

Editorial

Changes to PDP must be pitched carefully

‘IT’S terrifying to me, the idea that, after extended examinations, tests and continuous formative and summative appraisals at vet school, I would be tested yet again on the job in my first year.’

That is how one final-year vet student reacted when told about a proposal to bolster the Professional Development Phase (PDP) – a transition period that bridges university and life in veterinary practice.

The idea is contained in an RCVS consultation document on reforming graduate outcomes.

Other ideas include changes to Day 1 competences, replacing extramural studies (EMS) with an ‘externship’ programme and, while not recommending limited licensure, enabling students to focus more on a specific species or group of species while at vet school.

While the college has stressed that nothing is set in stone, it has floated the idea of turning the PDP from a self-evaluation system into a more formal, rigorous and supervisor-assessed process.

Some students will no doubt regard the vision of a more structured PDP with more support and supervision as a welcome prospect, but others may fear that it would amount to yet another barrier they must cross before they will be viewed as a ‘proper’ vet.

If the idea is taken forward, presentation and delivery will be key. Much will depend on how a ‘beefed up’ PDP is framed and viewed. There is a big difference between another test that you either pass or fail – something that students may regard as an onerous formal trial – and the concept of a genuinely supportive pathway that enables new graduates to become practice ready.

Will reality match presentation? Will practices regard it as more time-consuming red tape or as a mutually beneficial exercise in fostering resilient and fully competent vets? Warm words about support and mentorship are one thing, but if the people tasked with being mentors fail to live up to the promise then good intentions will be left

unfulfilled and nothing will really change.

Doctors, dentists, nurses, teachers, occupational therapists and a range of other professionals all already undergo their own equivalent of the kind of reformed PDP the RCVS is consulting about. Research has shown a number of benefits to a structured support programme such as improving retention rates, improving professionals’ mental health plus opportunities for career planning.



The PDP could turn from a self-evaluation system into a more formal, rigorous and supervisor-assessed process

It makes sense – if more vets are better supported and feel less out of their depth during their first year out of vet school, this might help fix the ‘leaky bucket’ (poor personnel retention rates being an acknowledged problem in vet world).

There are plenty of questions to be asked about the broad-brush proposals sketched out in the RCVS consultation – indeed, generating those questions is the

entire point of the consultation exercise. What cannot be doubted, though, is that looking at what works in other professions and seeking, where appropriate, to emulate it is a positive step.

Change introduced badly could have unintended consequences, but if introduced well could yield huge rewards for the profession and patients.

Vet Record urges anyone eligible to respond to the consultation. If you care about these issues, there’s still time to make your voice heard!

Josh Loeb

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