

# LANTRA

**LANTRA**

## An Investigative Study into Issues Surrounding the Recruitment of Qualified Veterinary Nurses

May 2008

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## Foreword

This study was commissioned by Lantra and its associated Professionals Allied to Veterinary Science Industry Group. In producing this report we have been able to explore the anecdotal view that there is a shortage of qualified veterinary nurses available for recruitment by veterinary practices and the linked problem faced by veterinary practices wishing to recruit at that level. We now have a much clearer picture of the challenges faced by veterinary practices and the organisations working to support veterinary nursing.

This report informs the veterinary world on the current situation regarding the recruitment of qualified veterinary nurses across the UK in relation to the number of positions advertised, the number of applicants and the number of positions filled. In addition, the report provides an insight to the reasons against job selection by qualified veterinary nurses.

The findings and recommendations can be used as evidence to support the sector in developing shared career information and recruitment plans. The findings have also highlighted the potential to conduct further research.

Through this report we now have the information we need to make beneficial changes within the veterinary industry, the challenge now is to deliver these.

Thank you to all partners for their help and support with various stages of this study:

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons  
Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons  
British Veterinary Nursing Association



Many thanks to **Valued Research Ltd** for conducting this research and report writing.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Peter Martin', is written over a horizontal line.

Peter Martin  
Chief Executive  
Lantra Sector Skills Council

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# An Investigative Study into Issues Surrounding the Recruitment of Qualified Veterinary Nurses

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## Executive summary

- Demand for qualified veterinary nurses (QVNs) appears to be much greater in the South of England. The South East and South West between them account for just over a third (36%) of all QVN advertisements placed in the *Veterinary Times*. Wales, the North East and Northern Ireland between them only account for 4% of QVN advertisements.
- Most veterinary practices were only seeking to recruit one to two vacant positions during the course of 2007. Two thirds of *Veterinary Times* recruiters were only seeking to recruit one position during the course of 2007, with a fifth seeking to fill two positions.
- More could be done to improve the consistency of 'core' information contained in QVN advertisements. Advertisements placed in the *Veterinary Times* are inconsistent in the 'core' information that is provided, often key employer location and contact details (other than email) are not provided. Only a tenth of QVN advertisements held information on the actual salary range on offer, but many had informal information such as 'cakes on a Friday' – this potentially devalues the perceived QVN status and role.
- Most veterinary practices in the follow-up survey were seeking a QVN to replace an employee that had left (63%), 12% were looking to recruit to provide temporary maternity cover. However, a fifth was due to practice expansion. Retention of staff per se does appear to be a key issue. However, based on responses to the length of employment with their current employer, employed QVNs appear to be split between a more stable longer term employment group and a newer, possibly more fluid, group. Over half of QVNs (asked for up to seven QVNs per practice) have been with their employer for over five years, with 14% with their employer for more than 21 years and a quarter one year or less.
- CPD appears to be the main way veterinary practices are seeking to attract and retain QVNs – many of the *Veterinary Times* advertisements mentioned funded CPD, and CPD came out in the follow-up survey as the most frequently mentioned incentive. The most commonly cited reason for QVNs leaving their employer was for a career change, relocation of spouse or partner's job and maternity leave (and not returning) and dissatisfaction with the job has also been noted.
- A main recruitment issue appears to be the extremely low number of applicants that each veterinary practice received for the vacant position. Veterinary practices report getting and retaining speculative letters from those wishing to work with animals but they are often without any work experience or qualifications. Most veterinary practices are seeking a QVN either to keep an appropriate mix between qualified, trainee and unqualified staff and/or due to the wider scope of work that QVNs can undertake. Some practices no longer take on trainee (Q)VNs as it was considered that they took up too much of other QVNs' time in portfolio management.
- Following on from this, the principal difficulty encountered in the recruitment of QVNs was stated to be insufficient QVN applicants, followed by a lack of local applicants.

- The shortlisting and selection process appears to range from very informal, i.e. 'if they seem nice and have experience we interview' to a formal and multi-stage process – shortlist, interview, practice tour/shift. Due to the low number of applicants who are experienced and qualified most veterinary practices interview all who match the criteria.
- The average length of cover for vacant positions is approximately two months, although 14% of the veterinary practices in the survey had yet to fill the vacant QVN position. Most are relying on locums and additional work being spread across existing staff to cover the gap.
- Overall those surveyed believed it is generally difficult to recruit a QVN, although some felt this had always been the case and others that it had become more difficult in recent years. There were mixed views as to how this will change going forward. For those who thought it is going to become more difficult, the reasons for this relate to the difficulty of practices becoming and maintaining training practice status. The results of this are believed to be that more QVNs are being trained via colleges and universities who then have insufficient practical experience, are not as committed to the practice they work for and expect a (commensurate) higher or graduate level starting salary.

# 1. Research background and aims

## 1.1. Background

Between January and March 2008 Valued Research Ltd undertook research on the recruitment of qualified veterinary nurses (including specialist roles such as equine veterinary nursing). This research was required by Lantra's industry representative group Professions Allied to Veterinary Science (PAVS), as there is currently an anecdotal view across the industry that there is a shortage of qualified veterinary nurses available for recruitment (including equine veterinary nurses) on a regional and national basis.

## 1.2. Research aims

The main purpose of the research was to provide evidence on the current situation regarding the recruitment of qualified veterinary nurses, via advertisements placed in the *Veterinary Times*, across the UK. The research outputs will also be used to tailor Lantra's approach to developing marketing materials to inform the veterinary world of the importance of attracting qualified veterinary nurses into the profession and the importance of effective recruitment.

The specific research aims were as follows:

- To provide information on the number of positions for qualified veterinary nurses advertised in the *Veterinary Times* over a 12-month period (placed during 2007)
- Conduct a follow-up survey of a sample of veterinary practice advertisers to establish how many applicants each advertisement attracted and how many of the positions were filled
- The follow-up survey and analysis of *Veterinary Times* job advertisements to also provide some understanding of the level of competition for qualified veterinary nurses.

## 2. Research methodology

The research methodology comprised two main strands.

### 2.1. Review, analysis and classification of job advertisements placed in the *Veterinary Times* for qualified veterinary nurses

The first stage of the research required Valued Research Ltd to manually check every other edition of the *Veterinary Times* for advertisements placed that were looking for a qualified veterinary nurse (QVN). In some cases the advertisement requested applications from only a QVN and in other cases the employers (mainly veterinary practices) were seeking a QVN **or** an experienced nurse, nursing assistant, or trainee nurse.

In total, 26 editions of the *Veterinary Times* were analysed for QVN advertisements starting from the 22 January 2007 edition and finishing with the 31 December 2007 edition. A total of 1,501 advertisements were identified and logged. Each advertisement that related to QVN recruitment was identified and logged in a spreadsheet, along with as much information on the employer, place of employment and terms and conditions as contained in the advertisement.

The advertisement database created was then used for two research purposes:

- It provided the sampling frame, and employer sample for the follow-up survey;
- The spreadsheet was analysed to provide information on the demand for QVNs by employers seeking QVNs via the recruitment route of the *Veterinary Times*.

The results of the *Veterinary Times* advertisement analysis are provided at the beginning of this report. There is also an excel spreadsheet of QVN advertisements with excel pivot tables that accompanies this report.

**Note:** A decision was taken by Lantra and PAVS to restrict the analysis of qualified veterinary nurse advertisements to those in the *Veterinary Times*, and subsequently the follow-up survey, because it is the only nationally published professional publication circulated to register veterinary nurses and veterinary practices across the UK.

### 2.2. Follow-up QVN recruitment survey

#### 2.2.1. Survey sampling

As stated above, the identification of QVN advertisements placed in every other edition of the *Veterinary Times* during 2007 was used as the sampling frame, as well as the database, used to contact a sample of employers to follow up on the outcomes of the advert placed as well as their views on the ease or difficulty in recruiting QVNs. Only veterinary practices were included in the follow-up survey and one national charity. Adverts from other employers seeking a QVN, e.g. a pharmaceutical company seeking to recruit to a rep role or a FE/HE institution seeking a lecturer were excluded from the follow-up survey sample.

The QVN advertisements were then grouped by region of the employer who had placed the advertisement; this then formed the basis on which the 50 follow-up interviews were spread across the UK nations and English regions. Given that the follow-up survey involved a relatively small number of employers, a minimum of three employers by region were to be interviewed. Despite a high sample to achieved interview rate, the low sample base for Northern Ireland and the North East prevented Valued Research from achieving three interviews in these two areas (additional interviews were undertaken with employers in the South East and North West to maintain overall sample size) - see Table 8 for the achieved sample by region and UK nation.

### **2.2.2. Survey questionnaire**

Valued Research worked with Lantra and industry representatives from the PAVS industry group to create the draft survey questionnaire. The draft questionnaire was then circulated to other members of the PAVS industry group for comment before it was piloted with five employers. Amendments to the pilot questionnaire were then agreed with Lantra before it was finalised for the main survey. The survey questionnaire is attached in Annex 5.

An introduction letter was also prepared for use where required to engage employers to take part in the survey. This letter provided the background, project aims and how Lantra intends to use the research findings, as well as the usual information on survey confidentiality etc. Most employers contacted did not actually require this letter to be sent before they would agree to be interviewed.

### **2.2.3. Survey method**

The follow-up survey of 50 employers (all but one were non-charitable veterinary practices) was undertaken by telephone. The interviewers made initial contact and either set up a date and time to call back to conduct the interview or conducted it 'on the spot' if the person was willing. The interviewers asked for the person that was named in the QVN advertisement as the employer contact.

## **3. Research findings**

This section of the report provides the findings from the *Veterinary Times* QVN advert analysis and the follow-up survey of employers seeking to recruit QVNs.

