Ensuring accreditation of veterinary degrees is fit for the future: the review and enhancement of RCVS accreditation standards and processes.

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.

1.   Background and overview of accreditation at the RCVS

The RCVS has a wide ranging interest in veterinary education and training, and is the sole body in the UK responsible for the accreditation of veterinary degrees. It has a statutory duty to set and monitor the standards of veterinary degrees for registration purposes.

Setting and monitoring the standards for veterinary education is a key responsibility of the RCVS. The RCVS defines the competences that need to be met by the new veterinary graduate, and specifies the requirements for veterinary degree courses to be approved for registration purposes. The RCVS undertakes formal visitations to universities to ensure that veterinary degree standards are being maintained, and for UK universities, reports its recommendations to the Privy Council.

The current RCVS standards of accreditation for veterinary degrees were developed in 2014 (implemented in 2015), and a further review is now required to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. Furthermore, the process by which universities are reviewed to evaluate whether our accreditation standards have been met also need to be considered in order to ensure our approach continues to be robust and successful in achieving maximum impact in terms of quality assurance and improvement.

A number of important matters are driving this need for a review of the RCVS accreditation standards and processes, as well as the guidance and training given to accreditation visitors, including:

- The imminent revision of the RCVS 'Day One Competences' (D1C) referenced by the Standards as the areas all graduates need to be competent in upon graduation.

- The emergence of new models of curricula, implemented by some institutions, such as the 'Community-based model' at Nottingham Veterinary School, and the 'Distributed model' at Surrey Veterinary School. More recently, Harper Adams and Keele universities have indicated that they are also developing a distributed model. The 2014 accreditation standards and process for review was developed for the more traditional veterinary school curriculum, before new models were proposed in the UK

- A number of new veterinary degrees are being proposed where the teaching takes place across two sites. Although in some proposals the two institutions are relatively close geographically, others involve significant distances, and potentially joint degrees across continents. This presents a number of logistical challenges for accreditation visitation panel members in being able to see everything within the schedule in a meaningful manner, and has significant financial implications for the RCVS.

- Concerns that the accreditation process has become too much of a 'tick-box' exercise, focusing too much on 'inputs' without sufficiently recognising relevant 'outputs' of the veterinary degree i.e. the graduates and their preparedness for practice. This also reduces the flexibility of the approach, which creates challenges where different models of curricular are in place.

This review presents RCVS with an opportunity to develop the Accreditation Standards, processes and guidance (including visitor training) to ensure they enhance the quality of veterinary education, promote quality improvement and result in high quality care for animals in the context of an evolving professional landscape.

The RCVS is keen to ensure that our review is evidence-based, and therefore we are commissioning a literature review around accreditation methods, their impact, facilitators and barriers, in order to inform our future approach.

2. Objectives

To provide a substantial evidence-base to inform the review of accreditation standards and processes, we require a literature/evidence review of accreditation methods (including standards and processes used) for professional education programmes. This evidence is required to ensure that the development of new RCVS standards and method / approach to accreditation is in line with current international best practice, and ultimately achieving its purpose in terms of quality assurance and driving quality improvement. It is an opportunity to explore recent advances in understanding regarding the influence, impact and consequences relating to the accreditation of professional education programmes.

This invitation to tender (ITT) relates to the literature review strand of the project. This will be a systematic, critical review of the literature on professional degree evaluation and accreditation (including any grey literature on the subject), the associated methods (processes) used and the effectiveness of each method in assuring quality and driving innovation and improvement. The high level themes/questions that the review should aim to address include:

a) Providing an understanding of different models of accreditation of professional qualifications (including – but not limited to – different risk-based models, and input vs output models).

b) What are the advantages and challenges of each of these models, in terms of impact (short & long term), outcomes and feasibility?

c) What impact does implementation of each of the models have for stakeholders, including faculty (and associates), students, recent graduates, employers and clients?

d) What are the resource implications for all of the models? Are there approaches to accreditation that could mitigate the increasing costs and resources required on a visitation, without compromising standards?

e) An analysis of risk-based versus non-risk-based models and which approach is working more successfully.

3.   The Accreditation Review Working Group

The project is being led by a Working Group, which includes representatives from key stakeholders including heads of vet schools, practitioners, employers, new graduates and students, in addition to external experts in education accreditation. The literature review will be reported to the working group.

4.   Contract Requirement:

The RCVS wishes to appoint an experienced contractor to carry out to the literature/evidence review for the project. The successful contractor would be able to work with the RCVS to review the literature/evidence on international best practice in the accreditation of professional or specialised programmes in higher education

The contract awarded will be for a duration of three months with an option for an extension for up to an additional two weeks.

5.   Questions about this tender

Queries should be submitted by **5pm on 21 October 2019** by email to j.nicholls@rcvs.org.uk. Please aggregate your queries as far as possible. Answers will be emailed to all tenderers **by 25 October 2019**.

6.   Summary of procurement timetable

Event	Date
Tender document sent to potential tenderers	1 October 2019
Deadline for receipt of queries	21 October 2019
Response to queries	25 October 2019
Deadline for receipt of tenders	29 October 2019
Face to face or telephone interviews	6 November 2019
Successful applicant notified	8 November 2019
Contracting completed	15 November 2019
Draft research results, analysis and report narrative to be delivered to RCVS for feedback	1 February 2020
Final research results, analysis and report narrative to be delivered to RCVS	15 February 2020

7. Instruction for return of tenders

Please email your tender by **5pm on 29 October 2019**. Unfortunately we will not be able to consider late or incomplete tenders.

8. 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.

Criteria	Weighting
Knowledge and experience of research team (including staff CVs and examples of previously published literature reviews)	30%
Understanding of RCVS aims and objectives	10%
Detailed proposal of approach and methodology (to include data sources and access to databases)	40%
Costs (including value for money)	20%

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

Points	Interpretation
10	**Excellent –** A comprehensive and strong answer indicating the provider is fully capable and experienced to deliver the required outcomes. A detailed response that directly responds to all requirements with no ambiguity and relevant examples provided.
7	**Good** – There are slight concerns that the organisation will not be able to achieve all the outcomes required and response lacked details of relevant experience. A less detailed response that broadly responds to the requirement with some ambiguity and few examples provided.
5	**Adequate** – There are concerns that the organisation will not be able to achieve the outcomes required and response lacks details of relevant experience. A less detailed response that broadly responds to the requirement with some ambiguity and no/irrelevant examples provided.
3	**Poor Response/Limited Evidence** – There are some indications that the organisation will not be able to achieve the outcomes required and has not provided appropriate evidence of experience to successfully deliver the outcomes required. A response that is not entirely relevant to the requirement, with ambiguity and lacking specific detail.
0	**Unacceptable** – The answer is non-compliant and/or no relevant information has been received 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 category 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.

9. Freedom of information

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

10. Intellectual Property

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

11. Additional information for bidders

a. The indicative budget for this work is up to £20,000. 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 15 February 2020. It will inform and feed into a wider piece of work to develop a new set of RCVS Accreditation Standards and processes.