



RULES

The RCVS Practice Standards Scheme (“the Scheme”) is effective from 1 January 2005. It provides a mechanism for accreditation of different types of practices - including Small Animal (SA), Equine (EQ), Farm Animal (FA) and designated Emergency Service Clinics (ESCs). It replaces the previous BSAVA and BVHA/RCVS schemes.

What Standards apply?

The Standards to be met are set out in the *RCVS Practice Standards Manual*. Copies may be obtained from Practice Standards, RCVS, Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 2AF
Tel 020 7202 0767; E-mail practicestandards@rcvs.org.uk

Practices may apply for accreditation in the following categories:

Tier 1	Core Standards	– Relevant to all veterinary practices (mainly legal and health & safety requirements)
Tier 2	General Practice	– Small Animal – Equine – Farm Animal – Emergency Service Clinic
Tier 3	Hospital/Veterinary Hospital	– Small Animal – Equine

The Tiers 2 & 3 are cumulative and represent the additional standards in order to achieve accreditation at the different levels. (For Tier 2, Tier 1 standards are mandatory. For Tier 3, Tier 1 and 2 standards are mandatory). Tier 1 Standards are ‘as applicable’ to Tier 1 premises.

It is open to a Practice to apply for multiple accreditation (eg, as a Tier 3 Equine & Tier 2 Small Animal Practice and for 3 branches as Tier 1 Core Practices).

Veterinary Nursing Training Practices (VNTP)

Tier 2 accreditation includes requirements under the VNTP Scheme. It should be noted however that additional resources as set out in Appendix 1 of the *RCVS Practice Standards Manual* are also required and that inspection of these resources and the training capabilities of a Practice will be carried out by the relevant Veterinary Nursing Accreditation Centre (VNAC). The current list of VNACs (with contact numbers) is available on the RCVS website or via the Veterinary Nursing Department.

How does the scheme work?

- Any Practice (the legal entity owning the business providing veterinary services) can apply to be included in the Scheme, and will be inspected by an RCVS approved Inspector before accreditation is given.
- Practices will be inspected every 4 years, but may be subject to 'spot checks' in the interim. These may be without prior warning. All premises involved in the provision of veterinary services will be inspected.
- A practice premises will be considered as a 'branch practice premises' if it shares resources set out in sections 1,2,3 & 9 of the Standards Manual with a main practice premises.
- Currently, the scheme recognises only main and branch practice premises. A practice may have one or more main practice premises, and branch practice premises associated with each main practice premises.
- Practices will be required to certify annually that they remain in compliance with the standards of their accreditation awarded and /or to notify any material change in circumstances which affects accreditation to the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme.
- Where a Practice has already received accreditation and, prior to its 4 yearly inspection falling due, wishes to apply for accreditation at another Tier and/or for accreditation in a different category, an Inspection fee will be payable as follows:

Within 1 year of previous inspection – **£400.00**

Within 2 years of previous inspection – **£300.00**

Within 3 years of previous inspection – **£200.00**

Within 3-4 years of previous inspection – **£100.00**

- The titles 'Hospital' and 'Veterinary Hospital' on their own or as part of any practice signage or practice advertising may only be used by practices accredited at Tier 3.
- A Practice shall only use the Logo to promote practice premises accredited under the Scheme.
- No amendment, alteration or addition may be made to the Logo as supplied to members when used in promotional or other documents or materials generated by the Practice or on its behalf.
- A practice may be asked to cease any promotion considered to be inconsistent with the Scheme.

Fees

- **Year 1 – Application/Joining Fee of £400
(for a main practice premises and its branch practice premises)**

These are non refundable fees payable before initial inspection can take place.

(Where inspection of a main practice premises and its branch practice premises cannot be concluded within one day the RCVS reserves the right to levy an additional inspection charge).

- **Year 2 Onwards – Annual Fee of £225 for each main practice premises + £50 per branch practice premises**

For practices joining the Scheme between January and June, the Annual fee will fall due on 31 January each year. For those joining between June and December, the Annual fee will fall due on 30 June. Direct Debit forms are available from the RCVS Finance Dept.

