the support I have received has been fantastic.

When starting as a new vet with Medivet you proceed in one of two ways, both of which were discussed with me in detail at my interview. There is a three- to six-month residency programme, or a three-week induction period before becoming a ‘floating’ vet (my chosen route). The first two weeks are spent at a branch shadowing a partner (who becomes your ‘buddy’ for the duration of your time at the company); this is followed by a week at one of the 24-hour continuous care centres. ‘Floating’ involves covering branch partners’ holidays and days off, with the rest of the time spent in the 24-hour centres.

I spent two weeks shadowing Marta Sanchez at the Stanstead Abbotts practice. It wasn’t all that different from extramural studies, with the opportunity to observe consultations and surgeries and also travelling with her to home visits, as well as going to the 24-hour centre if any of our cases required overnight care. I also needed to master the computer system, which I’m sure anybody at a new practice dreads. During my two weeks with Marta we discussed everything we did; she gave me tips on time management and explained the stickier cases she was dealing with. You learn so much at university but, funnily enough, as a new graduate, what you aren’t familiar with are the basics. Observing vaccination consults, dealing with euthanasias and even discussing flea control options, as a vet, rather than a vet student, helps massively to solidify the knowledge hidden under a lot of nerves.

Following my two weeks with Marta, I was placed at the Enfield 24-hour centre for another week to complete my training. Here I learnt how the emergency and critical care system worked in more detail, and began to carry out my own consultations and routine procedures. What was great, as a new graduate, was the availability of other vets. For example, what size suture material did I need to close a cat spay? I soon perfected the art of popping out of the consulting room ‘for a thermometer or stethoscope’ and hunting down a vet for advice on the case I was dealing with. Throughout my week, I was in frequent communication with Marta, and she made sure I was coping, getting my lunch and holding mini tutorials on the cases I was dealing with (these sessions continue even now, as the buddy system continues for as long as you need or want it).

I was definitely nervous when I had finished my introductory weeks and was travelling to other practices. However, I had been prepared with:

■ A bit more confidence than if I had gone straight into a more traditional practice.
■ Some more information and guidance on basic veterinary medicine.
■ A ‘go to’ list of phone numbers if I needed help.

Once I was floating, I was working in a combination of sole and team charge positions. My buddy was available at the end of a phone or in person if required, and we had structured fortnightly meetings as well as lots of informal ones. The structured meetings featured three cases that I felt had gone well and three cases that I had either struggled with or didn’t understand fully. They were like mini tutorials and I found them particularly helpful. I was asked to log my surgical experience for my Professional Development Phase anyway and summarise this in an email form to a senior...
partner every month or so. If I wasn’t getting enough stitch-ups or bitch spays done, then every effort would be made to get in contact with me if such cases were admitted at another branch so that I could gain experience as quickly as possible. I was encouraged to check other branches’ surgery lists and invite myself along to perform or observe the surgeries, and I quickly had a number of bitch spays under my belt, something I had been concerned about before starting work. Along with the surgical summaries, I was also asked to assess my buddy so that any problems were sorted out quickly (not that I ever had any).

After 14 months of floating, I was offered a permanent position at the Enfield 24-hour centre, where I have now worked for almost a year. I still see Marta all the time, but it is a lot less formal now and we chat and discuss cases just as any other colleagues would. The buddy structure made things so much easier for me, and I would definitely recommend it for any new vet or anyone returning to work after a break.

Ten-minute chat

Former practitioner Andrew Praill is president of the British Cattle Veterinary Association and a member of the BVA Board.

What does the Board do?
The Board seeks to maintain a robust corporate and financial platform from which the officers, executive managers and the staff can deliver the strategic aims it sets. Those aims reflect current and future requirements for how the BVA integrates with its members, the profession, other professional bodies and organisations and government.

Policy production and direction is provided by the BVA’s Council and committees; the Board is made aware of these policies especially where financial or reputational considerations are attached to them. It is critical that the Board and Council work in a coordinated and collaborative fashion and in this way the Board’s due diligence and its foresight provide that platform. Financial and reputational stability are what the board strives to deliver.

What do you bring to the Board?
I see myself as a ‘people person’ and believe that the main asset of any organisation is the people in it. However, my experiences in practice, with the BVA and in business, provide me with a holistic view of the veterinary landscape. This is accentuated by my involvement representing the BCVA or BVA with central, devolved and regional governments, and various agencies including the AHVLA and Veterinary Medicines Directorate where I am a member of the Veterinary Products Committee. Commenting on how these inter-relationships can best be made to work is something that I feel I can provide.

Why is the Board important?
Prior to the Board’s inception, the checks and balances and the necessary oversight of the BVA’s activities risked not being open to scrutiny. Being primarily a membership organisation, the BVA has to be financially secure. To achieve this, it has to have an effective commercial engine room, which is currently provided by membership subscriptions and publishing income. Simplistically, this income delivers members’ services and policy production, which are at the heart of the BVA’s raison d’être.

The world is changing apace and one of the most important roles of the Board is to look forward and to adapt strategies to fit with how it sees the future developing. Risk management is critical in this regard. The Board also has to recognise the relationships that exist with the regional and specialist divisions with regard to BVA’s position as an umbrella organisation.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to join the Board?
For those members who recognise the importance of the core values of the BVA and how these fit with future developments and relationships, and also feel that their previous experience can be put to good use to support and enhance those values, the Board offers a means to ‘do your bit’. There needs to be a wide spectrum of experience and expertise around the boardroom table. A recent Board review emphasised that in building the team all necessary qualities should be assessed and sourced. Be they practice sector, legal, financial, corporate, IT, HR, marketing, public relations or whatever, the Board’s skills and expertise around the boardroom table are all necessary.

What was your proudest moment?
Arguably, receiving my degree certificate 30 years after qualifying. I was delayed getting to the degree awards ceremony, and the nail on the wall in my study was eventually brought into use when my wife, Jane, procured a copy for me from Liverpool university for my 50th birthday.
Ten-minute chat

Andrew Praill

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