VetGDP

The RCVS Veterinary Graduate Development Programme (VetGDP)

Guidance 2021

RCVS SETTING VETERINARY STANDARDS

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Introduction

The Veterinary Graduate Development Programme, VetGDP, is being introduced in summer 2021 for new veterinary graduates. The programme builds on what we all do in practice every day when we have a new graduate – we build their confidence by starting with simple, straightforward tasks, and move through to more complex tasks as their knowledge and experience grows. The VetGDP will support graduates through that process while also providing the VetGDP Advisers with the appropriate skills and knowledge to maximise that support.

The transition from being a student to a veterinary graduate can be truly daunting and I certainly remember in my first few months of practice how important the support of an older wiser colleague was, to help me reflect and learn from my failures as well as celebrate my successes.

The VetGDP has been developed after consulting widely with the profession, and is designed to be driven mainly by the new graduates themselves. Working with their VetGDP Adviser, they will be able to decide where they want to focus and where they need support. It will enable the graduates to hone their skills in all of the day-to-day activities they need to do in practice. Building their confidence means they will develop more quickly into competent, resilient members of the veterinary team.

This programme guide provides you with an overview of what you need to do to prepare for your veterinary graduate recruitment. We hope that we have covered everything you need to know, but please remember that you can get in touch with the Education team about VetGDP by emailing **vetgdp@rcvs.org.uk**.

Dr Sue Paterson FRCVS
Chair, Education Committee

"The VetGDP will support graduates while also providing VetGDP Advisers with appropriate skills and knowledge to maximise support."

1. Background

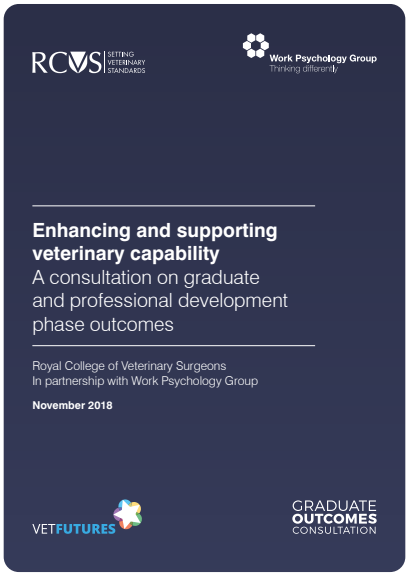
In 2017, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) commissioned a piece of research to evaluate the Professional Development Phase (PDP), which was implemented by the RCVS across the Veterinary Profession in 2007 to support graduates in their transition between Veterinary School and practice. This research evaluated the impact of PDP on the development of clinical and non-clinical skills; looked to understand the challenges faced by new graduates and their employers; and explored how reflection was understood within the veterinary profession.

The research found that whilst the profession recognised that a period of support for new graduates was necessary, the PDP was felt to be a 'tick box exercise', and this period instead needed to focus on meaningful professional development and quality of experience. The research found that there needed to be a greater focus on non-clinical skills including independent decision-making, client communication and relationship building. Furthermore, a perceived lack of resilience within graduates was noted, which may be a contributing factor to the low levels of retention within the UK veterinary profession.

The research highlighted the importance of reflection, the benefits of which were recognised by individuals across the veterinary profession. It was suggested that new graduates needed a more structured programme of support and guidance in order to improve the quality of their reflection as a cornerstone for lifelong learning.

To understand better what would be of greatest benefit to new graduates (or those returning to work following a break from practice), further research was carried out as part of the Graduate Outcomes consultation with the UK veterinary profession.

Extensive feedback was obtained from stakeholders across the profession through this consultation, confirming that the profession would like to see a range of measures to support graduates within their working environment. The measures needed to encompass a holistic approach to practice, involving a balance between professional and clinical skills across a range of activities. The new approach had to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate different veterinary roles and be driven by graduates with appropriate mentorship and support within the workplace (the VetGDP Adviser role).



Graduate Outcomes Consultation 2018

"Extensive feedback was obtained from stakeholders across the profession"

The Graduate Outcomes consultation report indicated that whilst a programme of structured support would be beneficial, new graduates and employers do not want a time consuming, onerous, tick box method of measuring new graduates, but rather something that is meaningful and reflects their everyday work and professional development in practice with the support guided by the needs of the graduate.

We carefully considered the evidence from the research and the feedback from the profession, and developed the Veterinary Graduate Development Programme (VetGDP) in response.

2. Aims and Objectives of the VetGDP

The aim of the VetGDP is to provide a meaningful and effective period of support for new veterinary graduates as they begin their career as qualified veterinary surgeons. It is recognised that a period of support is needed to help them move beyond being day one competent to become a confident and capable, independent veterinary professional.

The objectives of the VetGDP are to:

- Provide support for veterinary graduates as they begin their career giving them the confidence and capability required to have a long and happy career as a veterinary professional.
- Ensure a more consistent experience for all graduates by making sure they each have a trained VetGDP Adviser, who will dedicate their time and commitment to supporting them.
- Provide a structure for reflection where graduates, supported by their VetGDP Adviser, can improve the quality of their reflection to inspire a practice of lifelong learning.
- Give VetGDP Advisers the skills, through an RCVS e-learning package, to support new graduates to understand their capabilities and develop experience and confidence in their individual role.
- Provide a structure through an intuitive e-portfolio, which will allow graduates to record their professional development and reflections quickly and easily.

