Masters in veterinary professional studies

Kate Thompson and Dan Shaw will soon become the first graduates of the University of Liverpool’s Postgraduate Masters in Veterinary Professional Studies. Catherine McGowan, director of veterinary postgraduate education, and Rebekah Tee, lecturer in small animal practice, believe that the programme marks a new phase in postgraduate education.

The veterinary postgraduate unit (previously CPD Vets) at the University of Liverpool has been providing online taught modules as part of the RCVS certificate in advanced practice (RCVS CertAVP) since 2009. In January 2013, all online modules were also accredited by the university at masters level, allowing veterinary surgeons to use their completed modules towards further qualifications in addition to the RCVS CertAVP. This structure now enables veterinary surgeons in practice to complete postgraduate study in a flexible manner all the way to masters degree level.

They can decide whether to accept a postgraduate certificate in veterinary professional studies (PgCert) after completing the 60 M-level credits required for the CertAVP, or continue their studies in order to gain a postgraduate diploma (PgDip) or masters degree (MSc) (see diagram). Both clinical and non-clinical options are available for further study, following which a research project is required to achieve the full masters award.

Study towards the further qualifications is fully supported by university staff. All modules are provided online although there are options for attendance at practical day courses depending on the specific module. Modules are continually assessed, with deadlines set along the way, meaning that each study cohort progresses together and can learn from and support each other along the way. Learning is collaborative where possible, by means of online journal clubs and non-synchronous discussion boards and case discussions, allowing exchange of ideas and debate.

Veterinary surgeons enjoy the benefit of being a Liverpool postgraduate student, which includes access to members of staff, online (and physical) access to the library facilities and support, IT support and other student benefits such as an NUS card, which allows reduced fees for travel, eating and shopping, among other things.

The university framework allows a structured and supported route for further study for veterinary surgeons and the flexible teaching and learning processes allow this to be combined with professional and personal lives.

Over 1200 veterinary surgeons have undertaken fully taught online modules with the University of Liverpool, across a wide range of disciplines and species including equine, small animal and bovine, including 165 who also have succeeded in a synoptic examination enabling them to acquire a designated certificate and be eligible for the RCVS Advanced Practitioner list. At the end of this article our first graduates of the Masters of Veterinary Professional Studies, Daniel Shaw and Kate Thompson, give their comments on their experiences. Both graduates completed their CertAVP first and carried on undertaking clinical modules and completed their masters degree by undertaking a clinical research project.
Kate Thompson, BVSc, CertAVP(EP), CertAVP(VA), MScVPS, MRCVS

The structure of the veterinary professional studies programme offered me a unique opportunity to accrue module credits over time in a diverse range of subjects. The large variety of module subjects available allowed me to complete modules in both equine medicine and veterinary anaesthesia, which are directly applicable to my everyday practice caseload. Utilisation of these modules towards the masters degree qualification introduced the opportunity for me to conduct a research study and prepare a manuscript suitable for publication.

The research module provided an excellent introduction to statistics and enabled me to perform basic statistical analyses on my own study data. Module tutors and my individual supervisor were always available to guide the project design and provide teaching support when required but the self-directed nature of the module allowed me to gain experience in study design, data collection, data analysis and manuscript preparation. Overall, I have found the programme immensely useful and would recommend it to fellow veterinary practitioners.

Dan Shaw, BVSc, CertAVP(ESO), MScVPS, MRCVS

I personally enjoyed doing the MSc programme, finding it fitted in well with the modular certificate programme. While it’s been a long time since I graduated, the skills picked up in the certificate were put to good use. The statistics and study design lectures and exercises were challenging but very enjoyable, and give a whole new dimension to critical appraisal of published literature. Time management is critical when attempting the programme while in general practice, and I normally would try for two to three hours a night, and half or whole days at the weekends. The hardest part is actually turning on the computer after a hard day’s work, but the excitement builds when you start running the stats and answering the questions you have framed, and realise that you have meaningful results that are well worth sharing with colleagues in published form. With the supervisor and other back up from Liverpool being so good, even if, like me, you are based in Asia in a different time zone you are never alone if there are any issues.

More information on Liverpool’s postgraduate masters is available from www.liv.ac.uk/vets/cpd/ or by telephoning 0151 794 6016.

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