

## INVITATION TO TENDER (ITT)

January 2024

The further development of Clinical Career  
Pathways for Veterinary Surgeons in the UK.

Developing Flexible Routes for Specialist Training:  
A Rapid Review of Evidence.

## Invitation to Tender (ITT)

### Introduction

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is the statutory regulator for the veterinary profession in the UK. It is responsible under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 for keeping the register of veterinary surgeons eligible to practise in the UK, setting and monitoring standards for veterinary education and regulating the professional conduct of veterinary surgeons. It also exercises powers under its Royal Charter to award Fellowships, Diplomas and Certificates to veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and others.

### Background

The RCVS has a wide-ranging interest in setting and advancing standards within the veterinary profession. Following an update to the Veterinary Surgeons Act in 2014, the RCVS was granted increasing legislative power and was able to update certain aspects of the Code of Professional Conduct. One of the reforms made was protection of the term “specialist”, which meant that only those listed on the relevant register are formally recognised as RCVS Specialists and therefore able to refer and advertise themselves as being “specialists”.

The objectives of the RCVS Specialist List include the following:

- to promote specialisation within the veterinary profession.
- to identify, for the public and the profession, veterinarians who have specialised knowledge and skills; who are active practitioners within a recognised field of specialisation; who maintain specialised competence through continuing professional development.
- to encourage veterinary surgeons to refer cases, as appropriate, to RCVS Specialists.
- to recognise specialised competence in key areas, where there are suitable postgraduate qualifications.

To be included on the list of Specialists, an individual must have achieved a postgraduate qualification at least at Level 8 in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ - Diploma level) and must additionally satisfy the College that they make an active contribution to their specialty. A Specialist must also be available for referral or consultation by other veterinary colleagues (if appropriate to their area of work). Specialist status is time bound, and the individual must reapply for recognition every five years (or earlier in certain cases) to maintain their name on the list.

Most UK specialists train with one of the 27 European specialist colleges that are recognised by the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS). The education and training takes at least four years after the completion of a veterinary degree. This training is typically divided into two main phases - an internship and a residency.

An internship is the first stage of post-graduate training, and it lasts for at least one year before starting a residency. Due to the limited availability of residences, some practitioners undertake several internships before they are accepted onto a residency programme. The residency, which is the next phase, is designed to offer in-depth education in the science and state-of-the-art practices of the selected veterinary discipline.

A residency programme can follow a 'standard' or 'alternate' format and lasts for a minimum of three years (36 months). A 'standard' residency is a pre-approved, post-graduate training programme. An 'alternate' residency is a tailor-made, approved programme for an individual candidate. Both standard and alternate residency programmes have identical requirements for resident activities, documentation, and supervision by an EBVS Specialist (who has achieved a diploma already, i.e. a Diplomat).

During the residency, a resident usually spends at least two years (24 months) under the direct supervision of an EBVS College Diplomat. Candidates must complete their residency training within a maximum time limit of seven years.

EBVS-recognised speciality Colleges may offer an 'alternate' residency option to individuals whose circumstances may prevent them taking up a 'standard' residency. A resident on an alternate training programme must spend the equivalent of at least 60% of three years working in the practice of their speciality, under direct supervision of a certified Diplomat of the College.

Some speciality colleges have developed 'alternate' programmes with flexible pathways, each having a specified minimum duration of practical work. Where remote supervision can be used this is specified. The content and methods of delivery, including whether prior accredited learning can be included, will also be defined for such programmes. Relatively few colleges currently offer a flexible, modular route to specialisation.

Most veterinary surgeons who wish to become a specialist currently therefore need to go through a standard residency programme. These offer significantly lower pay compared to vets working in clinical practice and practitioners may need to relocate in order to take an internship or residency located within a college or referral practice. These barriers create inequalities around the accessibility of specialist training and there is a need for more flexible and accessible routes to specialisation.

### **The Veterinary Clinical Career Pathways (VCCP) project**

In November 2023, RCVS Council approved a wide-ranging project to further develop the clinical career pathway opportunities for veterinary surgeons in the UK. This includes three ambitious workstreams. Full details can be found via this [link](#).

Workstream 3 aims to develop more flexible routes to specialisation for the UK veterinary profession, by identifying mechanisms by which veterinary surgeons are able to access the teaching and learning opportunities, clinical experience and cases, supervision and support necessary for them to be able to successfully complete specialist training across a range of disciplines.

**The RCVS is keen to ensure that this work and our future proposals are evidence-based, having considered any lessons learned about the positive or negative impact of programmes already implemented in professional specialist-level education and training. Therefore, we are commissioning a rapid review of published evidence (including grey literature) in relation to the process, outcomes and impact of different 'flexible' training models or approaches to higher postgraduate training.**

## Contract Requirement: Rapid Review of Evidence

The RCVS wishes to appoint an experienced contractor to carry out the evidence review for the project. The successful contractor will be able to work with the RCVS to review the published literature/evidence relating to flexible models of specialist training.

The contract awarded will be for a duration of four months with an option for an extension for up to an additional six weeks if required.

## Instruction to Tenderers

This invitation to tender has been prepared by the RCVS for the purpose of inviting proposals to complete a rapid review of the literature / published evidence into the areas as set out in this document.