The programme is underpinned by the philosophy and mutual understanding that when graduates begin their veterinary career, they do not yet have sufficient experience to be able to carry out all activities confidently and independently without some level of support. This reassures the graduate that they are entitled to a level of support that reflects a consensus of their capabilities. As a result of the support provided by the VetGDP Adviser (and potentially other members of the practice team) the graduate's clinical and professional capabilities will develop as they gain more experience during the programme, leading to greater confidence and independence, and consequently lessening their need for support. This should reduce the anxiety graduates face when starting their first role and give them the confidence to try, knowing there is a safety net and system of support should they need it.

"Graduates are entitled to a level of support that reflects a consensus of their capabilities"

3. VetGDP: Programme Overview

Each graduate enrolled in the VetGDP will be supported in an RCVS- Approved Graduate Development Practice/Workplace, accredited to host the programme, by a trained, in-house VetGDP Adviser with committed time and resources to help the graduate.

Further information about requirements to host VetGDP and the Adviser role can be found on pages 10 and 20 respectively

The VetGDP is a workplace-based programme, which enables new graduates to further develop their professional and clinical capabilities, beyond day one competence level, to the point where they are fully competent, confident and independent veterinary professionals across the entire scope of their role.

The programme is led jointly by the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser who has agreed to be the primary person providing support to the graduate(s) enrolled in the VetGDP in their workplace. The practice/workplace also has a responsibility for allowing the graduate and VetGDP Adviser protected time for support activities as declared in their application to become an RCVS-Approved Graduate Development Practice/Workplace.

Graduates (with the support of their VetGDP Advisers) record and monitor their professional development and progress through the programme using an intuitive, versatile e-portfolio, which is structured around Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) directly relevant to their role. Essentially, EPAs are a way of describing the overarching activities carried out by a professional in their role, in a holistic manner, which represents the 'real world' of veterinary work.

Further information about EPAs can be found on page 12

At the start of the programme, the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser meet to discuss and agree the EPAs which are relevant to their role, whether this be clinical or non-clinical, and drawing upon the RCVS bank of EPAs, identify all which will need to be incorporate into their e-portfolio. Technical and clinical skills will underpin each area of broad activity (EPA), in addition to professional skills such as communication, professionalism, organisation etc. which will apply to almost all activities. However, the focus is on the overarching holistic activity (EPA) rather than its constituent parts and improving practice and professionalism in this area across different contexts and complexities.

EPAs are a way of describing the overarching activities carried out by a professional in their role.

For each activity (EPA) that is part of the graduate's role as a vet, the aim is for them to obtain further experience across different contexts (such as case complexities, clinical focus,

Figure 1 . VetGDP Programme Overview

Preparation for VetGDP within the Veterinary workplace

VetGDP Adviser(s) appointed

Declaration of commitment to role

Completes e-learning modules successfully

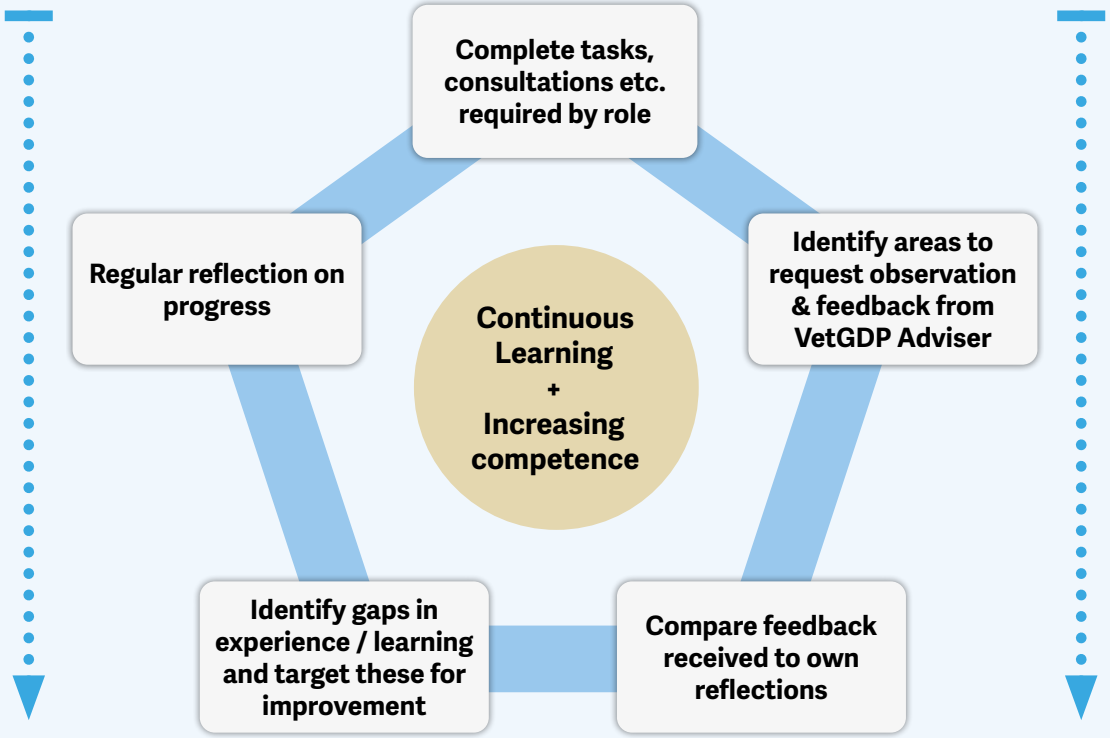
Engages with ongoing quality assurance

PSS accreditation (or equivalent) or working towards

Workplace is accredited: *"RCVS-Approved Graduate Development Practice/ Workplace" Status reflected on "Find-a-vet"*

During the **VetGDP**

Graduate and VetGDP Adviser agree the scope of activities (EPAs) relevant to their role, and confirm these as sections within their e-portfolio



Record regular personal reflections on achievements and learning needs against each EPA within e-portfolio

Complete monthly progress reviews with VetGDP Adviser across all EPAs

Review and sign-off

Monthly progress reviews with VetGDP Adviser, to include breadth and depth of experience across each EPA and progress made

VetGDP Adviser and graduate agree when they feel the graduate is a confident, capable and independent professional across all contexts within each EPA, supported by evidence within their e-portfolio

Graduate indicates to RCVS that e-portfolio is ready for external peer review and sign-off (after approximately 1 year).

client expectations / co-operation, and different species, environments etc.), so that they move beyond being 'day one' competent on straightforward, simple cases and situations to being a fully independent, competent and confident veterinary professional across a wide range of scenarios that relate to this activity in the workplace.

