

Summary	
Meeting	Standards Committee
Date	24 September 2024
Title	Standards Committee Minutes
Summary	<p>Minutes of Standards Committee meeting held remotely on Tuesday, 24 September 2024, at 10:00am</p> <p>The Committee's attention is drawn to paragraphs 1-29 of the classified appendix.</p>
Attachments	Classified appendix
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Classifications		
Document	Classification¹	Rationales²
Minutes	Unclassified	n/a
Classified appendix	Confidential	1, 2 and 3

1Classifications explained

Unclassified	Papers will be published on the internet and recipients may share them and discuss them freely with anyone. This may include papers marked 'Draft'.
Confidential	Temporarily available only to Council Members, non-Council members of the relevant committee, sub-committee, working party or Board and not for dissemination outside that group unless and until the relevant committee or Council has given approval for public discussion, consultation or publication.
Private	The paper includes personal data which should not be disclosed at any time or for any reason, unless the data subject has agreed otherwise. The Chair may, however, indicate after discussion that there are general issues which can be disclosed, for example in reports to committees and Council.

2Classification rationales

Confidential	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To allow the Committee or Council to come to a view itself, before presenting to and/or consulting with others 2. To maintain the confidence of another organisation 3. To protect commercially sensitive information 4. To maintain public confidence in and/or uphold the reputation of the veterinary professions and/or the RCVS
Private	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To protect information which may contain personal data, special category data, and/or criminal offence data, as listed under the General Data Protection Regulation

Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held in-person and remotely on Tuesday 24 September 2024

Members: Linda Belton (Chair)
Sinéad Bennett
Derek Bray
Olivia Cook
Linda Ford
Alice McLeish
Christopher Loughrey
Sue Paterson
Matthew Rendle
Tim Walker
Will Wilkinson

In attendance:

RCVS	Lizzie Lockett	CEO
	Gemma Kingswell	Head of Legal Services (Standards)
	Beth Jinks	Standards and Advisory Lead
	Vicki Price	Senior Standards and Advice Officer
	Ky Richardson	Senior Standards and Advice Officer/Solicitor

AI 1 Apologies for absence, declarations of interest, minutes from the meeting of 12 June 2024.

1. Apologies were received from D Bray, C Loughrey and A McLeish.
2. The minutes from the meeting of 12 June 2024 were agreed.

Matters for decision

AI 2 (a) Review of Letters of non-objection (LONOs) - phase 2

3. The Committee was reminded that at its meeting in June 2024 it had considered several issues that have arisen in respect of the current process for handling LONO requests and the advertising of practice names more broadly. At the June meeting the Committee agreed that new guidance should be drafted for Chapter 23 of the supporting guidance to the Code of Professional Conduct incorporating the Committee's comments from Phase 1 of this review; that objections to proposed company names should now only be made in line with the RCVS' limited power to object where the use of 'protected titles' in a company name is likely to constitute an offence under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (VSA); and a series of FAQs be drafted to address common issues,

including use of 'specialist' and 'hospital'/'veterinary hospital', to be published in all relevant departments, i.e., Advice, Registration, and PSS.

4. The Committee was presented with proposed new guidance for Chapter 23 of the supporting guidance in **Annex B** to the paper. The proposed new guidance included adding an explicit reference to practice names in the current guidance around making claims of superiority or comparisons and reporting misleading practice names; amending paragraph 23.33 to extend the newly agreed guidance on the use of the term 'specialist' in practice names to include the use 'advanced practitioner' in practice names; and inserting a new section of guidance titled 'Advertising of practice names' setting out the new position agreed by the Committee in its meeting in June 2024.
5. The Committee made the following general comments:
 - a. The suggested changes to the guidance were broadly supported. However, it was raised that it was unclear as to what elements of the guidance amounted to legal obligations, and which amount to guidance from the College. To simplify, it would be useful for the guidance to provide a clearer hierarchy addressing the legal requirements first (for example, the Advertising Standards requirements that apply to everyone, and what the College can object to in carrying out its statutory duty under the VSA), and then the best practice guidance recommended by the College. For example, the guidance at paragraph 23.27 is an abuse of title issue rather than an advertising issue.
 - b. It was agreed that it would be useful for the guidance to provide some further explanation of why certain complaints need to be directed to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the first instance.
 - c. The inclusion of an FAQ regarding the use of LONOs by Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs) prompted a wider discussion of the procedures RVNs can perform when working as community nurses. The Head of Legal Services confirmed that due to the wording of Schedule 3 of the VSA, which allows RVNs to undertake acts of veterinary surgery, the animal must be under the care of the RVN's veterinary surgeon employer (or a vet working on the employer's behalf), and our usual advice is that RVNs need to be clear with clients on the limits of what they can do when working independently and not covered by Schedule 3. It was raised that it might be possible to consider the work RVNs can do when working independently by looking at how 'employer' is interpreted.
6. The Committee agreed that Chapter 23 should be restructured so as to separate out legal obligations and to add further explanation of why certain complaints need to be directed to the ASA in the first instance. The Committee also agreed that the FAQ relating to RVNs should be reworded to focus on what RVNs can do in terms of practice names.