## Objectives

In order to develop more flexible and accessible specialist training pathways for UK veterinary surgeons, the RCVS wishes to commission a rapid review of the available evidence which addresses the following:

1. A description of the different 'flexible' models of specialist / higher postgraduate training currently in place in professional<sup>1</sup> education. This should include 'flexibility' in terms of:
  - a. Time
    - i. Less than full time, part time etc.
    - ii. Structure, i.e. combining a clinical role with a training place such as day / block release.
  - b. Supervision, e.g. single / multiple supervisors, flexible modes of supervision such as online or virtual supervision, supervision styles etc.
  - c. Location – different workplace settings, rotations etc.
  - d. Teaching methods, e.g. use of digital resources, simulation etc.
  - e. Other flexibility options that make training more accessible.
2. Evidence of the impact (positive / negative / risks) of the flexible training models / methods and approaches on:
  - a. Accessibility
  - b. Trainee satisfaction
  - c. Successful completion of the training programme, or attrition levels.
  - d. Learner outcomes (programme-specific)
  - e. Any other impact on the learner (e.g. on wellbeing, motivation, career progression etc.).
  - f. Any impact on the workplace and / or the wider profession.
3. Any known barriers to accessing flexible routes to specialist / higher postgraduate training, including those relating to selection criteria or procedures, or other unintended consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> Veterinary and other health professions, or other regulated professions such as the legal profession.

## Scope

The review should focus specifically on flexible training models / programmes and consider published evidence – from relevant databases and grey literature – from 2003 onwards. The literature search can be limited to publications in the English language but should consider any international studies or evidence.

As there may be a limited number of impact studies relating to existing programmes of veterinary specialty training, especially for flexible models of training (as relatively few currently exist), the scope of the literature search should include other health professions and any relevant regulated professions such as law.

## Reporting

The project is being led by the Veterinary Clinical Career Pathways (VCCP) Working Group, which includes representatives from key stakeholders including practitioners, employers, educationalists, specialists and advanced practitioners.

The final report will be submitted to the working group.

## Questions about this tender

Queries should be submitted by **5pm on 6 March 2024** by email to [j.soreskog-turp@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:j.soreskog-turp@rcvs.org.uk). Please aggregate your queries as far as possible. Answers will be emailed to all those who have expressed an interest **by 13 March 2024**.

## Summary of procurement timetable

Event	Date
Tender document published	24 January 2024
Deadline for receipt of expressions of interest and questions	6 March 2024
Response to questions	13 March 2024
Deadline for receipt of proposals	18 March 2024, 12 noon.
Interviews	w/c 25 March 2024
Successful applicant notified	2 April 2024
Contracting completed	8 April 2024
Draft research results, analysis and report narrative to be delivered to RCVS for feedback	8 August 2024
Final research results, analysis and report narrative to be delivered to RCVS	30 August 2024

## Instruction for return of proposals

Please email your proposal by **12 noon on 18 March 2024**. Unfortunately, we will not be able to consider late or incomplete proposals.

## Evaluation Criteria

Supplier responses will be assessed using the following criteria and weightings. A score will be given for each part of the information submitted that is to be assessed. The qualitative aspects of your response will be evaluated entirely on your response submitted.

Essential filter: Understanding of the aims and objectives for this RCVS project (if not met, not allowed to proceed)

Criteria	Weighting
Experience of research team and ability to deliver on the required service (including staff CVs and examples of previously published literature reviews).	30%
Quality and clarity of the proposal, including approach, methodology, and data sources.	30%
Responsiveness, transparency and flexibility	10%
Financial stability and long-term viability of the organisation	10%
Value for money	20%

The responses under each sub category will be scored based on the following matrix:

Points	Interpretation
10	<b>Excellent</b> – A comprehensive and strong answer indicating the provider fully meets the requirements. A detailed response that directly responds to all requirements with no ambiguity and examples provided (where relevant).
7	<b>Good</b> – A commendable response that broadly responds to the requirement.
5	<b>Adequate</b> – An acceptable response but there may be some concerns that the organisation will not be able to meet the requirement in full. Or a less detailed response that broadly responds to the requirement with some ambiguity or lacking appropriate examples (where required).
3	<b>Poor Response/Limited Evidence</b> – There are indications that the organisation will not be able to achieve the outcomes required and / or has not provided appropriate evidence of experience to successfully deliver the work. Or, a response that is not entirely relevant to the requirement, with ambiguity and lacking specific detail.
0	<b>Unacceptable</b> – The answer is non-compliant or has little / no relevant information to demonstrate the organisation can achieve the required outcomes. No response or a response that is entirely irrelevant.

All scores will be added together to provide an overall total score for each subcategory/section which will then be calculated against the criteria weightings. Once all the criteria weightings have been calculated, they will be added together to provide an overall total score.

Please note that all your responses to the tender requirements and the pricing schedule will be incorporated into a contractual document.

### **Freedom of information**

Applicants must provide an assurance that the proposed project is compliant with GDPR and how that assurance can be guaranteed.

### **Intellectual Property**

All intellectual property rights in this tender document and all material provided by the RCVS to applicants in connection with this tender are and shall remain the property of the RCVS. There may be an opportunity to publish the work as part of a wider publication in conjunction with the RCVS.

### **Additional information for bidders**

- a. The indicative budget for this work is £10,000. Bidders may wish to include a cost structure for different levels of provision, particularly if they feel that significant value could be added by undertaking some additional work beyond this cost ceiling.
- b. You will not be entitled to claim from the RCVS any costs or expenses which you may incur in preparing your tender whether or not the tender is successful.
- c. Timeframe: The RCVS would require the final project report by 30 August 2024. It will inform and feed into a wider piece of work to develop the clinical career pathways for veterinary surgeons in the UK.