Graduates will achieve this through a combination of their own reflections on workplace activities, with ongoing observation, feedback and guidance from their VetGDP Adviser (and / or other colleagues). Although both the graduate and VetGDP Adviser will drive and monitor progression through the programme, it is the responsibility of the graduate to identify which areas they most need support with and request this from their VetGDP Adviser. This might include inviting supervision and / or observation and feedback on activities for which they feel it would be beneficial. For example, at the start of the programme graduates are likely to request support for cases or situations that they have not experienced extensively at vet school and therefore would feel more confident having a more experienced veterinary surgeon present, or for the more unusual or complex cases or scenarios as they are encountered.

Requesting support from the VetGDP Adviser, including inviting supervision and assistance or observation with feedback, is a way for the graduate to obtain helpful feedback to support their development, and not a sign of any limitation whatsoever. Indeed, where a true learning culture exists in the workplace environment, to request such support would be a clear demonstration of the graduate's personal leadership qualities in terms of their professional development. Graduates should feel comfortable in requesting support with any aspect of their role, and confident from the start of their programme that such requests will be welcomed by their VetGDP Adviser and readily provided.

Further information on how the graduate might approach the programme, and the types of support they can expect to receive from their VetGDP Adviser can be found on pages 15, 16, 17, 18

Recording progress in VetGDP
Graduates will have access to an RCVS e-portfolio to record their progress through the VetGDP. This will be structured around their EPAs and they can record their own reflections, peer and VetGDP Adviser feedback, case reviews, etc. Regular progress reviews (across all EPAs) should also be recorded in the e-portfolio, to allow the graduate and VetGDP Adviser to see how, and in which areas of activity, strengths are developing and where areas needing more practice or experience remain, prior to completion of the programme.

The records (reflections, case studies, feedback etc.) for each of the EPA sections within the e-portfolio represent the evidence to support progressive decisions (with rationale) on the graduate's competence and journey towards becoming a capable, confident, independent veterinary professional, to the point where they no longer feel they need support in their role as a vet.

Further information about the e-portfolio (VetGDP) can be found on pages 14

Completion of the VetGDP
Once the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser agree that they have made sufficient progress in all activities within their role, and that the evidence and reflections in their e-portfolio clearly support this and demonstrate their learning and journey through VetGDP, they can submit this for peer review and sign off by the RCVS. The programme is not time-bound but we would anticipate that this will be approximately one year, depending on the learning needs and opportunities presented in the workplace.

Further information on the sign-off process can be found on page 19

Quality Assurance
Both the graduate and the VetGDP Adviser will be asked to feed into a quality assurance process that will allow the RCVS to make continuous improvements to the programme, in line with RCVS' commitment to evaluate our processes.

This process will not be onerous – a short questionnaire will be sent to the graduate and VetGDP Adviser 3-4 times a year to gather feedback on how the programme is working for each of them. Should any significant problems arise, support will be provided where possible.

Further information about the quality assurance process can be found on page 22

4. VetGDP: Enrolment and Exemptions

All new veterinary graduates registering with the RCVS from summer 2021, and working in the UK, need to undertake the VetGDP.

The Programme is also mandatory for veterinary surgeons who return to the register after a period of 5 years or more. However, such members can apply to the RCVS for exemption, for example if they have been working abroad for this period. Veterinary surgeons returning to work after a shorter period away may also request to enrol on the programme, if they feel it would be beneficial for them.

UK graduates going overseas
UK graduates who chose to work overseas after graduation will not be expected to complete the VetGDP whilst abroad. These graduates will have the option to enrol on the VetGDP if and when they come back on to the UK practising register, or to apply for exemption if the programme will no longer be beneficial due to their experience overseas. Non-completion of VetGDP under these circumstances would not affect the individual's MRCVS status.

Overseas qualified members
Overseas qualified veterinary surgeons, who register with RCVS and have less than one year of significant work experience as a veterinary surgeon will need to enrol onto the VetGDP. In addition, overseas registrants with more than one year of relevant experience are also permitted to enrol on the VetGDP, as it would provide excellent support for their first role in the UK.

Exemptions
VetGDP has been designed to be sufficiently flexible to work with almost any veterinary role; the structure of the programme around workplace activities (EPAs) is intended as a useful framework which can be applied to almost all veterinary roles. Furthermore, if there are additional activities within the graduate's role which the bank of EPAs does not yet cover, the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser can develop their own EPA using our template.

However, there are some instances when the VetGDP may not be the best option. For those beginning their careers with very little or no clinical element to their work such as studying for a Master's degree or PhD it may be more appropriate to postpone the programme.

