

## **STEM Ambassador - Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons – Veterinary Nursing**

Hi, my name is Racheal Marshall I have been a Registered Veterinary Nurse for almost 20 years, I work for Vets Now an Out of Hours provider where my role is Head of Clinical Nursing which involves advancing the veterinary nursing standards across the company.

I am the past chair of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Veterinary Nurse Council, and part of an RCVS project to promote veterinary nursing as a career.

**What animals do you handle and work with?**

Most veterinary nurses work in small animal practice working with family pets: dogs, cats, rabbits etc however you can see all sorts of animals. Nurses can also specialise in areas such as: farm animals, horses, exotics (reptiles & birds), zoo animals, wildlife.

**What grades are required for a veterinary nurse course? How many GCSEs do I need to qualify for this course? What GCSE courses would be most appropriate for this course?**

A minimum of 5 GCSEs at grade C/level 4 and above, including Maths, English & Science are required for a further education (FE) qualification. There are also several higher education (HE) qualifications available which require A-Levels usually including biology at grade C.

Both the FE and HE routes are accredited by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) meaning that on completion of the qualifications you can apply to join the RCVS Register of Veterinary Nurses.

**How did you decide what industry to work in?**

I was always interested in working with animals, I originally did a degree in agriculture, but I graduated during the BSE crisis which changed British agriculture resulting in less jobs being available. At this point I looked around for different careers and discovered veterinary nursing, which had not come up as an option when I had been looking at careers working with animals whilst at school.

**What is the best industry/field to go into currently?**

Veterinary nursing has undergone a lot of change in the last 20 years and is still progressing, there are many different fields which you can now go into in clinical work such as referral centres or working in charities for example the PDSA. There are also many options outside of clinical work, veterinary nurses work in education, for drug companies, in the insurance industry, in research, leadership roles, practice management, own their own practices, run their own businesses. There are such a lot of opportunities that it depends on what your specific are of interests are, for my own career I always preferred clinical work, I briefly moved into education but soon went back to clinical work and whilst I very rarely now do clinical work I am in a leadership position which looks after the clinical nursing standards of the company that I work for.

**How are you dealing with Covid 19? How has the outbreak affected your job or the companies you work with?**

Covid 19 had a big impact on veterinary practices, especially during the first lockdown when only essential work could be carried out, this meant that only sick animals could be seen and all preventative work such as vaccinations and neutering had to be cancelled. In some practices staff were furloughed because of the reduced workload during the initial lockdown.

The majority of nurses are now back at work however they have not gone back to normal, a lot of practices are still trying to catch up on the work which was cancelled during the lockdown and there has also been an increase in demand with a lot of people deciding to purchase pets during the pandemic.

The way we work has also changed, it is not possible to maintain social distancing within practices especially for veterinary nurses and veterinary surgeons who have to work very closely together, therefore a lot of staff are having to wear PPE – mask, aprons, gloves & visors, which can make working difficult. Many practices are also not letting clients into the building to reduce the risk to their staff.

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons have had to produce guidance for the veterinary professions on how to follow government Covid guidelines whilst ensuring that animal welfare is protected.

Some practices did struggle at the start of the pandemic due to reduced incomes however the majority are now reporting that income has recovered.

How long is a shift? Have they differed between the jobs you've had?

This varies depending on the practice or the sector of the profession which you work in. All veterinary practices have to provide 24 hour cover, in my first practice I used to work 8 hour shifts and because they did their own 'out of hours' I worked a share of weekends and bank holidays, plus some on call should there be an emergency out of hours where the vet needed assistance. I then moved to an 'out of hours' provider where we would cover the out of hours for a group of practices, this meant that we worked nights, weekends and bank holidays, I worked 3 x 15 hour night shifts per week.

What personality traits do you look for in a successful candidate?

The traits which I look for are friendliness, enthusiasm and willingness to learn.

Do you have to wear a uniform? Has this differed between the jobs you've had?

In clinical work, yes, traditionally veterinary nurses wore green, now a lot of practices have their own uniform which can be varying colours but usually involves trousers and a tunic top, or scrub suit.

What equipment do you use? Has this differed between the jobs you've had?

Veterinary nurses use a lot of clinical equipment, the equipment does vary between practices depending upon the type of work that they do, most practices have the following equipment:

- Laboratory equipment – practices have laboratory analysers and microscopes which nurses use to analyse samples including blood, urine & hair/fur
- Monitoring equipment – nurses use monitoring equipment to measure blood pressure, oxygen saturation, heart rate and rhythm
- Imaging – xray machines, ultrasound scanners, referral hospitals may also have CT or MRI scanners
- Infusion pumps are used by nurses to administer intravenous fluids (drips) and blood transfusions at the correct rate
- Anaesthesia – nurses use anaesthetic machines during operations and procedures to keep patients anaesthetised

What qualifications do you need to gain employment in the industry sector you specialise in? Do specific subjects help?

To work as a veterinary nurse, you need to be on the RCVS Register of Veterinary Nurses, to be able to apply to enter the register you must have completed an accredited FE or HE qualification. The list of institutions which offer accredited course can be found here [Further Education](#), [Higher Education](#)

What is the minimum wage for someone starting in the industry you specialise in? What is the average salary?

Salaries tend to start at £18,000 - £21,000 and mostly increase with experience, additional qualifications and specific role. The average salary is around £25,000.

How do you find veterinary apprenticeships? How many hours is training/academic work? How much is the starting salary for an apprentice?

Apprenticeships are available for the FE route, this requires having a job in a practice which is a registered as a training practice with the RCVS, a list of training practices can be found [here](#). Typically working a 40-hour week, with one day per week at college doing academic work, a minimum of 1,800 hours placement training must be completed.

What opportunities do you know of that veterinary organisations provide for young people? Do they offer virtual work experience?

A lot of veterinary practices offer work experience opportunities as most veterinary nursing courses ask for at least two weeks work experience. I am not aware of any practice currently offering virtual work experience although I do know that a few are looking into whether this could be an option. If you are looking for work experience my advice would be to email your local practices explaining why you want to see practice.

Can you be over qualified for a job?

No I don't think so, when I was looking for a student nurse position I did get told at one interview that I was over qualified as I already had a degree, but I have now been a veterinary nurse for almost 20 years.

What do you look for in a successful job application?

Apart from having the necessary qualifications/grades and experience where appropriate, I look for it to be tailored to the position being applied for, I see a lot of covering letters and CVs and those which have been tailored for the job stand out. Using the job description to tailor the application makes you more likely to get offered an interview.

Is having top grades and no work experience better or worse than having mediocre grades and lots of work experience?

If the grades are sufficient having more work experience is better than having higher grades. When looking for work experience to become a veterinary nurse it doesn't just have to be in a veterinary practice it is a good idea to have a wide range, other work experience can include: kennels/catteries, livery yards/stables, farms, pet shops.

### **Sources of information on veterinary nursing**

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons – [I want to be a veterinary nurse, career case studies](#)

British Veterinary Nursing Association – [Veterinary nursing career advice](#)