Action: Restructure guidance and revise RVN FAQ.

7. The Committee agreed that whether there is any scope for broadening the tasks that RVNs can do when working independently will be brought back for consideration in a future meeting.

Action: Bring issue of tasks RVNs can do when working independently back to future meeting

AI 2 (b) Mutual clients in farm practice

8. The Committee was reminded of the background for this item, which arises out of difficulties identified in complying with the obligation to share relevant clinical information with other veterinary surgeons when there are mutual clients, particularly in the farm sector. Discussions with stakeholders have identified the following barriers to complying with this obligation:
 - a. Veterinary surgeons being unaware of the requirement to share information, or believing the requirement does not apply to them as they are the 'primary vet';
 - b. Veterinary surgeons being aware another veterinary surgeon is treating the animals, but being unable to identify the other veterinary surgeon because of the client being unwilling to share details;
 - c. Veterinary surgeons finding medicines prescribed by someone else on farm but being unable to identify the prescriber because those details are not included on the label. At present, PSS Core standards require 'the name and address of the veterinary practice supplying the medicine' to be recorded on the label of POM-Vs. However, the prescriber and supplier are not always the same person/practice;
 - d. Even if the other veterinary surgeon can be identified, it can be challenging to identify what their out-of-hours arrangements are for the purpose of sharing information with any external provider and signposting the client. At present, RCVS guidance requires veterinary surgeons to 'provide their clients with full details of their 24-hour emergency cover provision', and does not expressly state this information should be made public;
 - e. The term 'mutual clients' could be interpreted as only applying where there is a mutually beneficial relationship between the veterinary surgeons, which is not always the case.
9. The Committee provided the following feedback on the proposed actions set out in paragraph 9 of the paper:
 - a. It is reasonable to expect transparency around the publication of details of the out-of-hours service provider;
 - b. Care should be taken in the terminology that we use to refer to each veterinary surgeon equally, so as to reflect that they are all mutually share the animals' care without hierarchy;

- c. The FAQ wording could be revised to focus more on building a relationship of trust with the client, and to avoid implying that the client has done something wrong or is trying to be misleading. Veterinary surgeons should be transparent with the client that they need the other veterinary surgeon's details so that they can contact the other veterinary surgeon for the sake of the animal's welfare.
- d. It would be helpful to develop a flowchart or quick glance table setting out the obligations of each veterinary surgeon, and a case study;
- e. It was agreed that it would be useful to improve owner awareness of why it is important for veterinary surgeons to be aware of others involved in the care of animals, including awareness of co-morbidities/avoiding adverse reactions; antimicrobial resistance; compliance with veterinary certification obligations; and assisting farmers to comply with their own legal obligations in relation to veterinary medicines.
- f. There is also a concern for some practices that they are losing lucrative work and the involvement of other veterinary surgeons is impacting on their sustainability, which in turn has implications for out-of-hours provision and access to veterinary care across the country.

10. The Committee agreed that the labelling requirements contained in PSS core standards should be amended so that the name of the prescriber must be recorded on the label.

Action: Amend labelling requirements in PSS core standards to require name of prescriber to be recorded on label

11. It was agreed that the guidance should be amended to clarify that veterinary surgeons should make the details of their 24-hour emergency cover provision publicly available, for example, by published details on the practice website, and providing this information to those who enquire.

Action: Amend guidance to clarify that vets should make details of 24-hour emergency cover publicly available

12. It was agreed that the FAQ should be simplified, use a more positive tone, and include more information to help clients understand why it is important for veterinary surgeons to have the details of other veterinary surgeons involved in the care of the animals, including that this is important in order to protect the animals, farmers, and the veterinary surgeon.