We would encourage all graduates to enrol in VetGDP as it offers genuine support but if the graduate feels that the role they are going into is not suitable, then they should contact the RCVS and these will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

"They are entitled to a level of support that reflects a consensus of their capabilities"

5. VetGDP: Structure and Implementation

5.1 Requirements for hosting the VetGDP

It is important to us that the VetGDP fulfils the aim of being a genuinely supportive, workplace-based development programme for all graduates. We know that many workplaces already offer excellent support to their graduates, but it is essential that all graduates – regardless of where they are employed – receive a consistent level of support, tailored to their specific requirements.

In order for a practice or workplace to be able to support graduates on the VetGDP they need to be[1] an **RCVS-Approved Graduate Development Practice/Workplace**, having been accredited against the following criteria:

- One (or more) vets working within the workplace meet the requirements to become a VetGDP Adviser, i.e.
    - They have satisfactorily completed all modules within our e-learning programme for VetGDP Advisers, within the last five years, including any module assessments. (This programme also counts as CPD for the individual). VetGDP Advisers should ensure that they take note of our regular updates to the training programme.[2]
    - They have signed a declaration agreeing to provide their graduate(s) with regular support. Across the duration of the programme, this should equate to a minimum of 1 hour per week (per graduate), although support should be implemented flexibly in line with the specific requests of the graduate. The VetGDP Adviser must spend sufficient time at the same practice site as the graduate to have the opportunity to observe their work, provide feedback and be accessible when a graduate faces new challenges and may require assistance. Support activities include (but are not limited to) goal setting, planning, case discussions, observation of activities and feedback, progress review discussions, advice and guidance on practice.
- The Approved Practice/Workplace pledges to engage positively with the quality assurance process.
- The Approved Practice/Workplace should ideally be a

It is essential that all graduates receive a consistent level of support

[1]Or for 2021, working towards being an RCVS Approved Graduate Development Practice
[2]For 2021, it will be sufficient for the VetGDP Adviser to have begun their training and commit to completing it before the end of the year

member of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) or equivalent, either with a valid PSS accreditation or be working towards this.

There are no restrictions on how many vets within a practice can become VetGDP Advisers and we would encourage as many as possible to do so.

Each graduate enrolled onto VetGDP must have an assigned VetGDP Adviser. It is possible that a VetGDP Adviser can be assigned more than one graduate, as long as they provide the necessary support to each individual assigned to them.

If a VetGDP Adviser plans to leave an approved practice, the practice should identify another vet who can train to be an Adviser and support the graduate. However, if the VetGDP Adviser leaves unexpectedly and / or if the practice is struggling to replace them, the practice will need to contact **vetgdp@rcvs.org.uk** to apply for a a temporary locum VetGDP Adviser. We will then contact local VetGDP Advisers that have volunteered to be on the 'locum' list to help and support the graduate, until a new VetGDP Adviser in the practice can be trained (or until the graduate completes the programme, whichever is sooner). The application will need to include details about estimated time frame until a permanent VetGDP Adviser will be employed, which can be extended if necessary. Payment for the locum VetGDP Adviser will be arranged by the workplace.

There are no restrictions on how many vets within a practice can become VetGDP Advisers and we would encourage as many as possible to do so.

For graduates who choose to work outside of veterinary practice, for example, in the public sector or for the Royal Army Veterinary Corp. etc., the employer will need to provide the same level of commitment i.e. a trained VetGDP Adviser with available time to fully support the graduate and participate in the required quality assurance activity.

For 2021, practices may take on a new graduate if the VetGDP Adviser has committed to, and is engaging with, the VetGDP Adviser training. The deadline for completing the training is the end of December 2021. In this case, VetGDP Advisers must provide support to their graduate(s) from the point at which they join the practice.

5.2 Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) – what are they and how are they used in VetGDP?

EPAs describe the overarching activities carried out by a professional in their role and workplace.

Upon graduation, all veterinary students have demonstrated that they have achieved the RCVS Day One Competences, and that they have sufficient knowledge and skills to begin working as a veterinary surgeon. However, it is recognised that this is the start of their journey towards becoming fully experienced, confident and competent veterinary professionals across the entire scope of veterinary activities in their role. During VetGDP, it is envisaged that graduates will further develop as veterinary professionals, building upon and integrating their knowledge and skills into the context and breadth of holistic veterinary practice in the real world.

EPAs describe performance in a holistic sense, i.e., the everyday work activities of a vet in the context of 'real' situations involving dealing with clients, across a range of unique clinical contexts and scenarios. The focus is on the whole (EPA) activity as it carried out in the workplace, rather than on the deconstructed individual competences that are done during the process.

The EPAs are deliberately 'high level' descriptions of activity, and flexible, so that they can be relevant to all of the cases and / or scenarios which will occur in the workplace. Although EPAs will focus on one (broad) area of work, they are integrative and general professional skills such as communication, professionalism, organisation etc. will apply across multiple EPAs. EPAs capture the interactive nature of veterinary work, not only with the public but with the whole veterinary team.

We have developed a bank of EPAs relevant to the veterinary workplace.

For each activity (EPA), the following information is provided:

- a description and commentary of what the activity involves and encompasses;
- relevant variables within the activity which may involve different knowledge and skill, for example different species, case complexity, environments;
- details of the main areas of competence that are involved in the activity, from the RCVS conceptual model for day one competences (Fig 2).

Figure 2: RCVS Conceptual Model for Day One Competences

N.B. only the main domains are referenced for each EPA in order to highlight the primary focus of the EPA. In practice, any of the domains from the model can apply to any case / scenario

The aim is for graduates, upon completion of the VetGDP, to have reached the point whereby, across all EPAs relevant to their role, they no longer feel they would benefit from additional support regardless of the complexity of the activity faced, and that their VetGDP Adviser shares this view. The process is not time bound but we would

anticipate that this will be approximately one year, depending on the learning needs and opportunities presented in the workplace.

