As part of an ongoing development programme by XLEquine for its member practices, Chris Lehrbach recently completed a two-day ‘train the trainer’ course with LANTRA. Here, he talks about the course and how he believes it will benefit him, his clients and his practice.

I GREW up with horses, along with a menagerie of other animals, and wanted to be vet from the age of eight. When I was 15 years old, my family moved from South Wales to a farm on the Orkney Islands.

When I qualified from Glasgow in 1994 I wanted to be zoo vet; however, I began in mixed practice in Lancashire where my interest in equine work developed. My Masters thesis involved research into equine racing injuries, tendon injuries in thoroughbreds and developmental orthopaedic disease in foals. In 2002, my wife and I were planning to move to Australia, but during the application process we relocated to Norfolk to Chapelfield Veterinary Partnership, a rural mixed practice where my remit was to develop the equine side of the business.

During the week that we had arranged to have chest x-rays for the migration process, my wife (who was then an equine vet in the same practice) was offered a partnership. So we decided to stay in Norfolk and I became an equine partner in 2008. In 2011, Chapelfield purchased land in Brooke, South Norfolk and designed and built its purpose-built equine clinic, which was completed in 2012. Chapelfield was a founding member practice of XLVets at its inception in 2005. As a director, my role includes responsibility for running and developing the equine services offered by the practice.

In spring this year, XLEquine launched its EquineSkills workshops. Based on the established FarmSkills template developed by XLVets and the successful ‘train the trainer’ programme, the workshops are structured, practical and interactive training courses for clients, with accurate information on the subject matter relayed in a consistent manner by the trainers. All trainers must have completed the train the trainer programme to be able to run the workshops.

The train the trainer programme teaches techniques and methods to vets to aid the delivery of practical instruction and course leadership. The course had been recommended to me by farm colleagues from within the practice, and two farm directors have been running successful training programmes for farmers for a couple of years. Having never had any formal training on how to teach, I decided this was too good an opportunity to miss. I was also made aware that I was the 300th member of XLVets to attend the course, which I think speaks for itself.

Train the trainer courses

Train the trainer courses are run by LANTRA at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire. I attended a two-day programme, although there are also five-day programmes available. The course was extremely interactive, involving lots of talking, team work and action. The aim was to involve everyone and encourage participation – no-one was able to hide at the back!

The content included understanding how people learn in different ways, and how to set up and run a training course with components that encourage participation. These include, for example, the use of icebreakers to start, mixing up capabilities and personalities within the groups, stimulating individual as
well as group thinking, problem-solving, and making people feel at ease and included (by using their names, for example, and mixing open and closed questioning).

The course used a ‘see one, do one, teach one’ method as a means of reinforcing a message. Each member had to prepare a simple practical task, which they would then demonstrate to their group, explaining how to do it, such that a member of the group then demonstrates how it is done back to the trainer; then they teach someone else how to complete the task.

I discovered that simple tasks can be difficult to explain. My task was to teach someone step-by-step how to boil an egg; other examples included wiring a plug and unravelling paragliding lines. Constant reinforcement of techniques was encouraged, such as questioning the demonstrator, giving consideration to health and safety issues, and thinking about the process from the learner’s perspective.

To be honest, I was surprised that I got so much out of a course which, despite the enthusiasm of my colleagues, I was still quite sceptical about. I learned a great deal about how to convey information to someone using common sense and practical techniques. The first hour of the programme did feel rather cheesy and slightly uncomfortable, but, by the end of the two days, everyone attending had clearly embraced the ideas of the learning techniques conveyed and thoroughly enjoyed the process.

Benefits
The tangible improvement in my communication and knowledge transfer skills means that I now feel equipped and able to provide training programmes to clients, as well as vets and other staff within the practice.

I now have a greater understanding of how people learn and an increased awareness of different learning styles and how to relay information, to communicate and teach. It has also helped improve my professional conversational skills with clients and work colleagues, resulting in more effective transfer of information.

Client workshops
As well as providing an additional income stream, client workshops are an excellent means of bonding clients to the practice, as well as enhancing the reputation of the practice within the local equestrian population.

An initial series of 36 EquineSkills workshops are being delivered by XLEquine member practices across the UK from May to December 2014, covering two topics: equine first aid and equine foot care. Further topics are planned for 2015 and beyond, as it evolves.

Food labelling, non-native species, dog breeding licensing, the bovine TB strategy, the rural economy, stunning of poultry and WATOK regulations have kept our parliamentary diarist, Hannah Jordan, busy this month.

There has been plenty to keep us occupied this month, not least a substantial chunk of reading through the Consumer Rights Bill to hunt for anything pertaining to food labelling, and the Infrastructure Bill due to its section on non-native species. However, it turns out that it is the innocuous-looking Deregulation Bill that might be the most relevant bit of legislation to vets. It removes the requirement for dog breeding licence holders to keep prescriptive dog breeding records in anticipation that new compulsory microchipping records will suffice; concerns have been raised that this make it easier for disreputable breeders to obtain licences.

Lord Trees’ oral and supplementary questions on bovine TB strategy provided a useful assurance from the Government that future research goals of oral badger vaccination, cattle vaccination and appropriate cattle diagnostics will not be inhibited by funding restrictions. Considering that there has been a Cabinet reshuffle and that Defra is now under new leadership, it is comforting to have that reassurance. Follow-up questions revisited badger culling before Lord Cunningham reminded the House of the current and projected costs of bovine TB. It is important to note that the Defra budget doesn’t just get squeezed by the Chancellor each year, but also by the increasing costs of tackling bTB.

Although we did not win the crossbench ballot for a debate on food security, Lord Trees spoke recently on the subject in Earl Shrewsbury’s debate on the rural economy. He highlighted the potential impact of political unrest, climate change, energy production, population growth and a change of dietary habits on demand for UK land resources. Without a strategy, particularly in land use planning, investment in food production and agriculture is stalling, and the effects for the veterinary industry and consumers are becoming evident. We discussed this again in Lord Plumb’s debate on July 24. The final evidence session on welfare at slaughter of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Beef and Lamb took place on July 9, to hear from Defra via George Eustice MP. In the session it was established that the changes to the EU parameters for electrical stunning in poultry were under further discussion by the Government. There are concerns that the new parameters may kill birds and thus ‘force’ halal slaughterhouses to adopt a non-stun policy. It is our understanding that most large-scale units have moved to gas stunning for this reason. As regards a decision on labelling, Defra thinks it would be best applied at EU-level and consequently will await the completion of the report into the matter by the EC. At the end of the session I mustered the courage to ask the minister whether he was prepared to comment on the revocation of the Draft Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing regulations, but all I got was a squirm and ‘under consideration’. We shall wait and see!

In other news, my ‘politician bingo’ sheet is improving – on reshuffle day I spotted Mr Miliband chatting under the colonnades and later I almost got run over by Boris Johnson on a bicycle. The highlight of this week was watching as Black Rod narrowly avoided getting leapt on by some enthusiastic Morris men at the summer fayre in Westminster Hall.

Hannah Jordan is the parliamentary intern to veterinary peer Lord Trees

Diary of a parliamentary intern
Learning to teach

Chris Lehrbach

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