Non-payment of Annual Fees following one warning notification will result in accreditation being withdrawn. Any application for reinstatement should be made in writing to RCVS, together with payment of the joining fee. The RCVS reserves the right to require reinspection of the Practice.

A Practice may notify the RCVS at any time that it wishes to withdraw from the application process or membership of the Scheme. No refund of fees already paid will be made.

The Inspectorate

Who are the Inspectors?

The criteria for appointment as an Inspector are as follows:

- To be at least 5 years qualified as an MRCVS;
- To be in full or part-time veterinary practice (or to have been so within the previous 3 years);
- To have been approved by the Review Group as having suitable experience for inspections to be undertaken.

There shall be no restriction either geographically or with regard to the number of occasions on which an individual Inspector is chosen to inspect Practices.

The Senior Inspector

One of the Inspectors shall be appointed by the Practice Standards Group to act as Senior Inspector for a term of three years.

Composition & Role of the RCVS Practice Standards Group (PSG)

PSG

- The PSG comprises 7 members, one to be nominated by each of the British Veterinary Association (BVA); the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA); the British Veterinary Hospital Association (BVHA); the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA); the British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA); RCVS Council (who shall be the Chairman of the Group); and Veterinary Nursing Council.
- The Chairman may co-opt individuals to the PSG on an ad-hoc basis. Such individuals will have no voting rights.
- The PSG shall be responsible for the ongoing development of the Scheme and the Standards and shall report to RCVS Council through Advisory Committee.

Composition & Role of the Review Group

- The Review Group shall comprise the Chairman of PSG; the Senior Vice President of RCVS and the Senior Inspector.
- A member of Advisory Committee may not also be appointed as a member of the Review Group.
- The Review Group shall decide whether an applicant shall join the Scheme or not, subject to the role of the Chairman of PSG as set out in the Application Process and shall consider complaints made against Practices in the Scheme.
- The Review Group will review any decision disputed by an applicant as set out in the Appeals procedure.
- All decisions of the Review Group shall be recorded together with reasons for such decisions.
- The Review Group may recommend to Advisory Committee possible changes to the Scheme.

Role of the Advisory Committee of the RCVS in the context of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme

- To recommend to RCVS Council changes to the Scheme requiring authorisation by RCVS Council.
- To act as an appeal body in relation to individual applications to the Scheme and complaints against individual practices so far as they relate to complaints within the Scheme.
- In considering any matter related to the Scheme a quorum of Advisory Committee shall be 4 members.

The Application Process

- 1 Application should be made to the Practice Standards, RCVS who will issue the following:
 - Application Form (this shall be completed by the legal entity running the business in respect of ALL practice premises where veterinary services are carried out);
 - RCVS Practice Standards Manual;
 - Checklist of requirements;
 - List of Required Documents;
 - Inspection Feedback form.
- 2 The Practice should return the completed Application form together with the appropriate fee, to the RCVS. An Inspector will then be appointed and a date set for inspection, no later than 3 months from receipt of the application. The inspector must notify the RCVS of any potential conflict of interest that might arise in carrying out the inspection.
- 3 In the event that a Practice does not wish an individual Inspector to be appointed it may notify the RCVS in writing/email, within 14 days, giving the reasons for its objection. Subject to approval by the Senior Inspector an alternative Inspector may be appointed.

4 No later than 14 days after inspection the Inspector shall submit his Report and Recommendations to the RCVS as follows:

- Outright Pass/Fail

Or

- Pass subject to compliance with stated conditions within stipulated time frame (up to a maximum of 6 months).

Conditions may be 'major' ie necessitating re-inspection or 'minor' where written/photographic evidence of compliance verified by the Inspector may be sufficient.

Or

- Pass but at a Tier other than that applied for (with or without the imposition of conditions).

5 Where the Inspector recommends a Pass or Pass subject to minor conditions the Inspection Report and Recommendations, together with the Application ("The Practice File") will be submitted to the Chairman of the PSG for approval.

6 Where the Chairman of PSG concurs with the Inspector's Recommendation to Pass a Practice, a Certificate of Standards will be issued to the practice within 21 days.

7 Likewise where the Chairman of PSG concurs with the Inspector's recommendation to pass a Practice subject to Minor conditions and all conditions have been verified by the Inspector, a Certificate of Standards will be issued to the Practice.

8 If 'minor' conditions are not met within the stipulated time, the Practice file will be referred to the Review Group for consideration, and the decision of the Review Group notified to the Practice within 21 days.

9 Where the Inspector recommends a pass subject to imposition of 'major' conditions, or a pass at a level other than that applied for, or a Fail, or the Chairman of PSG does not concur with the Inspectors recommendation of a Pass or Pass subject to 'minor' conditions, the Practice File will be referred to the Review Group which will consider the matter. The Practice will be notified of its decision within 21 days.

10 If 'major' conditions are not complied with or a practice fails re-inspection, the Practice File will be referred back to the Review Group for consideration, and its decision notified to the practice within 21 days.

11 The Practice may dispute/appeal a decision of the Chairman of the PSG or the Review Group. (see Dispute and Appeals Procedures below).

12 Following consideration by either the Review Group or the Advisory Committee if conditions require to be fulfilled, a Certificate of Standards will not be issued until the Inspector has confirmed the Practice has complied with all conditions and issued a Supplementary Report and Recommendations, and the Chairman of the PSG has approved accreditation.

Conditions Imposed

'Minor' Conditions – written and/or photographic evidence of compliance should be submitted by the Practice to the RCVS as soon as possible within the stipulated period. Upon receipt (and in the event of no or incomplete evidence being tendered) the Inspector shall prepare a Supplementary Report and Recommendations.

'Major' conditions requiring Reinspection. In the event of Re-inspection being required a date shall be fixed for this to take place on expiry of the stipulated period and notified to the Practice. Following Re-inspection the Inspector shall prepare a supplementary Report and Recommendations. An appropriate re-inspection fee may be levied.

The Inspection

- Inspection of the main Practice and all Branches should be completed within one day. The RCVS reserves the right to levy an additional inspection charge in the event that more than one day is required. To ensure the smooth running of the Inspection all items set out in the List of Required Documents should be made available immediately at the commencement of the inspection.
- In the course of their visit Inspectors will expect to speak to a cross section of staff involved in the normal activities of an operational day.

Disputing a decision of the Chairman Of PSG

In the event that a Practice disputes a decision of the Chairman of the PSG, it should notify the RCVS in writing of the grounds of their dispute and submit any additional material it wishes considered within 21 days. This together with the Practice File shall be submitted to the Review Group for a decision, which shall be notified to the practice within 21 days.

APPEALS PROCEDURE

- (a) In the event that a Practice disputes a decision of the Review Group, and wishes to lodge an appeal, it should notify the RCVS in writing, of its intention to appeal, within 21 days of the date of the letter from the RCVS notifying it of the decision.
- (b) Upon receipt of notification of intention to appeal, the Practice shall be supplied with any additional reasons for the decision already recorded but not provided, for example the relevant minutes of the Review Group meeting, and an Appeals Form.
- (c) If the Practice wishes to pursue the appeal then it should submit to the RCVS a completed Appeals Form stating fully the grounds for the appeal, and any supporting documentary/photographic material it wishes to be considered. (This must be done within 21 days of receipt of the date of the letter notifying it of the Reasons for the decision).
- (d) The Inspector who carried out the Inspection shall be given the opportunity to comment upon the grounds of appeal and supporting material, and any comments received shall be supplied to the Practice for further comment thereon (All comments from the Inspector or the Practice must be submitted within 21 days of receipt of the date of the letter from the RCVS inviting comment).