If a graduate moves practices part way through the programme, they can take their e-portfolio with them and recommence with a new VetGDP Adviser. If their new role differs in any way, they are also able to change or update their EPAs within their portfolio.

Using EPAs within the VetGDP
As a graduate progresses through VetGDP, they will gain more experience across each activity within their role (EPA), and with the support provided by their VetGDP Adviser gain increased competence, confidence and independence in each area.

At the start of the VetGDP
At the start of the programme, the graduate should meet with their VetGDP Adviser to discuss and agree the EPAs relevant to their role. If there are any activities not covered in our bank of EPAs, then there is a template to help the development of further activities as required. Once agreed, these EPAs will become the framework of the graduates own, personal e-portfolio, against which they will record and monitor their professional development.

Within the VetGDP, the EPAs aim to provide a useful framework and structure for the programme, sufficiently flexible to apply across the majority of veterinary roles. However, should a graduate enter a role which includes activities not covered by the existing RCVS bank of EPAs, they should not feel restricted in any way. Those activities should still be included in their portfolio (a template is available to develop new EPAs, and we can support this process).

During the VetGDP
Through a range of support activities (see pages 17-18), it is envisaged that the graduate will carry out their veterinary duties as normal, and in doing so work through their EPAs and monitor progress against each of the contexts and variables within each. Although both the graduate and VetGDP Adviser should monitor progress and identify areas to gain further experience, it is the responsibility of the graduate to request support where it would be most helpful to them. At the start of the programme, this may be on straightforward cases or situations to give them the confidence they need to work independently in these areas, and as they master straightforward activities they may embark upon more complex procedures with the support of their VetGDP Adviser.

For example, for EPA 6: "Perform a common surgical procedure on a patient, including pre-operative and post-operative management". Upon completion of the programme there should be evidence within the graduate's VetGDP e-portfolio (through reflections and feedback on a wide range of cases completed) that they are competent, confident and able to perform independently, common surgical procedures involving different species relevant to their role, case presentations, case complexities and where acute / chronic conditions are present.

So, in the first week of their role, a graduate might be happy to complete a dog castrate as they have had experience of this at vet school. However, if that same case has multiple co-morbidities or complexities, such as a testicular tumour or retained testicle, which could impact on the outcomes of surgery, the graduate may wish to request some guidance from their VetGDP Adviser or ask them to supervise and provide feedback afterwards.

The accumulation of these experiences will move the graduate beyond being day one competent to working independently across each of the areas of activity relevant to their role. Through regular review on progress within and across the EPAs, the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser are able to see which activities are being done well, and areas that may need further development.

It is important to understand that the way in which EPAs are used within VetGDP is somewhat different to how they are applied in other contexts, such as at undergraduate level or within other health professions training programmes. In such contexts, they are often aligned with formal performance assessment processes, leading to the ability to perform a certain procedure unsupervised, or the achievement of specific competences. This is not the case in VetGDP. EPAs within the VetGDP context simply provide a useful framework for a graduate's e-portfolio, which represents the activities in their role. There are no 'formal' assessments or tick-boxes in VetGDP. Instead, graduates will demonstrate successful completion of the programme through reflections, feedback and other records within the e-portfolio.

5.3 VetGDP e-portfolio

All graduates enrolled onto the VetGDP will have access to a bespoke e-portfolio where they can record their reflections, feedback and progress against the EPAs they have identified as being part of their role.

VetGDP Advisers will also have access to the platform so that they can support their graduate when reflecting on activities and add their feedback on either observed cases / situations, or progress review discussions. They will also be able to consider the evidence supporting progress across all EPA activities with the graduate towards the end of the programme in order to agree when to submit the portfolio to the RCVS for final peer review and sign off. See further information on peer review and sign-off on page 20.

The e-portfolio has been designed to be intuitive to use and will be supported by an app which can be downloaded to a mobile phone - the app will be available by the end of 2021. The recording platform has a range of features intended to make the user experience easy and straightforward to record all reflections, feedback and progress, including:

- Separate sections for each EPA, with easy navigation within and across each;
- The ability to upload documents, and or dictate text into fields to record reflections and / or feedback;
- Easy to view progress for each individual activity and across all EPAs in the programme;
- Photos can be uploaded to record case-specific information;
- Discussions can be recorded using audio and uploaded, for example feedback from the VetGDP Adviser.

The e-portfolio is sufficiently flexible that if the graduate decides to move on to a new workplace before completing their VetGDP, they may take their e-portfolio with them and sign on with a new VetGDP Adviser. They can also amend their chosen EPAs if necessary.

5.4 Progressing through the VetGDP: graduate activities

At the start of the programme, the graduate will meet with their VetGDP Adviser to discuss the scope of their role, agree which of the EPAs within the RCVS bank are relevant to them and whether there are any additional areas which need to be included. (see section on EPAs, page 10-12).

Once agreed, these areas will be established as the different sections within the graduate's VetGDP e-portfolio, and progress against these can be recorded throughout the programme.

The VetGDP is workplace-based, and therefore the nature of the graduate's job as a vet (i.e., the clients, cases and activities undertaken day-to-day) drives the experience gained, particularly in the early stages. As the graduate becomes more established later in the programme and considers their progress across the full scope of their role, they may identify particular types of activity (such as rare, unusual and / or complex cases or scenarios) where they feel they would like more experience and request support from their VetGDP Adviser (and/or other colleagues) in gaining access to these as they arise.