Action: Revise FAQ

AI 2 (c) Under care review - confidential

13. The minutes of this agenda item discussion can be found in the classified appendix at paragraphs 1-4.

AI 2 (d) Professional autonomy

14. The minutes of this agenda item discussion can be found in the classified appendix at paragraphs 5-10.

AI 2 (e) Chapter 8 review

15. It was agreed this paper would be held over until the October Standards Committee meeting to enable more time for discussion. It was noted that written feedback had been provided to the Standards and Advice team by one Committee member, which would be reviewed in the meantime.

AI 2 (f) Industrial action

16. The Committee was informed the College had been asked to provide clarity for the profession on the implications of taking part in industrial action, in light of the current strikes. The College prepared a statement setting out the legal and regulatory position for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses who wish to take part in industrial action, which was shared with the union involved with the ongoing action. The Committee was asked to consider whether a version of the statement should be added to Chapter 2 of the supporting guidance, and if so, to agree the proposed wording for the statement.
17. The Committee provided the following comments and feedback:
 - a. The Committee acknowledged the sensitivity involved in the strikes, and that the decision to strike is extreme and last resort for many colleagues. However, anecdotally it was noted that in the current industrial action there have been some issues with comments on social media from both sides which may be considered to bring the profession into disrepute;
 - b. The statement wording was preferable to the proposed guidance wording insofar as it referred to the cover arrangements being a matter for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses to establish in advance through collaboration and dialogue;
 - c. It was queried whether it could be stated that out-of-hours cover does not require all staff to be there and set a minimum cover level. The Chair noted however that it is unfortunately not possible to specify a minimum number given the variation in practices;
 - d. It was noted that the industrial action has also included lay people acting detrimentally to animal welfare. For example, there are anecdotal reports of oxygen deliveries being disrupted by lay staff. It was agreed that this was possibly something to think about covering in the guidance.
18. The Committee agreed that the proposed guidance should be added to Chapter 2, with additional points to be added regarding not bringing the profession into disrepute and clarify the need to establish arrangements for emergency cover in advance, and worded so as to cover everyone involved in the industrial action and not just those striking.

Action: Add agreed guidance to Chapter 2

AI 2 (g) APHA blood sampling - confidential

19. The minutes of this agenda item discussion can be found in the classified appendix at paragraphs 11-13.

Matters for discussion

AI 3(a) GEFS update – confidential

20. The minutes of this agenda item discussion can be found in the classified appendix at paragraphs 14-16.

Matters for report

AI 4 (a) Disciplinary Committee Report

21. The report was noted.

AI 4 (b) Riding Establishments Subcommittee Report

22. The report was noted.

AI 4 (c) PSS Report

23. The report was noted.

Confidential matters for report

AI 5 (a) Routine Veterinary Practice Subcommittee Report

24. The report was noted.

AI 5 (b) Ethics Review Panel Report

25. The report was noted.

AI 5 (c) Certification Subcommittee Report

26. The report was noted.

AI 6 (a) Risk and equality

27. The minutes of this agenda item discussion can be found in the classified appendix at paragraph 17.

AI 7 Any other business and date of next meeting on 23 October 2024 (remote)

28. The date of the next meeting on 23 October 2024, to be held remotely, was noted.

29. The Committee was informed of the need to appoint a Vice-Chair. It was agreed that the Committee would be emailed with the opportunity to volunteer for the role.

Action: Appoint a Vice-Chair at the next meeting

30. The Committee was asked to volunteer to be the Standards Committee representative for the Finance and Resourcing Committee. Linda Ford volunteered, and it was agreed that she would be the representative.

Action: Inform FRC Secretary of the SC rep

Table of actions - unclassified

Paragraph	Task	Responsibility
6	Restructure guidance and revise RVN FAQ	Standards and Advisory Team (KR)
7	Bring issue of tasks RVNs can do when working independently back to future meeting	Head of Legal Services (Standards)
10-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend labelling requirements in PSS core standards to require name of prescriber to be recorded on label • Amend guidance to clarify that vets should make details of 24-hour emergency cover publicly available • Revise FAQ • Update guidance to refer to 'shared clients' 	Head of Legal Services (Standards)
19	Add agreed guidance to Chapter 2	Standards and Advisory Lead
29	Appoint a Vice-Chair at the next meeting	Committee
30	Inform FRC Secretary of the SC representative	Standards and Advisory Lead