- (e) As soon as practicable, the Appeals Form, supporting material, Inspectors comments and Practice's comments (together the Appeal Documents) and the Practice File shall be submitted to the Review Group which shall review the application and either:
- confirm the earlier decision and refer the matter to the next available meeting of the Advisory Committee;
- Or
- Issue an Amended Decision.
- (f) The result of the review by the Review Group and a copy of its Reasons shall be notified to the Practice within 14 days.
- (g) In the event that the Practice disputes the Amended Decision it shall notify the RCVS and the matter shall be referred to the next available meeting of Advisory Committee.
- (h) The decision of Advisory Committee as to whether or not to accredit a Practice under the Scheme and the appropriate level of accreditation and any conditions to be imposed shall be final.

Complaints

If a complaint is received alleging a practice has not complied with the Standards of the Scheme, the Review Group will consider it after the Practice has had the opportunity to comment on the complaint.

If in the course of an Inspection an Inspector has concerns relating to a possible breach he reserves the right to bring the matter to the attention of the Review Group or where concerns relate to issues of professional conduct, to the Professional Conduct Department.

Practices agree to respond to all requests for information and complaints relating to the Scheme.

Data Protection

All information on a practice obtained or recorded in connection with the Scheme will be accessible to the RCVS as a whole, and, in particular, may be used by the Professional Conduct Department responding to complaints relating to the professional conduct of a veterinary surgeon or, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, may be passed to relevant enforcement agencies, eg the Health and Safety Executive.

Miscellaneous

If any matter arises regarding the operation of the Scheme that is not provided for under the Rules it shall be decided upon by the Review Group.

Although the Health and Safety requirements (and other legal requirements) may be extensive, and as far as possible up to date, fulfillment of these at Inspection does not constitute a guarantee that each and every Health and Safety requirement (or other legal requirement) has been met, and does not obviate the necessity for each practice to check with the Health and Safety Executive (or other relevant authority) regarding their individual requirements.

The College welcomes feedback on the Application/Inspection Process. Practices are therefore encouraged to complete the Comment form following inspection and/or contact Practice Standards Dept of the RCVS.

In the future the Scheme will recognize Referral Practice premises and may recognize other types of Practice premises.

Transitional Arrangements (from 1 January 2005)

1 Main Practices premises accredited under BSAVA or RCVS/BVHA Schemes on 31 December 2004

- Such Main practice premises are eligible for entry into the Scheme as of 1 January 2005 without payment of any Application/Joining Fee. Where the previous inspection of the practice took place during 2004, the first Annual fee shall be payable on 31 January 2006.
- Branch practice premises of such main practice premises will not form part of the accreditation, and will pay no Annual Fee until first Inspection of the Practice (all main and branch practice premises) under the Scheme has taken place, unless they have been individually inspected and approved in 2004. (see below for Branch practice premises independently approved as VNTPs).
- Where inspection takes place between July and December 2004 under the previous RCVS/BVHA Scheme, the Inspector's Report will be referred to the first available meeting of the Advisory Committee in 2005, for accreditation under the Scheme. The Application and Joining fee for such Practices shall be waived.
- Practice premises already accredited under the BSAVA Scheme may continue to use existing promotional material until the Practice (all main and branch practice premises) has had its first Inspection under the Scheme.

2 Main or Branch Practice premises already approved as VNTPs (where no Practice premises were accredited under either the BSAVA or RCVS/BVHA Schemes in 2004)

- Before 30 April 2005, such Practice premises may apply to join the Scheme by way of self certification of compliance with Tier 2 Standards. (Small Animal and/or Equine as applicable). No Application/Joining Fee will be payable and the first Annual Fee shall be payable on 31 January 2006.
- First inspection of these Practices (all main and branch practice premises) will take place within 4 years of joining the Scheme.

3 Practice premises already approved as VNTPs (where other Practice premises are already accredited under either the BSAVA or RCVS/BVHA Schemes)

- Such Practice premises may apply to join the Scheme by way of self certification as in 2 above. No Application/Joining Fee will be payable and the first annual fee will be payable on 31 January 2006.
- Inspection of these Practice premises shall take place at the same time as first inspection of the Practice as a whole, under the Scheme, (ie in accordance with the BSAVA or RCVS/BVHA inspection cycles).