As indicated in Figure 1, while carrying out their day-to-day activities as a vet, graduates will progress through the programme gaining increasing experience, competence and confidence through the following:

- Personal reflections on activities, which include the overarching skills involved such as client communication, teamwork, professionalism etc. as well as the technical / clinical components of the EPA. These reflections would ideally be carried out – and recorded – daily or several times each week. They do not need to be onerous and might involve a few minutes dictating your reflection into the app or recording some questions to discuss with your VetGDP Adviser.
- Requesting observation and feedback from the VetGDP Adviser or a colleague. In any working environment where there is a positive learning culture, a request for support, guidance

While carrying out their day-to-day activities as a vet, graduates will progress through the programme gaining increasing experience, competence and confidence

or observation and feedback by the graduate demonstrates their personal leadership qualities and ownership of their professional development. There may be several reasons a graduate would request observation and feedback:

- To confirm their own reflections that something went well, and they carried the activity out to a high standard. This would give them confidence for future activities of this type or help them identify further areas to work on.
- To provide support during a difficult case or encounter, or where confidence is perhaps lacking, such as a complex clinical presentation not seen before, or working in a challenging environment or with a challenging client. In this situation the graduate can take confidence from the fact that there is someone with more experience nearby, but still be able to attempt to perform the activity independently and receive valuable feedback.
- To revisit an activity where areas for improvement had previously been identified (through the graduate's own reflection, or feedback from a colleague or VetGDP Adviser), in order to confirm the progress made.

- Ad hoc requests for advice or case discussions. For example, the graduate may wish to check their approach to a case, or a diagnosis or treatment plan, or they may wish to debrief following an activity that did not go as planned.
- Monthly meetings with VetGDP Adviser to discuss progress. These regular meetings should review progress made across all activities (EPAs), including the professional skills relevant across activities such as client communication, organisation, professionalism etc. in addition to an opportunity to look at the specific progress in each area. Taking a holistic view in this way, will also enable the graduate and VetGDP Adviser to identify areas where additional opportunities for experience might be helpful, such as particular case types that don't come up regularly.

We anticipate that the programme will take around a year to complete for most vets, although some may be ready in more or less time

The programme is led jointly by the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser, however it is the responsibility of the graduate to identify which areas they feel they need support in and to request support as required. Although all graduates have met the RCVS day one competences upon graduation, each will inevitably have had different experiences during their time as a student, whether that be the case types seen at vet school, or EMS experience.

It is envisaged that during the early stages of the VetGDP, graduates are likely to request support from their VetGDP Adviser / colleagues more often than in the later stages of the programme, when perhaps their requests for supervision / observation may only be for complex or unusual cases or situations, or to confirm their progress in particular activities.

We anticipate that the programme will take around a year to complete for most vets, although some may be ready in more or less time. When monthly progress reviews indicate that the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser agree they have demonstrated (and recorded in their e-portfolio) that they are sufficiently confident and competent to work independently across all activities, including different contexts and challenging cases, they will submit their portfolio to the RCVS for external review and sign off. (Further information on external peer review and sign-off is on page 20).

5.5 Progressing through the programme: VetGDP Adviser support activities

VetGDP Advisers have agreed to be the primary person providing support to the graduate(s) enrolled in the VetGDP in their workplace. This involves making a commitment to spending dedicated time supporting the graduate in their professional development, through a range of activities, in addition to learning best practice techniques for doing so and keeping up to date through the VetGDP Adviser e-learning modules.

At the start of the programme the VetGDP Adviser and the graduate should meet to review the graduate's role, and identify which of the EPAs in the RCVS bank are relevant to their job. If there are any activities not covered by the bank of EPAs, they should develop additional EPAs using the template provided and the RCVS can provide support in doing this. Once agreed, the set of EPAs relevant to the graduate's role should be uploaded into their VetGDP e-portfolio.

The VetGDP is a workplace-based programme, and therefore learning takes place while doing the daily activities required as part of the graduate's job.

The VetGDP is a workplace-based programme, and therefore learning takes place while doing the daily activities required as part of the graduate's job.

There are a wide range of support activities which might prove useful to the graduate. The VetGDP is led jointly by the graduate and their VetGDP Adviser, however it is the graduate who is responsible for identifying when and how they would like support from their VetGDP Adviser (or other colleagues), as they are best placed to identify the areas in which they feel they would benefit from your support most.

VetGDP Advisers should ensure the graduate understands that their requests for support will be acknowledged positively, and they should feel confident that seeking guidance and feedback is expected and part of every vet's professional development.

In addition to support relating to individual activities carried out in the workplace, VetGDP Advisers are encouraged to diarise a monthly meeting with the graduate to review progress and provide feedback across all (EPA) activities.

Some examples of the types of ad hoc support that may be requested by graduates are as follows:

- General advice before, during or after a clinical case or consultation
- Case / activity discussion or debrief, to understand whether their approach was correct, or if they could have done something differently
- A 1:1 meeting to discuss their own reflections on an activity, and receive feedback
- Observation and / or supervision, and the provision of feedback and guidance for future activities or to discuss different scenarios and contexts
- Hands-on support (for complex cases or situations), with feedback
- A meeting to review progress with either an individual activity (EPA) or monthly reviews of their progress across all activities relevant to their role.

It is likely that most VetGDP Adviser support will relate to tasks or cases in which the new graduate is assuming primary responsibility, but which present new challenges.

It is likely that most VetGDP Adviser support will relate to tasks or cases in which the new graduate is assuming primary responsibility, but which present new challenges. They may need support from their VetGDP Adviser in the form of talking through the procedure they are engaged in, or appreciate having someone else in the room while they are completing it. Subsequently, the graduate will then make a note of when they completed a similar task or case unaided.