### **3.1. *Veterinary Times* QVN advertisement analysis**

The spreadsheet of QVN advertisements was first 'cleaned' for any obvious data entry errors or any inconsistencies in the data entry between advertisements. Repeat advertisements, i.e. where the same recruiter had advertised a position with the same qualifications in the previous *Veterinary Times* edition were then excluded.

In all but a few cases the region of recruitment was the same as the employers (as placed in the advertisement). In some cases the location of the advertised recruitment position was derived from the contact phone number as it was not provided in the *Veterinary Times* advert. The following tables provide the analysis of the *Veterinary Times* advertisements seeking QVNs. The overall advertisement analysis is provided in Annex 1.

#### **3.1.1. New advertisements analysis**

The following tables are provided only for different QVN advertisements, repeat advertisements have been excluded from the analysis.

Some 95% of the recruiters were veterinary practices, and 4% of recruiters were registered charities. There was significant inconsistency in the amount of information provided by recruiters. In some cases not even the employer's name or location was provided. Some 17% (180) of recruiters had included in their advert that they were either a training practice or RCVS accredited practice. The remaining 1% included colleges and pharmaceutical companies. The list of identified descriptions can be found at Annex 2.

**Table 1:** Number of new adverts by region of recruiter (veterinary practice)

Region	Number of recruiters	% of recruiters	Number of 'new' advertisements	% of 'new' advertisements
South East	145	22.10%	230	22.10%
South West	94	14.30%	145	14.00%
North West	77	11.70%	116	11.20%
East of England	73	11.10%	129	12.40%
London	66	10.10%	119	11.50%
West Midlands	50	7.60%	70	6.70%
Yorkshire and Humber	41	6.30%	63	6.10%
Scotland	40	6.10%	48	4.60%
East Midlands	36	5.50%	63	6.10%
Wales	15	2.30%	21	2.00%
North East	9	1.40%	10	1.00%
N Ireland	4	0.60%	5	0.50%
National	4	0.60%	17	1.60%
Overseas	1	0.20%	1	0.10%
Channel Isles	1	0.20%	2	0.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Valued Research Ltd, *Veterinary Times QVN Advertisements Analysis (Jan-Dec 2007)*

The region that has the largest recruitment demand for QVNs based on the analysis of *Veterinary Times* advertisements is the South East, which accounts for 22% of all recruiters and 'new' advertisements. Lowest recruitment demand appears to be in Northern Ireland, the North East, and Wales. The regional spread of QVN advertisements placed in the *Veterinary Times* during 2007 is reflective of the regional spread of the RCVS registered veterinary nurses around the UK.

These analysis results should be interpreted carefully as only every other *Veterinary Times* edition was analysed and it represents only one recruitment route used by QVN recruiters. The researchers have been provided with information from Lantra obtained from the *Veterinary Times* that states that their market share of veterinary nurse advertisements (out of all printed publications) is approximately 50%. Veterinary practices surveyed in this project were also asked which other recruitment methods and routes they use to recruit qualified veterinary nurses and the results are discussed later in Section 4.2.5.

Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) 2006 data for veterinary activities (SIC 85.2) provides the following percentage profile of the share of veterinary practices, although ONS ABI 2006 data on the number of establishments is not available for Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Census of Employment 2005 shows there were 1,519 people employed in veterinary activities (SIC 85.2) of which 844 were female. The share of veterinary activities by region according to ABI 2006 data is provided in Annex 3. The South East region is slightly over-represented (based on its ABI share of workplace units of 17%) in the *Veterinary Times* advertisements analysis at 22%, whilst Wales and Scotland are both under-represented with 2% and 5% of *Veterinary Times* advertisements compared to a 6% and 10% share of ABI veterinary activities units, respectively.

**Table 2:** Number and % of recruiters (veterinary practice) by the number of 'new' advertisements placed

Number of 'new' advertisements placed	Number of recruiters placing advertisements	% of recruiters
1	432	66%
2	139	21%
3	46	7%
4	25	4%
5	9	1%
6	1	>0.5%
8	1	>0.5%
9	1	>0.5%
11	1	>0.5%
12	1 (National Charity)	>0.5%
	<b>656</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research Ltd, *Veterinary Times QVN Advertisements Analysis (Jan-Dec 2007)*

Two thirds of recruiters were only seeking one position during the course of 2007 (note: analysis caveats), with a further 21% seeking two positions, 7% were seeking three positions and the remainder were seeking between 5-12 positions.

Of those recruiters seeking more than one 'new' position this may be due to re-advertising an unfilled position that appeared earlier in the year or to a different position within the practice for a QVN.

Valued Research has attempted to separate out these two groups by categorising 'new' advertisements as to whether the recruiter was seeking the same person/qualification specification or whether it was different. If it is the same person/qualification specification then Valued Research has assumed this is a re-advertisement of the same position advertised earlier in the year in the *Veterinary Times*. If there is a different person/qualification specification then Valued Research has assumed this advert relates to a different position within the veterinary practice. The results of this analysis (on those advertisements with sufficient information) are provided below in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Percentage of recruiters by vacancy type (seeking only QVN or alternatives)

Person specification /qualification required	Definite new advertisements	Number of advertisements by same recruiter for different qualification in next issue	Total new advertisements	Repeat adverts: i.e. placed by same recruiter for same qualification in next issue	Total advertisements
QVN Only	619	32	651	331	982
QVN or Experienced Nurse or Nursing Assistant	154	23	177	68	245
QVN or Trainee	117	19	136	58	194
Not stated	43	18	61	19	80
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>1,025</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>1,501</b>

Source: Valued Research Ltd, *Veterinary Times QVN Advertisements Analysis (Jan-Dec 2007)*

Approximately a third of all adverts (476) using the categorisation explained above were assessed to be a repeat advert, i.e. where the veterinary practice had placed advertisements more than once for a position advertised earlier in the year which had not been filled (based on the categorisation assumptions).

The majority, just under two-thirds (64%) of recruiters were advertising for a QVN only – of these approximately 3% (19) were seeking an equine veterinary nurse. The next most popular category of recruiters was seeking either a QVN or a trainee nurse (13%). Some 17% of recruiters were seeking either a QVN or an experienced nurse, or a nursing assistant.

### 3.1.2. Advertisement characteristics

Only 2% of recruiters identified in the *Veterinary Times* advertisement analysis were seeking a Qualified Equine Veterinary Nurse, although this may be a reflection of the number of practices requiring specific equine expertise. Vetfile statistics obtained from the *Veterinary Times* show that equine practices account for 2.7% of practices receiving the *Veterinary Times*.

**Table 4:** Recruiters seeking an equine QVN

Seeking an equine QVN	Number of recruiters	% of recruiters
Yes	19	2%
No	764	74%
Possibly	11	1%
Unknown	245	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research Ltd, *Veterinary Times QVN Advertisements Analysis (Jan-Dec 2007)*

The majority of advertisements (57%) did not provide information on whether the job required the person to work 'out of hours'. Of those advertisements that did provide information, 28% stated there was no out-of-hours working and 14% that they would be expected to work out of normal working hours. The researchers observed that, in the majority of cases, where rotas were mentioned, this applied to weekend working.

**Table 5:** Whether the job requires the person to work out-of-hours

Out of hours	Number of recruiters	% of recruiters
Not out of hours	292	28%
Out of hours	148	14%
Minimal out of hours	5	>0.5%
Unknown	594	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research Ltd, *Veterinary Times QVN Advertisements Analysis (Jan-Dec 2007)*

Less than 10% of advertisements provided any information on the salary attached to the job, many advertisements either made no mention of salary or only stated it was competitive or related to experience and qualifications held. Where a salary range was provided the main range was £15,000 to £20,000.

**Table 6:** Salary range

Salary range	Number of recruiters	% of recruiters
£10,000-£15,000	1	>0.5%
£15,000-£20,000	73	7%
£20,000-£25,000	16	1.5%
£25,000-£30,000	7	0.5%
Not stated in advert	942	91%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research Ltd, *Veterinary Times QVN Advertisements Analysis (Jan-Dec 2007)*

### 3.1.3. General comments on the *Veterinary Times* advertisements

There does not appear to be a standard minimum level of information that is provided for each advert placed in the *Veterinary Times* seeking qualified veterinary nurses. In the researchers' opinion there were a significant number of advertisements that have **core gaps in information vacancy information**. Some examples of core information gaps were:

- No phone numbers provided
- No contact names
- No practice names
- Only contact was via email (thus excluding those without access to the Internet)
- No understanding of precisely where the recruiter was located e.g. 'lovely location near the downs', or 'rural Wiltshire' etc.
- Few provided information on the salary range, descriptions such as 'competitive salary' were more likely to be used.

Some of the job/person descriptions were vague or very informal, e.g. 'if you like lots of chocolates and biscuits', 'like Radio 1 an advantage' etc.

Good practice would suggest there needs to be more consistency in the core information a potential applicant needs to have in a QVN advertisement in order to help them assess whether they should apply, e.g. employment location, salary range, and the working hours.

## 3.2. Follow-up recruitment survey – findings

The following section provides the results from the QVN recruitment follow-up survey with 50 recruiters. All but one were veterinary practices, which was a national animal charity.

The sample was spread across regions and UK nations in order to get a representative view. However, the relatively small sample base will not support any reliable analysis of the data to distinguish any differences by region and by type of recruiter.

The statistics generated below must be used with caution. Given the small sample base, (drawn only from recruiters placing an advert in the *Veterinary Times*) it is not possible to extrapolate the statistics to make general statements, e.g. 6 out of 10 veterinary practices are struggling to recruit a qualified veterinary nurse. What the data does provide is a sense of the issues encountered by a sample of QVN recruiters that chose to recruit using the *Veterinary Times* in 2007.

### 3.2.1. Achieved sample by region

The achieved number of interviews by each English region and UK nation is provided below.

**Table 7:** Achieved sample by region (veterinary practice)

Region	Number	Percentage
South East	9	18%
South West	7	14%
West Midlands	5	10%
East of England	4	8%
East Midlands	4	8%
North West	5	10%
Yorkshire and Humberside	4	8%
London	3	6%
Scotland	3	6%
Wales	3	6%
North East	2	4%
Northern Ireland	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

The achieved sample is reflective of the regional proportions of QVN advertisements identified from the analysis of *Veterinary Times*.

### 3.2.2. Respondent job title

The majority of the telephone interviews undertaken by Valued Research were conducted with either the Head Nurse (42%) or the Practice Manager (28%). The next largest respondent category was veterinary surgeons (who were either the owner of the practice or a practice partner) at 14%.

**Table 8:** Respondents' job title

Region	Number	Percentage
Head Nurse	21	42%
Practice Manager	14	28%
Veterinary – Owner/Partner	7	14%
Personnel Manager	4	8%
Manager - Other	1	2%
Veterinary - Other	1	2%
QVN	1	2%
Receptionist	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

### 3.2.3. Veterinary practices recruiting QVNs - profile

Some 82% of the practices that were interviewed are training practices – typically the number of student veterinary nurses trained matched the number of student or trainee nurses employed. However, where a veterinary practice was also a training practice there were, in a few cases, slight differences in the numbers of student to trainee nurses due to the practice having work placements as well as employed trainees.

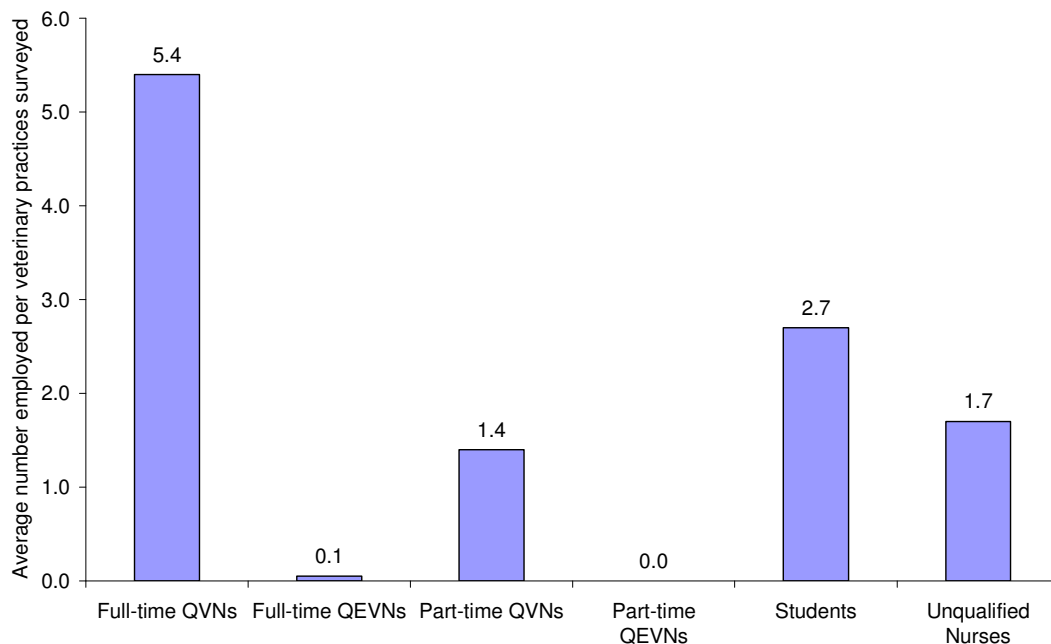
**Table 9:** Size of practices

<b>Number of employees</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1-6	4	8%
7-10	5	10%
11-15	6	12%
16-20	9	18%
21-30	11	22%
31-75	12	24%
110+	3	6%
<b>Number of sites</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	20	40%
2	11	22%
3	8	16%
4	6	12%
5-16	5	10%

*Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007*

Excluding the national charity, the average size of practices interviewed was 29 people employed (including practice owner/managers and non animal care staff). On average there were 5.4 full-time QVNs employed, 1.4 part-time QVNs employed, 2.7 student VNs employed and 1.7 unqualified nurses employed per veterinary practice surveyed. There appears to be a very limited employment of (and possibly supply of) equine veterinary nurses in the veterinary practices surveyed – only one practice with 2 QEVNs was included here. The spread of employment by nurse qualifications and whether part or full time can be found in Annex 4.

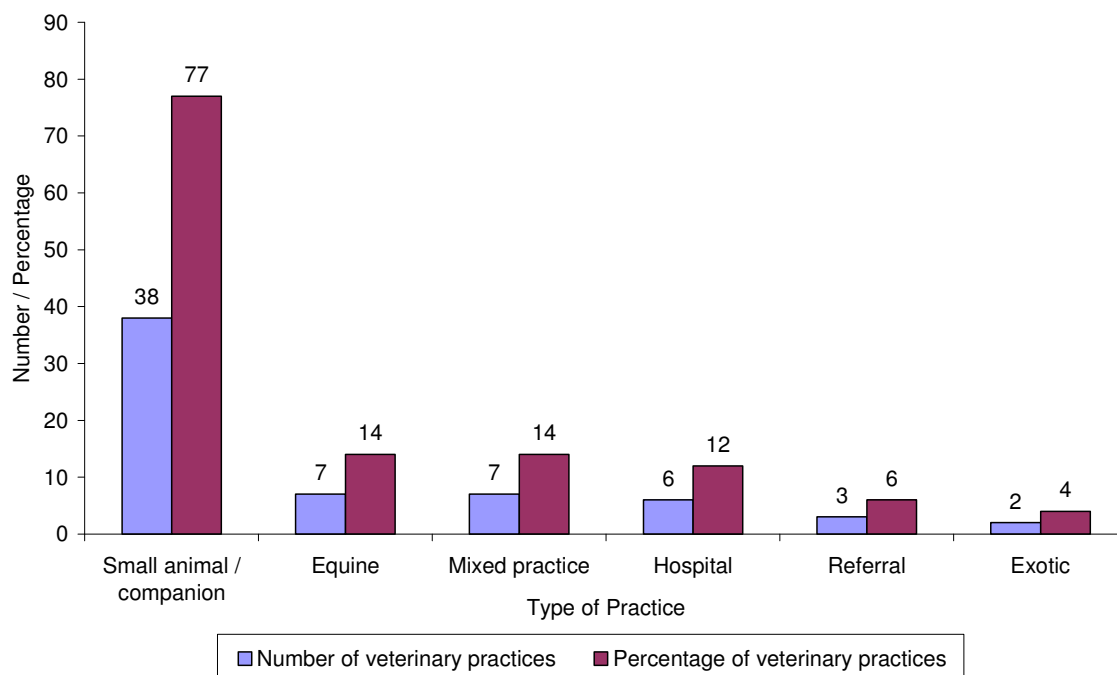
**Figure 1: Average numbers employed by veterinary practices**



Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

RCVS data shows that most student veterinary nurses are female, given this and the reported concentration of females in QVN positions from survey respondents, there appears to be surprisingly relatively low levels of part-time QVN positions.

**Figure 2: Category/categories of the veterinary practice (multiple responses)**



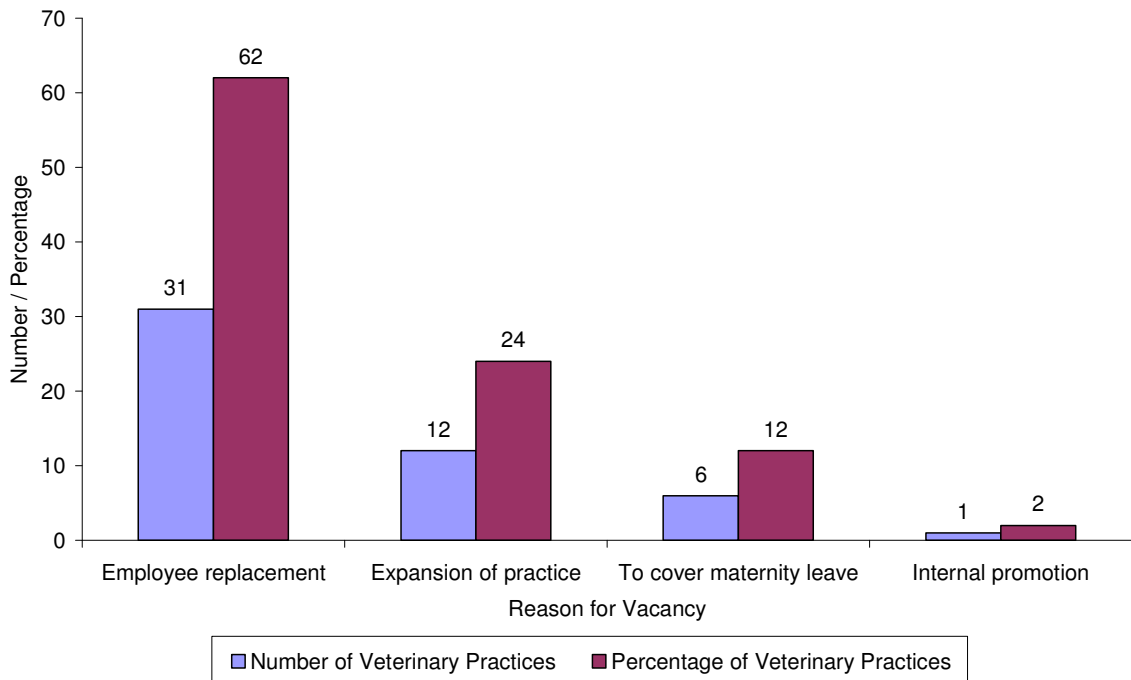
Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

Respondents were allowed to describe themselves in more than one way using the categories above, no definitions were used and respondents were allowed to classify themselves. Over three quarters of veterinary practices categorised themselves as 'small animal/companion practices', with 14% of veterinary practices reporting themselves as either 'mixed practice' or 'equine'. Some 12% of veterinary practices were 'hospital'.

### 3.2.4. Reason for QVN vacancy

The majority (62%) of veterinary practices stated that they were seeking to recruit a QVN to replace an employee that had left, and a further 12% were seeking a QVN to **cover** maternity leave. Some 24% of veterinary practices were seeking to recruit a QVN due to the expansion of the practice and only one practice (2%) stated they were recruiting due to internal promotion.

**Figure 3:** Reason for vacancy



Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

### 3.2.5. Advertising of the QVN vacancies

The surveyed veterinary practices were asked how many *Veterinary Times* advertisements they placed for the QVN position they had been seeking to recruit, and whether (and how many) they had placed any other advertisements for this position.

All practices interviewed had used the *Veterinary Times* to advertise their QVN (including registered veterinary nurses and Head Nurse) vacant positions. Typically practices had placed four advertisements with the *Veterinary Times*, which are usually bought in runs of four consecutive weeks from the *Veterinary Times*.

**Table 10:** Number of QVN advertisements in the *Veterinary Times*

Number of <i>Veterinary Times</i> advertisements placed for the QVN position	Number	Percentage
1	7	14%
2	9	18%
3	11	22%
4	20	40%
8	2	4.1%
Don't know	1	2.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

### Other recruitment sources used

Most (65%) of practices interviewed stated that they had not placed any other advertisements in other publications, the remainder had placed between 1-6 advertisements in other publications, when recruiting for the QVN position.

Those surveyed were also asked what recruitment routes they use generally. Word of mouth (someone pointing out the advertisement to others or just being aware that the practice was recruiting) at 63% and speculative applications at 37% were strong recruitment routes used by veterinary practices. The most commonly used advertising route (other than the *Veterinary Times*) was local papers at 43%.

**Table 11:** Number of QVN advertisements placed elsewhere - not in the *Veterinary Times*

Number of non- <i>Veterinary Times</i> advertisements placed for the QVN Position	Number	Percentage
0	33	65%
1	9	18%
2	4	8%
4	2	4%
6	1	2%
Don't know	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

**Table 12:** Advertising and recruitment routes used and considered most successful (multiple responses)

Advertising routes	Number of veterinary practices using route	Percentage of veterinary practices - used	Number of successful recruitments	Percentage of veterinary practices - led to successful recruitment
<i>Veterinary Times</i>	50	100%	25	50%
Word of mouth	31	63%	8	16%
Online agency	18	37%	1	2%
Speculative applications	18	37%	6	12%
Local papers	21	43%	3	6%
Other local advertising	3	6%	1	2%
Other specialist journals	11	22%	-	
Colleges	11	22%	2	4%
Practice website	4	8%	0	0%
Others	4	8%	4	8%
Don't know			1	2%
Not appointed (no route was successful)			9	18%

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

Despite all of the veterinary practices using the *Veterinary Times* to recruit QVNs, only 50% stated that this had proved a successful recruitment route - although this is a much higher percentage than for any other recruitment, with word of mouth at 16% being the next most successful recruitment route used.

## Response mechanisms used

Practices asked applicants to respond in a number of ways, typically applicants are asked either to post or email their CV, or, initially, telephone the practice.

During the review of *Veterinary Times* advertisements, the researchers noted confirmation of this but also highlighted a lack of clear instructions in some instances.

**Table 13:** Advertisement response mechanisms (multiple responses)

Method of response	Number of responses	Percentage of veterinary practices
Post CV	34	68%
Email CV	26	52%
Telephone	22	45%
Post practice application form	4	8%
Online practice application form	1	2%

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

### 3.2.6. Outcome of the QVN advertisement and QVN demand

Some 74% of those veterinary practices surveyed did report they had successfully filled the vacant position advertised in the *Veterinary Times*, of which 92% reported they had recruited a QVN to the position. Therefore, of the sample of veterinary practices, approximately two thirds had managed to fill the vacant position with a QVN. If looked at negatively, one third of veterinary practices reported they either hadn't filled the vacancy (26%) or had not managed to recruit a QVN to the vacant position.

Some 19% (9 of the 47 who could provide an answer) of veterinary practices had not recruited to a QVN position in the last two years (before the advertised position). On average, veterinary practices interviewed reported recruiting to between 1-2 QVN positions in the last two years, most of which had been to due to employee replacement rather than to a new QVN position (a 3:1 ratio).

#### Compensation and reasons why unable to recruit to vacant position

Of the three veterinary practices that had recruited but who had not been able to recruit a QVN, two had recruited a Level 2 student, and one had recruited an unqualified nurse. As a result these practices had to undertake the following compensation measures; the number in brackets shows how many of these practices provided this response:

- Rely on a locum (2)
- Increase the workload on existing QVN (1)
- Taken on another student (1).

For those 13 practices that had been unable to recruit to the vacant position they were asked why they thought they were unable to recruit a QVN, the following responses were given:

- Shortage of QVNs (10)
- Location (rural) (2)
- Don't want to move (2)
- Logistical/travel problems (1)
- 24-hour cover required (1)
- Expensive location (1)
- Applicants looking for part-time work only (1)
- Filled in internally so not needed (1).

*"There is not the quantity and quality of suitable staff available"*

*"...As a veterinary nurse myself, it doesn't pay enough once you reach a certain age, because there isn't a career path or pay grade progression"*

*"Merged with another practice in June last year and just haven't got enough QVNs to cover the surgeries"*

#### **Number and quality of applicants**

Just over a half of those surveyed reported receiving between 1-3 applicants for the vacant position, a further 22% reported receiving between 4-6 applicants, 8% between 8-11 applicants, with one veterinary practice reporting they had received 20 applicants. Some 8% did not have any applicants.

There clearly are low numbers of applicants applying for each QVN job advertised that was followed up in this survey at an average of only 3.4 per vacant position. This average reduces to only 2.7 per vacant position when it is restricted to QVN applicants.

**Table 14:** Number of applicants – total and QVNs

<b>Number of applicants</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage of veterinary practices</b>
0	4	8%
1-3	29	58%
4-6	11	22%
8-11	4	8%
20	1	2%
Don't know	1	2%
Average number of applicants = 3.4		
<b>Number of QVN applicants</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage of veterinary practices</b>
0	7	15%
1-3	28	56%
4-6	12	24%
8-11	2	4%
Don't know	1	2%
Average number of QVN applicants = 2.7		
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

Given the low level of applicants and when on average less than two QVNs are interviewed for each position it is perhaps surprising that three out of four veterinary practices have actually found the right person and filled the vacant position.

**Table 15:** Number of applicants interviewed – total and QVNs

<b>Number of applicants interviewed</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage of veterinary practices</b>
0	8	16%
1-3	35	70%
4-6	5	10%
8	1	2%
Don't Know	1	2%
Average number of applicants interviewed = 2.0		
<b>Number of QVN applicants interviewed</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage of veterinary practices</b>
0	11	22%
1-3	33	66%
4-6	4	8%
Don't Know	2	4%
Average number of QVN applicants interviewed = 1.7		
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

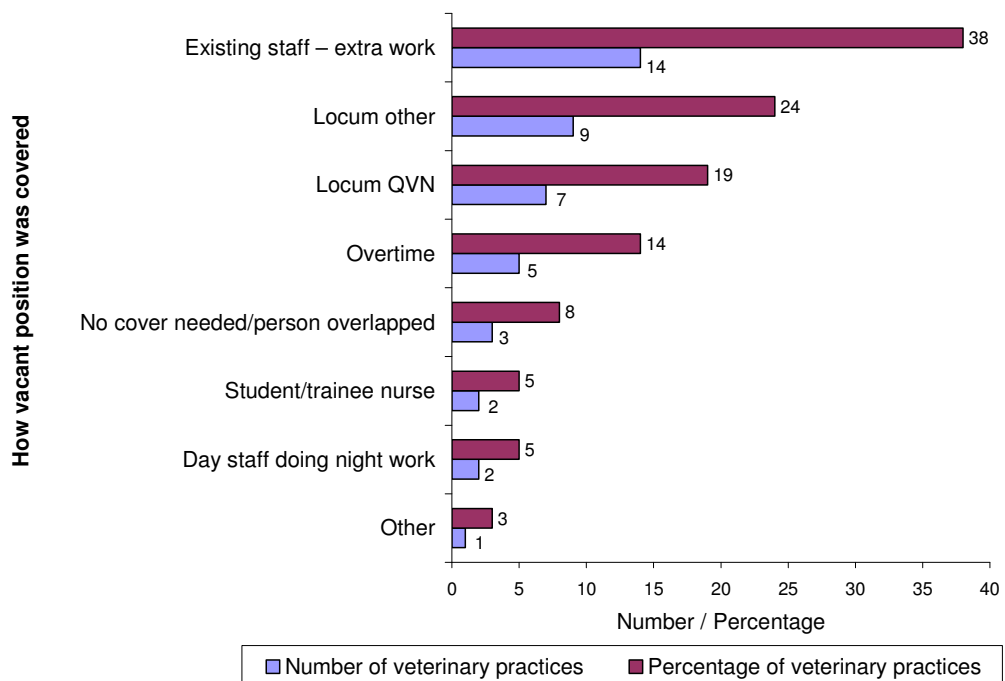
## Length of advertising to recruitment

Typically it was taking two months to recruit and positions were covered for a similar length of time. Some 10% of practices reported no cover period, these were either forward thinking or able to retain the departing QVN until a replacement was found (usually in cases of maternity leave). Some 16% of practices reported covering the vacant position for 2-4 months, 8% between 4-7 months and 6% between 8-10 months. Fourteen (28%) veterinary practices had been unable to recruit to the vacant position at the time of interviewing. Practices that had been unable to recruit had been covering the vacant position for an average of four months.

## How did the veterinary practice cover the vacancy?

The majority of veterinary practices that had managed to fill the vacancy had covered the position mainly through the use of locums and reliance on existing staff doing extra work. In a few cases no cover was required as there was no gap or overlap between staff leaving and the new staff being recruited. Of the practices that hadn't managed to recruit half reported (still) covering the vacant position using overtime to cover the work – either increasing the workload on existing QVNs or continuing to rely on locum availability. The categories in Table 19 have been created from verbatim responses with some categories having some potential overlap, e.g. existing staff doing extra work and overtime.

**Figure 4:** Vacant position cover (veterinary practices that had filled position only and multiple responses)



Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

The following are verbatim quotes that highlight how practices report covering vacant positions.

*"We covered it ourselves. We do employ a locum QVN to cover holidays, sickness at the branches... have been having to manage ourselves, not been able to take as much holiday"*

*"We all did extra shifts"      "Work was spread around existing staff"*

*"Covering with our student nurses"*

*"Wanted to replace two leaving staff but only had one applicant so we have taken on another student as well, so we have had to do additional work"*

### **Why the veterinary practice was seeking a QVN**

All veterinary practices interviewed were asked why they had been seeking to recruit a QVN. The table below shows their responses. Respondents' reasons have been coded from their verbatim responses.

Key reasons for seeking to recruit a QVN appear to maintain the mix between qualified and student or unqualified staff, that QVNs have the right skills and experience required, and that QVNs are required to do schedule 3 and other more skilled work within the practice.

*"We have a bunch of trainees which is all well and good but it's nice to have a qualified one for clinics and operations as better to have qualifications as they're on their own"*

*"To get the maximum things out of them – there are some things which we do where there is a legal requirement where we have to have a qualified person"*

*"We are no longer a training practice and so now prefer to have a qualified nurse as they have more advantages, as a training practice we found they were leaving and it is too time consuming and costly as a small practice to continue"*

*"Need to offer a professional service therefore they must be a QVN"*

**Table 16:** Why seeking a QVN (multiple responses)

How covered vacant position	Number of veterinary practices	Percentage of veterinary practices
One for one replacement/maintain mix	17	34%
QVNs have right skills and experience/do the job better	13	26%
Consulting and schedule 3 procedures/legal requirement	9	18%
Other individual reasons	9	18%
QVNs assessors/need assessors	8	16%
Don't want any more trainees	5	10%
Need relevant experience and qualifications to cover OOH/247 cover	4	8%
Need QVN to cover 'surgery' when veterinary on call/in-house locum	4	6%
Need QVNs to offer professional service	3	6%
To assist in surgical procedures/hospital/tier 2	3	6%
Good from client viewpoint	3	6%
Head nurse so must be QVN	2	4%
Pharmacy management	1	2%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>81</b>	

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

### 3.2.7. The recruitment selection and interview process

All veterinary practices that were surveyed were asked how they decide who to interview from the applicants they receive. It should be remembered that (Section 4.2.6) most practices receive very few applications per vacant QVN position, i.e. an average of less than three QVN applicants, thus many stated they 'selected' for interview all who had applied and had the necessary experience, skills and qualification (based on their CV). The main responses (coded from verbatim comments) as to how veterinary practices shortlist for interview are as follows:

- Based on work experience (30% of veterinary practices)
- Shortlist from CV (28% of veterinary practices)
- All who are qualified (26% of veterinary practices)
- Based on telephone interviews/conversations (20% of veterinary practices).

*"All who are qualified"*

*"Would normally interview everyone who was qualified but if there were so many applicants that we needed to do a sift then it would be based on experience"*

*"We look at experience and suitability to fit in with the existing people"*

*"We speak to them on the phone first, go through the basics of the job, if they are still interested we ask them to send in a CV and if they sound nice we invite them in"*

Other aspects that came into the selection process included more personal aspects such as whether or not it was felt that the applicant would fit in with the other practice staff and if they were living within the locality (these reflect some Head Nurses' views that changes in these circumstances can result in QVN's leaving).

The main **interview processes** the veterinary practices used (coded from verbatim responses) to interview and select candidates for the vacant position are as follows:

- Interviewed by principal/director (usually a veterinary) (22% of veterinary practices)
- Interview – sometimes informal (22% of veterinary practices)
- Interviewed by the head nurse and practice manager (14% of veterinary practices)
- Practice tour (12% of veterinary practices)
- Practice/training shift (12% of veterinary practices)
- Interview using a personnel panel (12% of veterinary practices).

Veterinary practices were asked separately whether or not they invite shortlisted applicants to spend time in the practice, the majority (80%) replied that they did do this, with the remainder saying they didn't.

*"I (head nurse) interview a candidate and shortlist for interview by one of the partner veterinaries, we see how they work and fit into the practice"*

*"The interview process is in two stages – the first consists of a two-person panel interview and then a half day working in the practice"*

*"They are brought into the practice for an informal interview and look around"*

### **3.2.8. Difficulties encountered during recent and past QVN recruitment**

Veterinary practices were asked to state from a list of difficulties (read out to them) which had applied to them, both in the recent recruitment being followed up and in any QVN recruitment activity during the last two years. Any other difficulties provided that weren't on the list have been coded from verbatim responses. A number of those interviewed stated that apart from this last recruitment they hadn't had to recruit a QVN in the last two years.

Given the low number of applicants that was previously noted in the survey findings, it is unsurprising to see that 'insufficient QVN applicants' is the main difficulty both in the recent recruitment being followed up (94% of veterinary practices) and during any recruitment activity in the last two years (74% of veterinary practices).

Other main difficulties that were spontaneously raised related to a lack of locally based applicants, applicants not wanting to work out of hours, personality issues, and level of salary offered.

*"Just a lack of QVNs in general, I don't know if it is just a problem in the South East"*  
*"A lot move on to absolutely different jobs such as human nursing and paramedics"*

**Table 17:** Difficulties encountered during this QVN recruitment process

Difficulties encountered	Recent recruitment		Last two years	
	Number of veterinary practices	Percentage of veterinary practices	Number of veterinary practices	Percentage of veterinary practices
<b>Insufficient QVN applicants</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>74%</b>
Lack of local applicants	38	76%	28	56%
<b>Lack of appropriate skills</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Lack of hands-on workplace experience</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20%</b>
Poor work ethic, attitude or motivation	13	26%	15	30%
Lack of personality/unlikely to fit in	23	46%	21	42%
Childcare/carer responsibilities	8	16%	9	18%
Inflexible in terms of hours will work	16	32%	16	32%
Don't want out of hours	24	48%	22	44%
Salary offer not high enough	17	34%	18	36%
Competition from other practices	16	32%	18	36%
Competition from alternative jobs	13	26%	17	34%
Others	1	2%	2	4%
No difficulties/not applicable			9	18%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>249</b>		<b>237</b>	

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

When the standard definitions (as used in the National Employer Skills Survey - NESS) are used to distinguish between veterinary practices stating they have stated skills shortage causes as opposed to hard to fill vacancies, all veterinary practices surveyed reported suffering from at least one of the skills shortage vacancy causes of 'insufficient QVN applicants', 'lack of appropriate skills', and 'lack of hands-on workplace experience' shown in bold in the table above during their most recent recruitment. The remaining difficulties are hard to fill vacancy causes that relate to terms and conditions, and non-skills issues.

It is not appropriate to draw direct comparisons of these survey findings with other data sets given the small sample, how it has been drawn for this survey, and differences in the way the question was asked across surveys. However for information, the most recent data from the NESS (2007) shows that skills shortage vacancies accounted for 29.2% of all vacancies across the Lantra sector, and hard to fill account for 46.8% of all vacancies.

### 3.2.9. Incentives used to attract and retain QVNs

Continuous professional development (CPD) and funded training are the two most frequently cited methods of attracting and retaining QVNs by those veterinary practices surveyed, followed by discounted pet care, and good work rotas. Competitive salary is used by approximately a quarter of those surveyed to attract QVNs and regular salary increases used by a similar percentage to retain QVN staff. The researchers noted that respondents found this question difficult to answer, indicating that these aspects are not necessarily front of mind despite the difficulties in attracting and retaining QVNs experienced by some practices.

*“Flexible working pattern, already doing emergency and critical care so can specialise; team working and encourage them to have their own specialist areas”*

*“Nothing, good facilities and a purpose built building”*

*“Pay membership fees”*

*“We pay as much as possible and QVNs are put on five weeks' holiday from the start where unqualified staff only get four weeks”*

*“We train assessors and also we allow them to specialise”*

*“They just love us and never leave” “We're nice to work for, we're lovely people”*

**Table 18:** Incentives used to attract and retain QVNs – unprompted

Incentives used	To attract QVNs		To retain QVNs	
	Number of veterinary practices	% of veterinary practices	Number of veterinary practices	% of veterinary practices
Continuous professional development	30	60%	26	55%
Additional qualification opportunities	7	14%	9	19%
Funded training/membership fees	19	38%	16	34%
Reward and bonus schemes	3	6%	4	8%
Healthcare – pet insurance	3	6%	-	-
Discounted pet care e.g. reduced costs of treatment/pet food	18	36%	18	38%
Pension	10	20%	6	13%
Accommodation	9	18%	5	11%
No out of hours	11	22%	5	11%
No on call/emergency work	7	14%	6	13%
Good work rotas	20	40%	17	36%
Regular reviews	2	4%	5	11%
Regular salary increases	9	18%	13	28%
Promotion opportunities	3	6%	5	11%
Specialisation opportunities	9	18%	9	19%
Travel costs to interview	4	8%		
Travel costs to work			2	4%
Competitive salary/ pay as much as can afford	11	22%	6	13%
Overtime rates	1	2%	1	2%
Flexibility of hours worked	2	4%	2	4%
Good holiday allowance	1	2%	1	2%
Good working environment/ nice workplace	4	8%	5	11%
Nice location	1	2%	2	4%
Friendly/family practice	3	6%	4	8%
New premises/equipment etc.	3	6%	1	2%
Expected to take responsibility/initiative	1	2%	2	4%
Good reputation as an employer	1	2%	1	2%
No incentives	3	6%	4	8%
Other	4	8%	3	6%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>199</b>		<b>179</b>	

Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

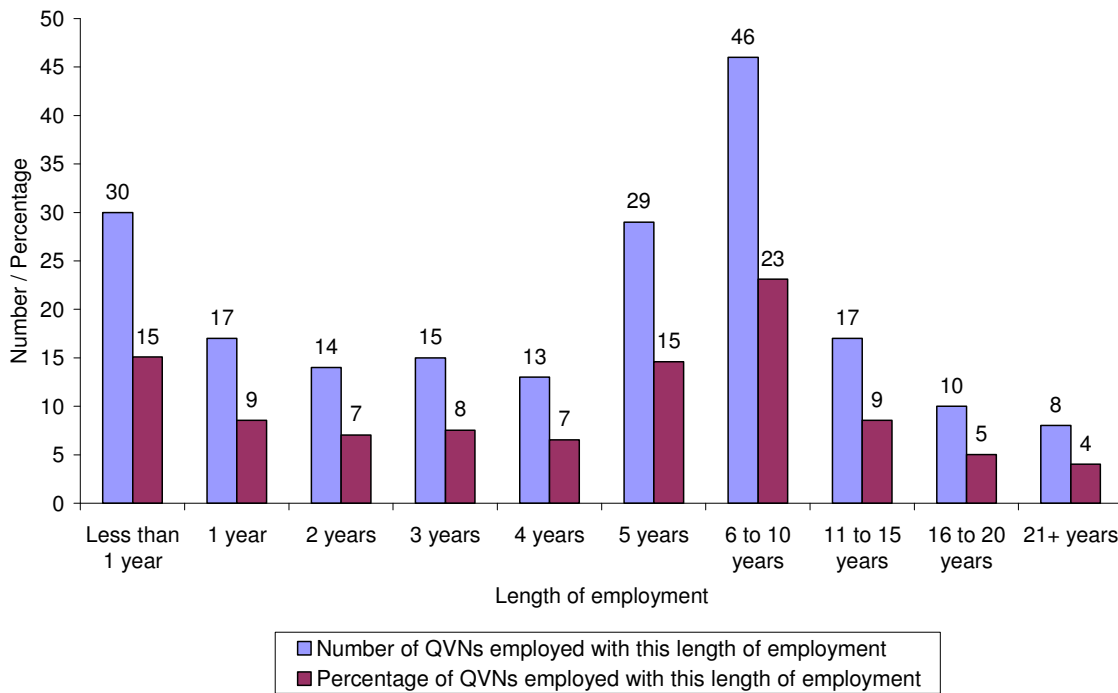
### 3.2.10. Staff retention

#### Length of employment - existing QVN staff

All interviewed were asked to provide the length of employment for up to seven QVNs that are currently employed by the veterinary practice. The responses have been combined to show the spread of QVN length of employment across all of the veterinary practices surveyed.

Surprisingly, the typical length of employment for a QVN appears to be between 5-10 years, with a substantial number of QVNs being reported as being employed with the same employer for more than 15 years. If this length of employment is typical across veterinary practices, it may be that there are some difficulties for newly qualified veterinary nurses to have opportunities for career progression.

**Figure 5:** Length of employment by QVNs employed



Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

### QVN reasons for leaving – veterinary practice views

Of the 47 veterinary practices that could answer, **40% do conduct exit interviews** with their staff when they leave the practice.

All interviewees, regardless of whether they conducted exit interviews or not, were asked to provide in their own words why they believed QVN staff left their practice. The responses were coded and the main reasons that were given are provided in Table 25. The most cited reason (36% of respondents) was 'career change' - that QVNs are leaving to pursue other careers either within animal care or outside of it. The next most cited reason was that it was due to the 'poor rates of pay' (26% of veterinary practices). In some cases there will be underlying issues leading to these actions e.g. disillusionment. Personal changes such as the need to relocate or maternity leave compound the 'loss' of QVNs.

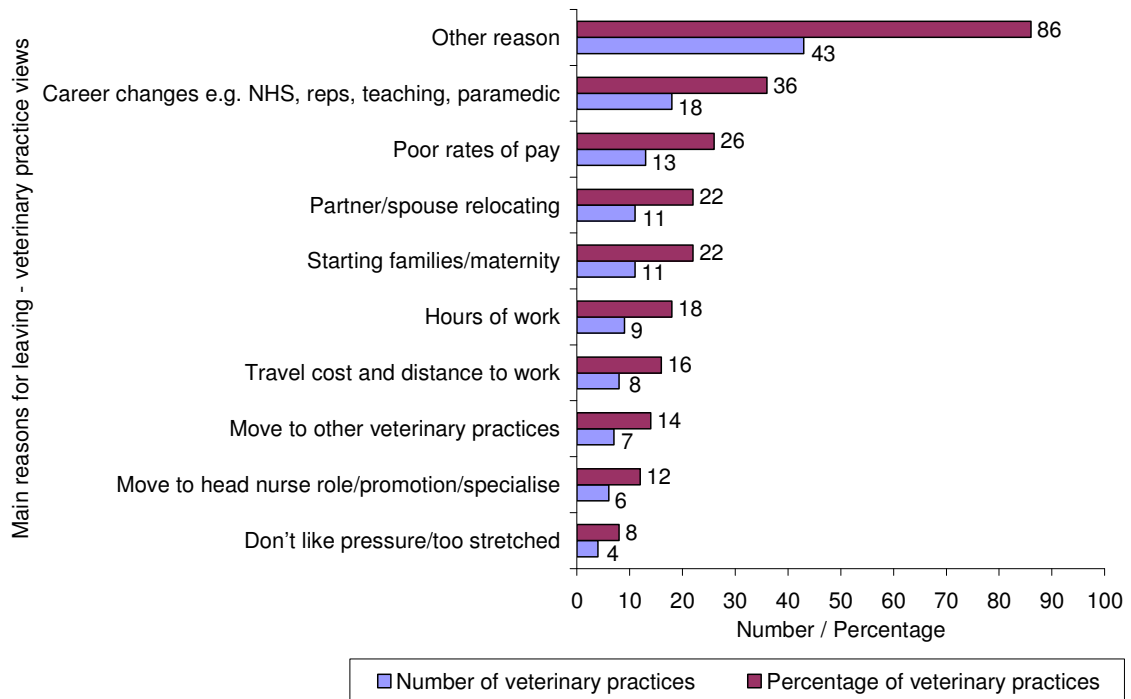
*"The last left to go into equine nursing and qualify in that; they just don't want to do the hours; or found jobs nearer to their homes – one went to a veterinary that had just set up on his own"*

*"...Pressure of the work they think they would like to do something different repping or go to another type of practice"*

*"They leave for a job with more money or to have a family and then they don't come back to it, or if they do they only want part-time work"*

*"Sometimes it's because they become disillusioned, long hours, low pay. Some leave because they want a bigger challenge and go to a referral centre"*

**Figure 6:** QVN main reasons for leaving – veterinary practice views



Source: Valued Research QVN Follow Up Survey, Feb-March 2007

### 3.2.11. Veterinary practice views on the ‘QVN recruitment marketplace’

Interviewees were asked a final set of questions to establish their general views of how the ease or difficulty in recruiting QVNs has changed in recent years, their views as to how it may change in the future, and any reasons lying behind these changes. Responses were captured verbatim and then coded into common categories (multiple responses were coded for each veterinary practice).

The main responses provided as to whether the level of difficulty in the recruitment of QVNs had changed in recent years reflect recent anecdotal information. They are as follows:

- It has become more difficult (58% of veterinary practices)
- About the same (18% of veterinary practices).

*“Seems to be fewer applying for positions... don’t know if this is due to poor retention or that not enough are being trained”*

*“Got more difficult as they are demanding more money”*

*“There has always been a shortage in Scotland; lack of wages as not paid a lot”*

*“Turnover has increased... there are insufficient qualified nurses and the graduate ones don’t have the experience”*

*“When I qualified in 2001 there was an influx of nurses (QVNs)...loads of people wanted to do the job but after a year they change their minds”*

*“Now they have to prove they can do the maths etc...they decide not to go for the qualifications...they don’t want to build their portfolios”*

*“Harder to get qualified staff as a lot of work is needed by them to the qualification”*

When asked how they saw the situation changing over the next 3-5 years, the main responses that were provided are distributed as follows:

- No change/continue to be difficult (32% of veterinary practices)
- Probably get worse (24% of veterinary practices)
- Hope it will improve/may be more being trained (20% of veterinary practices).

As well as views on how it has and is expected to change, veterinary practices also gave a number of views as to why this was the case when responding to the above questions. These views are given below along with those elicited when specifically asked why they believed there were difficulties in recruiting and retaining QVNs.

The veterinary practices' views on why there is difficulty recruiting and retaining QVNs and the factors causing it were explored with verbatim responses being categorised and coded to provide the following common themes:

- Pay is the main issue (too low) (at least 40% of veterinary practices)
- QVNs are not valued (33% of veterinary practices)
- Lack of (appropriate) QVNs due to the training reforms (26% of veterinary practices)
- Hours are the issue – too long (16% of veterinary practices)
- Lack of career opportunity (12% of veterinary practices)
- Hours are the issue – OOH (12% of veterinary practices)
- Older QVNs need more money (10% of veterinary practices)
- Issues due to being a training practice (8% of veterinary practices)

*“Our QVNs now have to do a lot of training, not just on-the-job training, in addition to their normal job”*

*“A lot go because of the workload in training practices that has been put on by the Royal College is increasing so I see a lot giving up being a training practice as it is hard to maintain the training practice status, so we end up with university trained QVNs with NO hands-on skills which means even more leave the sector when they get a job and find out what it is really like”*

*“Will probably get worse – can’t see the pay position improving”*

*“If we all continue to train at the current rate it should be OK, there are always girls who want to train”*

*“Not sure, depends on availability of training practices”*

*“It will get worse.... the preparation of portfolios is very expensive and time consuming”*

*“Will probably get harder as the younger people do not seem to have the same work ethic”*

Other views that came out as factors perceived to be creating difficulties in recruiting and retaining QVNs can be grouped into the following themes:

- Disillusionment
- Lack of trained QVNs – many state this is due to issues (bureaucracy, too much coursework, lack of training practices/providers etc.) and costs of training nurses
- Lack of training practices/more training opportunities required
- Head-hunting becomes an issue
- Poor retention of (newer) QVNs within the industry
- Doing unqualified nurse work – lay nurse work
- Childcare issues – costs and need for flexible working hours (especially in small practices).

Overall there appears to be a view that more QVNs are being trained via colleges rather than through their employers as more are reporting that veterinary practices are either reducing the number of trainees due to cost and time pressures, or are stopping because of the increasing requirements that have to be met, e.g. the veterinary practice doesn't have the scope or the volume of cases to be able to meet the training practice criteria or the QVN/assessor resource required.

## 4. Recommendations

### 1. Recruitment processes

The information contained in job adverts is lacking in many of the key points that may influence potential applicants in their decision whether to reply or not.

In the short term, Lantra should highlight these findings to the *Veterinary Times* and suggest a template for job advertisements which could be used to prompt employers about the type of information to include.

In the longer term, Lantra should work with veterinary professional organisations and employers to provide guidance on the recruitment process:

- content of advertisements
- correct job title and information on position to be filled
- interview process.

### 2. Job roles and qualifications

The review of job adverts revealed that confusion is present regarding the use of job titles and the position being advertised, as many adverts were aimed at different levels of staff, e.g. qualified veterinary nurse, student veterinary nurse and experienced 'nurse'. Lantra should:

- Ensure that the differentiation is considered during the review cycle of the VN National Occupational Standards
- Work with the RCVS to distinguish between the different levels of qualifications, working roles and job titles used in veterinary practice
- Work with the veterinary and veterinary nursing professional organisations to promote the differences and use of job titles.

### 3. Skills development and career progression for veterinary nurses

Lantra should continue to work with veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and the relevant professional organisations to identify opportunities for the skills development and career progression for veterinary nurses.

### 4. Benefits of training for the veterinary practice

It can be seen that the role of the veterinary nurse is valued in veterinary practice. Lantra should continue to:

- work with employers and the relevant professional organisations to promote the benefits of training and employment of veterinary nurses
- gather and promote examples of good practice in the training and assessment of student veterinary nurses and CPD for veterinary nurses.

**5. Veterinary nurses – employment search techniques**

Information has been gained through this project on how veterinary practices recruit veterinary nurses, but little information is available on the methods used by veterinary nurses when seeking employment and the factors that influence their selection of vacancies to apply for and positions to accept. Further research is recommended to investigate these factors fully.

**6. Retention of veterinary nurses**

The study uncovered very positive trends with regard to retention with two fifths of veterinary practices retaining qualified veterinary nurses for 5-10 years. Further research is recommended to investigate the factors that affect the retention of veterinary nurses within veterinary practices.

## Annex 1

### Overall advert analysis

**Table 1:** Overall analysis of QVN advertisements placed in every other edition of the *Veterinary Times* (22 Jan-31 Dec 2007)

Region	Number of recruiters	New adverts	Average new adverts per recruiter	% of New adverts by region	Recruiters % by region	Repeat adverts	Total adverts	Repeats % of total	Total adverts per recruiter
South East	145	230	1.6	22%		97	327	30%	2.3
South West	94	145	1.5	14%	14%	62	207	30%	2.2
North West	77	116	1.5	11%	12%	58	174	33%	2.3
East England	73	129	1.8	12%	11%	54	183	30%	2.5
London	66	119	1.8	11%	10%	42	161	26%	2.4
West Midlands	50	70	1.4	7%	8%	30	100	30%	2
Yorkshire and Humber	41	63	1.5	6%	6%	32	95	34%	2.3
Scotland	40	48	1.2	5%	6%	19	67	28%	1.7
East Midlands	36	63	1.8	6%	5%	35	98	36%	2.7
Wales	15	21	1.4	2%	2%	12	33	36%	2.2
North East	9	10	1.1	1%	1%	2	12	17%	1.3
N Ireland	4	5	1.3	0%	1%	4	9	44%	2.3
National (employment opportunities across the UK)	4	17	4.3	2%	1%	14	31	45%	7.8
Overseas	1	1	1	0%	0%		1	0%	1
Channel Isles	1	2	2	0%	0%	1	3	33%	3
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>1,501</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>2.3</b>

Source: Valued Research Ltd, *Veterinary Times* QVN Advertisements Analysis (Jan-Dec 2007)

## Annex 2

### Training practice or quality standard descriptions

4 Tier two	1
Accredited training practice	1
Advanced educational and clinical commitments	1
Approved training practice with IIP	1
Official training centre	1
RCVS	21
RCVS accredited and ATAC	1
RCVS Accredited Practice	8
RCVS practice standards Tier 2 practice	1
RCVS Tier 2 SA	2
RCVS Tier 2 status	1
RCVS Tier 2 training practice	2
RCVS Tier 3 accreditation and TP status	1
RCVS Tier 2 training practice	2
Registered training practice with own assessors	5
SA TP	1
SA2	1
Tier 3 Veterinary Hospital and TP	1
Tier 2	7
Tier 2 accredited	1
Tier 2 accredited and approved VN training centre	2
Tier 2 Certified Training Centre	1
Tier 2 practice	1
Tier 2 RCVS training practice	2
Tier 2 SA training practice	1
Tier 2 TP mixed practice	1
Tier 2 training practice	6
Tier 2 training practice, IIP	1
Tier 2 VN training practice	1
Tier 3	1
Tier 3 hospital	3
TP and RCVS accredited	3
TP and Tier 2 practice	1
TP and Tier 3 practice	7
Training practice	87
Training practice with emphasis on practical training	1
VNTC, Veterinaries Now	1
Unknown	859
Total	1039

Source: Valued Research Ltd, *Veterinary Times QVN Advertisements Analysis (Jan-Dec 2007)*

## Annex 3

### Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) 2006 data for SIC 85.2 veterinary activities

Country/English region	Workplace units	Percentage
England	3,700	85%
Wales	250	6%
Scotland	400	10%
North East	150	3%
North West	400	9%
Yorkshire and Humber	300	7%
East Midlands	300	6%
West Midlands	350	8%
East	500	12%
London	400	8%
South East	800	17%
South West	600	13%
Great Britain	4,300	100%

Source: ONS, ABI 2006

Note. Workplace Data Units, rounded to the nearest 100

## Annex 4

**Table 11:** Size of practices and balance of nursing staff by type

<b>Number full-time QVNs</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0	1	2%
1	7	14%
2	4	8%
3	10	20%
4	5	10%
5	9	18%
6	5	10%
7-8	4	8%
9-12	4	8%
55	1	2%
<b>Number of EQNs</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0	49	98%
2	1	2%
<b>Number part-time QVNs</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0	25	50%
1	8	16%
2	11	22%
3-4	2	4%
6-7	3	6%
12	1	2%
<b>Number of part-time EQNs</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0	50	100%
<b>Number student/trainee VNs</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0	11	22%
1	10	20%
2	10	20%
3-4	10	20%
5-6	5	10%
8-9	3	6%
15	1	2%
<b>Number unqualified nursing staff</b>	<b>Number of veterinary practices</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
0	17	34%
1	10	20%
2	12	24%
3-4	7	14%
5	1	2%
7	2	4%
12	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Annex 5

### Qualified Veterinary Nurses recruitment survey

#### INSERT FROM SAMPLE CONTACT DETAILS

Organisation ref number: (Code using VT Edition & ID Number)			
Vacancy Code (e.g. QVNO, QVNT, QVNNA, QVNE)			
Respondent's Name			
Organisation Name			
Respondent's Job Title & Role within the Practice			
Address:			
Town:		Postcode:	
Region:			
Telephone No:		Interviewer:	

#### Introduction

*Provide only in brief where you have already sent the respondent the letter of introduction.*

Lantra, in conjunction with the Professions Allied to Veterinary Science (PAVS) industry group, has commissioned Valued Research Ltd to follow up on the outcomes of a sample of adverts placed in the *Veterinary Times* by employers seeking Qualified Veterinary Nurses.

I would be most grateful if you could find the time to help us with this project by agreeing to take part in a telephone interview (about 20 minutes), as there is an anecdotal view across the industry that there is a shortage of qualified veterinary nurses available for recruitment (including equine veterinary nurses) on a regional and national basis. All information you provide will be treated in total confidence and the survey will adhere to the Market Research Society's code of conduct.

#### *Optional additional information to provide:*

Lantra will use the outcomes of this research to evidence future challenges faced by veterinary practices and the organisations working to support veterinary nursing. It will also be used to inform the veterinary world on the current situation regarding the availability of qualified veterinary nurses across the UK. In addition, it will also help the sector in developing shared career information/literature and recruitment plans.

Report will be available from Lantra spring /summer 2008 – Lantra website.

## Section 1 – Respondent Classification

1. How many people are employed in your organisation as a whole? (INCLUDE ALL TYPES OF WORKERS E.G. VETS, RECEPTIONISTS, ADMIN, NURSE)

Total number employed \_\_\_\_\_

At how many employment sites \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many people are employed in the following groups:

Total **full time QVNs** employed \_\_\_\_\_

Of these how many are Equine Vet Nurses: \_\_\_\_\_

Total **part time QVNs** employed \_\_\_\_\_

Of these how many are Equine Vet Nurses: \_\_\_\_\_

Total **student** or **trainee VNs** employed \_\_\_\_\_

Total **unqualified** nursing staff employed \_\_\_\_\_

3. How would you categorise this vet practice? MULTIPLE CODE

Small Animal / Companion 1

Exotic 2

Equine 3

Hospital 4

Referral 5

Mixed Practice 6

Other, *Write in*.....

4. Are you a Training Practice?

Yes (go to Q5) 1

No (go to Q6) 2

5. IF YES, how many STUDENT VETERINARY NURSES do you currently train and employ?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. CHECK AND WRITE in Town & County Where Vacancy Was Filled

\_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2 –Outcome of the Advertisement

7. Thinking of your QVN advertisement (INFORM RESPONDENT OF POSITION ADVERTISED AND THE DATE) what were the reasons for this vacancy?

- Expansion of the practice                    1
- Change of practice focus                    2
- Internal Promotion                            3
- Employee replacement                    4
- To cover Maternity Leave                    5
- Temporary Cover                              6
- If Temporary, why.....
- Other reason *Write in*.....

8. How many adverts, in total, did you place for this position?

\_\_\_\_\_ VT Adverts  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other Adverts

9. How many applicants did you get for this position? \_\_\_\_\_ Number

10. How many applicants did you get for this position that were QVNs? \_\_\_\_\_ Number

11. How many applicants were interviewed for this position? \_\_\_\_\_ Number

12. How many of those interviewed were actually QVNs? \_\_\_\_\_ Number

13. Did you manage to fill this vacancy?

- Yes (go to Q14)                    1
- No (go to Q20)                    2

14. How long did it take to recruit? (PROMPT IF NECESSARY - INITIAL ADVERTISEMENT DATE & THE START DATE)

\_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_ Weeks

15. How did you cover the work of the advertised position? PROBE WHO DID WHAT

16. How long did you cover this position for? \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_ Weeks

17. Did you recruit a **Qualified** VN?

- |     |                   |   |
|-----|-------------------|---|
| Yes | (go to Section 3) | 1 |
| No  | (go to Q18)       | 2 |

18. IF NO, who did you recruit?

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Animal Nurse Assistant (ANA)    | 1 |
| Veterinary Care Assistant (VCA) | 2 |
| Level 2 Student VN              | 3 |
| Level 3 Student VN              | 4 |
| Unqualified Nursing Staff       | 5 |

Other, *write in*.....

19. What have you had to do as a practice to compensate for not recruiting a **Qualified** VN?

(DISCUSS FULLY e.g. work load, additional training costs, specialist agency staff, restricted activity)

(Now go to Section 3)

20. ASK ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT FILLED THE VACANCY ADVERTISED (ALL NO AT Q13) Why do you think you were unable to fill this QVN vacancy with a (qualified) vet nurse? PROBE FULLY

21. ASK ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT FILLED THE VACANCY ADVERTISED (ALL NO AT Q13) How are you covering the work of the advertised position?

22. ASK ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE NOT FILLED THE VACANCY ADVERTISED (ALL NO AT Q13) How long have you been covering this position for? \_\_\_\_\_ Months

### Section 3 –Reason for Wanting QVN & Recruitment Mechanisms

23. Why were you specifically seeking a QVN? PROBE FULLY AND WHERE RELEVANT DISCUSS WHY AN ALTERNATIVE LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION/ EXPERIENCE WAS SUGGESTED IN THE ADVERTISEMENT – REASONS TO BE CODED AFTER INTERVIEWING

24. How many QVN positions have you recruited to in the last 2 years?

Write in total number: \_\_\_\_\_

*Of those:*

How many were replacement (excluding maternity cover)? \_\_\_\_\_

How many were new positions? \_\_\_\_\_

25. (A) What other advertising and recruitment routes do you use to fill your QVN positions? READ OUT AND TICK EACH THAT APPLIES

<b>Advertisement Route</b>	<b>Q25(A)</b>	<b>Q25(B)</b>	<b>Write in title/web address</b>
Word of mouth			
Agency – online			
Applicant calls in on spec / write in			
Local advertisements e.g. in shop window			
Local paper(s)			
Other specialist journals (not Vet Times)			
College(s)			
Practice website			
<i>Veterinary Times</i>	✓		
Other <i>write in</i>			
Don't Know			
Have not appointed			

Q25(B) Which route led to the successful appointment? TICK THE ONE THAT APPLIES ABOVE.

26. What method of response do you ask applicants to use when responding to your QVN advertisements? MULTIPLE CODE

- E-mail CV 1
- Post CV 2
- Online practice application form 3
- Post practice application form 4
- Telephone 5
- Other, *write in*.....

27. (A) How do you decide who to interview & what interview process do you use?

28. (B) Do you invite applicants to spend some time in the practice as part of the interview/selection process? Yes 1 No 2

29. Which of the following **difficulties** have you encountered during this specific recruitment activity? READ OUT ALL & CODE EACH YES OR NO

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Insufficient QVN applicants	1	1
Lack of local applicants	2	2
Lack of appropriate skills	3	3
Lack of hands on workplace experience	4	4
Poor work ethic, attitude or motivation	5	5
Lack of personality/ unlikely to fit in with	6	6
Childcare/Carer Responsibilities	7	7
Inflexible in terms of hours will work	8	8
Don't want Out of Hours	9	9
Salary offer not high enough	10	10
Competition from other practices	11	11
Competition from alternative jobs	12	12

PROBE for Other, *write in*.....

30. Thinking about the recruitment of QVNs as a whole, what problems, if any, have you encountered during the last 2 years? READ OUT ALL & CODE EACH YES OR NO

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Insufficient QVN applicants	1	1

Lack of local applicants	2	2
Lack of appropriate skills	3	3
Lack of hands on workplace experience	4	4
Poor work ethic, attitude or motivation	5	5
Lack of personality/ unlikely to fit in with	6	6
Childcare/Carer Responsibilities	7	7
Inflexible in terms of hours will work	8	8
Don't want Out of Hours	9	9
Salary offer not high enough	10	10
Competition from other practices	11	11
Competition from alternative jobs	12	12

PROBE for Other, *write in*.....

31. What incentives, if any, do you use to attract suitable QVN candidates to your practice? DO NOT READ OUT, CODE BELOW USING Q30 Attract BOXES

32. What do you do to retain your QVNs? DO NOT READ OUT, CODE BELOW USING Q31 Retain BOXES

	Q30 Attract	Q31 Retain
Continuous Professional Development	1	1
Additional Qualification Opportunities	2	2
Funded training	3	3
Reward & Bonus Schemes	4	4
Healthcare	5	5
Pet Insurance	6	6
Discounted Pet Care e.g. reduced costs of treatment/ pet food	7	7
Pension	8	8
Long weekends	9	9
Accommodation	10	10
No out of hours	11	11
No on call/emergency work	12	12
Good work rotas	13	13
Regular reviews	14	14
Regular salary increases	15	15
Promotion opportunities	16	16
Specialisation opportunities	17	17
Travel costs to interview	18	18
Travel costs to work	19	19

Other, *write in*.....

33. How long have your current QVNs (INCLUDING RESPONDENT IF QVN) been with the practice? RECORD ANY COMMENTS MADE WHILE RESPONDING TO THIS QUESTION

	1st QVN	2 <sup>nd</sup> QVN	3 <sup>rd</sup> QVN	4 <sup>th</sup> QVN	5 <sup>th</sup> QVN	6 <sup>th</sup> QVN	7 <sup>th</sup> QVN
Years							
Months							

34. Do you conduct exit interviews when a QVN leaves?                      Yes    1                      No    2

35. What are/what do you think are the main reasons for staff leaving? PROBE

36. In your experience how has the ease or difficulty of recruiting QVNs changed in recent years?  
PROBE WHY

37. How do you see this changing in the next 3-5 years? PROBE

38. As you may have heard, some practices believe that there are difficulties in recruiting and retaining nursing staff, in particular the QVNs. What are your views on this and what factors do you think are causing this? PROBE FULLY - RESPONSES TO BE CODED AFTER INTERVIEWING

39. Lantra may be carrying out some more consultative interviews to create some case studies. Would you be willing to be contacted again by Lantra or an organisation working on their behalf for this purpose?

Yes 1                      No 2

THANK & CLOSE

TIME TAKEN TO INTERVIEW \_\_\_\_\_ MINS

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## Lantra

Lantra is the Sector Skills Council supporting skills, training and workforce development for businesses in the environmental and land-based sector. We are committed to helping everyone access the training, qualifications, skills and knowledge they need for business success and to develop their career.

We are an independent, UK-wide organisation that is owned and managed by our industries, which are grouped around land management and production, animal health and welfare and environmental industries.

We lead the way in understanding our industries' future skills and business needs. We work together with trade organisations, unions, training providers, governments and many more to maximise investment in skills.

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