The RCVS VetGDP Adviser e-learning programme will prepare vets to carry out this role effectively, and ensure they have the knowledge and skills to provide effective support. (see page 20 for VetGDP Adviser Training)

Once VetGDP Advisers have completed their training, also have the opportunity to register as a 'locum VetGDP Adviser' that can potentially be called upon to support another local graduate in their geographical area on a temporary basis. This will, over time, create a pool of locum VetGDP Advisers that can be used in exceptional circumstances. We will administer the register of locum VetGDP Advisers, and support practices in finding one if required. Locums will be paid for their services by the practice they were temporarily supporting.

5.6 Completing the VetGDP: peer review and sign off

In order for the graduate to complete the VetGDP and receive their certificate of completion, the evidence within their VetGDP e-portfolio will be subject to peer review by an independent third party.

For successful completion of the programme, graduates must demonstrate that they can perform all activities within their role without support. Their VetGDP e-portfolio will portray their journey, from their first weeks in work where they needed a lot of support to becoming a more experienced professional, working independently with confidence. It will show that they can perform each of the EPAs across a range of contexts (identified in each EPA), including the professional skills relevant to all activities such as professionalism, client / team communication and organisation etc. This will be evident from the evidence (reflections, feedback etc.) within their portfolio showing the breadth and depth of their abilities, rather than through counting the number of cases they have seen. The programme is not time bound but we would anticipate that this will be approximately one year, depending on the learning needs and opportunities presented in the workplace.

The independent peer review of the portfolio ensures that the VetGDP Adviser does not have final responsibility for signing off the graduate, which might conflict with the mentorship aspect of their role.

However, we expect that the VetGDP Adviser – through monthly and final reviews of progress with the graduate – will agree when the time is right to submit the e-portfolio to the RCVS for peer review and sign off.

A member of our Education team will review each portfolio for completeness once they are submitted. We will be ensuring there are sufficient reflections, feedback and progress reviews to support the professional development journey of the graduate relating to each EPA activity, and that this includes an appropriate range of contexts (as highlighted in the EPA, such as different species, case complexities etc.).

This independent review of the portfolio ensures that the VetGDP Adviser does not have final responsibility for signing off the graduate.

Providing the portfolio is considered to be sufficient in terms of content, it is then anonymised and shared with a member of the RCVS VetGDP panel. Members of the panel are experienced vets who have completed the VetGDP Adviser learning modules and are most likely to be (or have been previously) a VetGDP Adviser themselves.

In exceptional circumstances when the graduate and the VetGDP Adviser disagree about the progress made by the graduate and / or the readiness for final peer review and sign off, the graduate may submit their portfolio without the agreement of their VetGDP Adviser. Under such circumstances the e-portfolio should then include a commentary from the VetGDP Adviser as to why they do not think it is complete, and a response from the graduate. This will be independently assessed by a member of the RCVS VetGDP panel.

6. Role of the VetGDP Adviser

The role of the VetGDP Adviser is to provide valuable one-to-one, in-house support for the new graduate for the duration of the programme, giving the graduate the confidence and experience to progress and work independently.

The role includes:

- **Giving effective feedback:** frequently observing the graduate carrying out the activities in their role and engaging in timely feedback discussions which are constructive, motivational and specific to the graduate's development.
- **Guiding reflection:** helping the graduate explore and express what they feel they have learned during specific cases or other work activities, and guiding them to recognise their strengths and areas for further development; ensuring they are challenging themselves to progress in a supportive environment.
- **Providing 'hands-on' support and supervision:** providing guidance and / or assistance for challenging cases or activities, giving them the confidence to perform new or challenging techniques with the security of having a more experienced vet to help if needed. Encouraging reflection, discussing capabilities and expectations, assisting when called upon, sharing knowledge and experience and demonstrating skills.
- **Coaching:** listening to the graduate and guiding them to find their own solutions; supporting them in their identification of next steps for development. Supporting graduates in identifying where the gaps in their experience are, and helping them develop a plan how to address these areas.
- **Mentoring:** providing guidance and reassurance to the graduate, developing their self-belief and encouraging them to find their professional identity. Managing expectations and encouraging discussions

to help their professional development. (Further mentorship as part of a wider pastoral role may also come from elsewhere in the practice).

- **Goal-setting:** working with the graduate to set clear, specific, challenging (but achievable) time bound goals, acting on feedback and reflections. Ensuring that all progress and the achievement of goals is recognised by the graduate and new goals are made which will move them forward.

- **Facilitating:** ensuring support is given from all areas of the workplace, allowing graduates to get involved with the cases they need in order to progress.

- **Progress reviews:** meeting regularly (ideally on a monthly basis) to discuss the graduates' progress as a whole across all the activities in their role (EPAs).

VetGDP Advisers will have completed all modules within the RCVS e-learning programme, including any module assessments, and keep this learning up to date with any changes to the training modules via a top up every 5 years.

The VetGDP Adviser is committed to supporting the development of the graduate:

- by being approachable and making themselves available to give help and advice, building a relationship of trust with the graduate so that they are comfortable to come and ask questions and actively seek guidance and feedback.

- by completing a minimum of at least one hour a week of support activities, which may include guidance discussions, observations, feedback, reviewing specific skills, etc. It is likely that more time will be needed in the early stages of the programme.

- by completing a monthly progress review of all the EPA activities within the graduate's e-portfolio, (including professional skills relevant across activities such as communication, teamwork, professionalism etc.), looking at areas where the graduate is now confident and capable and areas which still need more experience.

The Veterinary Team

Although each new graduate should have an assigned VetGDP Adviser who provides them with the support outlined above, all members of the Veterinary team are encouraged to assist, encourage and give feedback to new graduates. Some support activities such as supervision or observation and feedback may be delegated by the VetGDP Adviser to other team members if it falls outside their area of expertise, e.g. if the VetGDP Adviser is a small animal vet and the graduate is in a mixed practice role. However, the VetGDP Adviser must still ensure that they spend at least the minimum recommended time with the graduate, and are available to give advice. All members of the veterinary team involved in supporting graduates are encouraged to complete the VetGDP training if possible.

VetGDP Adviser Training

One of the criteria for a practice to be recognised as a RCVS- Approved Graduate Development Practice is that the designated VetGDP Adviser has satisfactorily completed all modules within the RCVS e-learning programme, within the last five years, including any module assessments.

The training will prepare the VetGDP Adviser for their role in supporting new graduates in the workplace.

The VetGDP Adviser training is made up of the following modules:

Module 1: Understanding the VetGDP Programme and the VetGDP Adviser Role

Module 2: How to support your graduate effectively: Best practice to achieve positive outcomes

Module 3: Exploring the graduate's reactions, guiding reflection and providing feedback

Module 4: Supporting the graduate's progression: Educational Alliances, Coaching for Change and Goal Setting

Module 5: Supporting and mentoring a graduate who is struggling

Module 6: Application of VetGDP Adviser skills in different scenarios

Each module will represent 2-3 hours of CPD.

The training is provided through the RCVS online training platform and incorporates mixed methods of learning, including short recorded presentations, reading, reflections, case studies etc. The learning is broken down into bite sized chunks of information to make learning manageable and accessible. There will be assessments included in the training to check understanding.

7. Quality Assurance of the VetGDP programme

It is important that all graduates receive the support they need throughout their VetGDP.

The specific requirements will vary between individuals, and it is likely that most graduates will need more support at the start of the programme, and less towards the end, as they become more independent and their experience, confidence and competence develops.

As part of our quality assurance processes, approximately 3-4 times a year we will administer – via the VetGDP e-portfolio platform – a short questionnaire comprising up to five generic questions, to understand whether the graduate feels they are being given the support that was agreed. Similarly, as it is also the responsibility of the graduate to drive the programme and request support when required (and to a reasonable level), a short evaluation questionnaire will be sent to the VetGDP Adviser to understand if this is working well. Any publication of this data will be in an anonymised, aggregated format only.

Should any problems be identified, the RCVS will endeavour to support the employer and graduate if / where needed.

It is important to note that all information provided within the e-portfolio and quality assurance questions will remain strictly within the RCVS Education department. A member of the VetGDP Panel will carry out a peer review of the e-portfolio prior to sign off, but the name of the graduate and VetGDP Adviser will be removed.

RCVS VetGDP sub-committee

The programme will be overseen by the RCVS VetGDP sub-committee. This committee will report to RCVS Education Committee and will review and respond to the quality assurance processes as well as providing guidance for any issues and queries arising as the programme progresses.

For any additional information about VetGDP please contact vetgdp@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0791

Appendix 1: Activity Reflection form

(Illustrative purposes only – will be part of the VetGDP e-portfolio)

VetGDP Activity Adviser observations / feedback form

Name: **Date:**

ACTIVITY TYPE (circle which apply)

EPA 1	EPA 2	EPA 3	EPA 4	EPA 5	EPA 6	EPA 7	EPA 8	EPA 9	EPA 10	EPA 11	EPA 12	EPA 13	EPA 14	EPA 15

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS INVOLVED (identify all that were carried out)

CLIENT COMMUNICATION		TEAMWORK / COMMUNICATION		PROFESSIONALISM	
LEADERSHIP / MANAGEMENT		ADAPTABILITY		DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY	

ACTIVITY DETAIL:

CASE COMPLEXITY: Low/routine ☐ Moderate ☐ High/complex ☐

Species: **Environment:**

Client Co-operation: Good ☐ Challenging (reasons) ☐

REFLECTIONS

Areas which were challenging:

Areas completed well:

Areas for further development:

Areas for further development:

Appendix 2: VetGDP Activity Adviser Observations / feedback form

(Illustrative purposes only – will be part of the VetGDP e-portfolio)

VetGDP Activity Adviser observations / feedback form

Name: **Date:**

ACTIVITY TYPE (circle which apply)

EPA 1	EPA 2	EPA 3	EPA 4	EPA 5	EPA 6	EPA 7	EPA 8	EPA 9	EPA 10	EPA 11	EPA 12	EPA 13	EPA 14	EPA 15

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS INVOLVED (identify all that were carried out)

CLIENT COMMUNICATION		TEAMWORK / COMMUNICATION		PROFESSIONALISM	
LEADERSHIP / MANAGEMENT		ADAPTABILITY		DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY	

ACTIVITY DETAIL:

CASE COMPLEXITY: Low/routine ☐ Moderate ☐ High/complex ☐

Species: **Environment:**

Client Co-operation: Good ☐ Challenging (reasons) ☐

REFLECTIONS

Areas which were challenging:

Areas completed well:

Areas for further development:

Additional comments / reflections / feedback:

Appendix 3: Monthly Progress Review Form (Graduate)

(Illustrative purposes only – will be part of the VetGDP e-portfolio)

EPA1

Progress across different species

Day one competent level

Independent, competent confident practitioner

Progress across case complexities

Day one competent level

Independent, competent confident practitioner

Progress across levels of Client Co-operation

Day one competent level

Independent, competent confident practitioner

Notes:

EPA2

Progress across different species

Day one competent level

Independent, competent confident practitioner

Progress across case complexities

Day one competent level

Independent, competent confident practitioner

Progress across levels of Client Co-operation

Day one competent level

Independent, competent confident practitioner

Notes: