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## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2010**





## Introduction

The primary functions of the Veterinary Council, as specified by the Veterinary Practice Act 2005, are the regulation and management of the veterinary professions in Ireland. These functions are exercised in the public interest for the purpose of safeguarding animal health and promoting animal welfare. In order that its role may be effectively fulfilled, it is essential that channels of communication be maintained between the Veterinary Council and all those stakeholders with an interest in the veterinary professions.

This year, in addition to eight full council meetings and numerous committee meetings, meetings were held with representatives of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, the Veterinary Defence Society, the Health & Safety Authority, the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland, the Competition Authority, Animal Health Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food. These meetings were very useful; the Veterinary Council must remain abreast of current developments affecting the professions so that decisions are made on an informed basis.

The Veterinary Council had a stand at the UCD Veterinary Hospital open day at which staff and members of Council were present to meet with veterinary practitioners and nurses. The main topic of discussion was the upcoming mandatory Continuing Veterinary Education (CVE) scheme. It proved a useful forum to deal with specific individual queries. The CVE regulations received Ministerial consent this year, paving the way for the introduction of the mandatory scheme from 2012 onwards.

In February, Council members met with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Food to advise him of the Council's misgivings about Schedule 8 of the Animal Remedies Regulations, 2007. The regulation of veterinary paraprofessionals was also discussed. A document was circulated to all members of the profession stating the ethical responsibilities of registered veterinary practitioners (RVPs) operating under Schedule 8. The Council also circulated a document with animal welfare guidelines for managing acutely injured livestock on farm to all RVPs.

In practical terms, updating the office computer system this year helped to facilitate the flow of information to and from 53 Lansdowne Road. Information on the Veterinary Council became more easily accessible to veterinary practitioners and nurses as well as members of the public. In terms of communication, more important than the most sophisticated IT system, the Council is very fortunate to have such dedicated, courteous and hard-working staff. They remain cheerfully unflappable at all times!

This year, the freehold of 53 Lansdowne Road was purchased from the estate of the Earl of Pembroke. The Council contributed €10,000 to the Veterinary Assistance Programme which was launched in July. Funding was also provided to help set up a course of education for provisionally-registered veterinary nurses.

In fulfilment of its disciplinary responsibilities, the Veterinary Council had a busy year in 2010. A total of six practitioners appeared before the Fitness to Practise Committee - there were no findings of professional misconduct. The first four year cycle of the Practice Accreditation Scheme concluded at the end of the year. A visitation was conducted to review the programme of Veterinary Medicine education at UCD.



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Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Deirdre Campion who departed from the Council this year. Deirdre's commitment and contribution, particularly at the Veterinary Education & Training Committee, are greatly appreciated.

Lindy Vaughan  
President



The Council comprises 19 members, 10 of whom are elected from amongst the profession and 9 who are appointed. L Vaughan was elected President on 21 January 2010 and S Ó Laoide was elected Deputy President on 21 January 2010. They hold these positions until 31 December 2011.

**Elected Members: Elected Until 31 December**

W Cashman	2011
J Cassidy	2011
J Collins	2013
D Connolly	2011
T Hanley	2013
S Ó Laoide	2013
M O'Donoghue	2013
M Osborne	2013
P J Talty	2011
L Vaughan	2013

Appointed Members: (Period of Appointment Expires on 31 December 2013)

**Appointed by the Minister for Agriculture and Food:**

- B Bent
- D MacFadden
- G Mulcahy (NUI nominee)
- F Mulligan (NUI nominee)
- J O'Rourke
- M O'Sullivan (Food Safety Authority nominee)
- S Quinn
- P Rogan
- F Smith (Minister for Education & Science nominee)



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**Statutory Committees of Council:**

**Veterinary Education and Training Committee (VETC)**

D Champion, J Cassidy, J Collins, T Hanley (Chair), G Mulcahy, F Mulligan, M O'Donoghue, F Smith and PJ Talty

**Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC)**

B Bent, D Connolly, D MacFadden and PJ Talty

**Fitness to Practise Committee (FTPC)**

T Hanley, G Mulcahy, F Mulligan, S Murphy (Independent Chair), M O'Sullivan, M Osborne and S Quinn

**Other Committees:**

**Finance Committee**

D Connolly, S Ó Laoide (Chair) and L Vaughan

**Legislation and Ethics Committee (LEC)**

B Bent, J Cassidy, D MacFadden, F Mulligan, S Ó Laoide, M Osborne (Chair), J O'Rourke, M O'Sullivan and P Rogan

**Practice Premises Committee (PPC)**

W Cashman, D Connolly (Chair), T Hanley, M O'Donoghue, F O'Leary, J O'Rourke, M Osborne and S Quinn

**Veterinary Liaison Committee (VLC)**

B Bent, W Cashman (Chair), J Collins, M O'Sullivan and S Quinn

**Conjoint Committee**

S Ó Laoide (Chair), P Talty

J Collins, F Murphy, P Nowlan – Veterinary Ireland

M Lyons – Veterinary Officers Association



## The Register

The Register of Veterinary Practitioners was established on 29 June 2006 pursuant to section 43 (2) of the Veterinary Practice Act 2005. The Register is published on the Council's website. The total number of registered veterinary practitioners on the Register at 31 December 2010 was 2457. New registrations for the year amounted to 105. 137 voluntary removed their name, 20 were erased and 18 deaths were notified to Council in the year. Restorations following voluntary removal amounted to 28 and 10 names were restored following erasure.

## Obituaries

It is with regret that the Council records the deaths of the following registered members notified to it during the year. Council extends the sympathy of its members and of the profession to their families.

Berry, JP	Brennan, M	Cooney, JJ
Galvin, TA	Greal, MJ	Keating, J
Kirby, MA	MacInerney, JF	Maher, KJ
Marsh, J	McAuley, B	McKeever, SA
O'Neill, CP	O'Hanlon, T	Quilter, T
Rogers, C	Sheehan, JC	Vaughan, JJ



## Committee Reports

### Finance Committee

*Membership of Committee – listed in another section of the Report*

The Committee met on 3 occasions during the year and in early 2011 to consider the audited accounts for 2010. Apart from reviewing the quarterly management accounts prepared for Council the Committee also considered fee and funding queries and dealt with the financing requirements for renovations to the Council building and for the purchase of the freehold of the building.

The Veterinary Council's audited accounts for 2010 are appended to this Report. The 2010 figures show that income amounted to €1,308,167 and expenditure amounted to €742,826. Two significant increases in expenditure during the year related to the ongoing PAS visits and the legal expenses associated with Fitness to Practise inquiries. The Balance Sheet reflects significant investment in the Council building and IT infrastructure in 2010.

The Veterinary Council's Education Trust Fund audited accounts for 2010 are also appended to this Report.

### Preliminary Investigation Committee

*Membership of Committee – listed in another section of the Report*

The Council received 18 applications in 2010 for inquiries into fitness to practise under section 76 of the Veterinary Practice Act 2005. This number is less than 2009 and more in line with previous years, there had been 17 applications in 2007 and 11 applications in 2008 and 33 applications in 2009. The Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) met on 12 occasions in 2010 and dealt with 12 of these cases in total. Three cases did not proceed as the veterinary practitioner was not named and the remaining cases are ongoing. The subject of these cases concerned dogs (8), cats (1), dog and cat (1), breaches of CPC (1) and false statements (1). More specifically the allegations made by complainants related to misdiagnosis by practitioner (3), post operative complications (3), poor practice procedures (4), inadequate emergency consultation (1) and mismanagement of labour (1). Six of the animals treated were died or were euthanised.

None of these cases were referred to the Fitness to Practise Committee for inquiry. In all cases considered, the Committee concluded that there was insufficient evidence to recommend that the complaints be referred to the Fitness to Practise Committee for inquiry and these recommendations were accepted by Council.

The Committee makes the following points by way of assistance to practitioners in order to minimise the possibility of complaints being made to the Council:

It is important that -

- (1) Clients are properly apprised of all risks and costs involved in any suggested procedures and that such advice should be recorded;
- (2) Clients are informed clearly concerning **their** role and responsibilities after the surgery/procedures have been carried out i.e that they are clear on any warning signs etc to look out for and that it is **their** responsibility to follow up and return to the practitioner. Any such advice should be recorded;
- (3) Practices have a protocol in place to deal quickly with any complaints which do arise;



(4) Good communication skills at all levels in the practice are vital to minimise complaints. 'Understand bereavement' skills by practice staff could be helpful.

(5) Practices have in place a mechanism to identify and deal with vulnerable clients who bring their animals in for treatment e.g the elderly, people living alone or those that appear to be particularly attached to their animals.

### **Fitness to Practise Committee**

*Membership of Committee – listed in another section of the Report*

Three inquiries were held in front of the Fitness to Practise Committee (FTPC) in 2010. Five members of the FTPC sit to hear an inquiry, the five people are (i) two registered persons who are members of Council, (ii) two non registered persons who are members of Council and (iii) an independent chair who is a practising solicitor and nominated by the Law Society. The three inquiries were held in private. The standard of proof required in each case was the criminal standard i.e. beyond reasonable doubt.

The first inquiry was spread over six days. This inquiry related to four veterinary practitioners who were accused of animal welfare violations in relation to a mass slaughter of animals on a farm in 2002. The FTPC having heard all the evidence ruled that there was no evidence of professional misconduct by any of the veterinary practitioners and therefore that no sanction should be applied to any of the four veterinary practitioners. This decision was reported to the Veterinary Council.

The second inquiry concerned one veterinary practitioner who had supplied vaccination certificates for a litter of puppies which had been subsequently exported to the UK. The complaint centred around the fact that one of the vaccination certificates had not be fully completed and therefore could not be identified as belonging to the puppy with which it travelled. The FTPC considered the evidence put before it by the Registrar and ruled that there was no evidence of professional misconduct by the veterinary practitioner and that no sanction should be applied to the veterinary practitioner. The Committee did make a number of recommendations to the Council concerning vaccination certificates for companion animals. The decision and recommendations were reported to the Council.

The third inquiry held during 2010 related to a veterinary practitioner who it was alleged had possessed or imported or administered one or more animal remedies without making any or any adequate inquiries as to their provenance. Following consideration of the evidence the FTPC concluded that whilst the evidence fell short of professional misconduct by the veterinary practitioner it suggested that the Council consider imposing a sanction. This decision was reported to the Council. The Council decided not to issue a warning to the veterinary practitioner.





## **Legislation and Ethics Committee**

*Membership of Committee – listed in another section of the Report*

The Legislation and Ethics Committee (LEC) met on 4 occasions in 2010. Ms M Osborne was elected chair of the Committee. Ms Osborne indicated that the Committee would take time over the coming meetings to discuss the wider issue of ethical behaviour and what this should mean to the profession. The Committee continued to respond to queries concerning both codes of professional conduct. It was clear from these queries that some veterinary practitioners had not read the updated code particularly in relation to the less onerous approach taken to marketing of veterinary services. Both codes are printed in the annual register publication and can be viewed on the Council's website.

Support by members of the profession to new graduates was an issue of concern which was discussed in some detail. Whilst some members of the profession provide excellent support to new graduates there were still cases where unrealistic expectations were expected from these graduates that leads to stress and disillusionment. The Code of Professional Conduct requires veterinary practitioners to support and encourage new graduates.

The Committee is working with relevant stakeholders to agree the minimum information required on a vaccination certificate for companion animals which would satisfy (i) the expectation of clients that such certificates can be relied on as a record of vaccinations and (ii) the requirements of the twelve principles of certification as printed in the Code to Professional Conduct of Veterinary Practitioners. Committee discussion on this issue reiterated that certification is a vital aspect of a veterinary practitioner's work and that adherence to the twelve principles is essential to maintain the highest standards.

## **Veterinary Education and Training Committee (VETC)**

*Membership of Committee – listed in another section of the Report*

The Veterinary Education and Training Committee (VETC) met on 6 occasions in 2010. The three sub-committees which cover Continuing Veterinary Education; Registration; and Veterinary Nursing meet between meetings and report to the main committee. The VETC reports to Council where its decisions are ratified.

Continuing Veterinary Education (CVE). Mandatory CVE requirements for re-registration in 1 January 2012, as allowed for in section 66 (4) of the Veterinary Practice Act 2005, requires that both veterinary practitioners and veterinary nurses have achieved the requisite number of credits in the credit year 1 August 2010 to 31 July 2011. The regulations covering CVE were agreed by the Minister in accordance with section 66 of the Veterinary Practice Act 2005. The volume of queries concerning the eligibility of courses or activities for CVE credit increased substantially during the year indicating that the profession is aware of its obligations. Members of the VETC attended the UCD Hospital Day in August in order to answer the profession's questions on this subject.

Registration. The number of new registrations dropped during the year as the economic situation in the country affected employment. A small number of registration queries from veterinary practitioners and veterinary nurses with qualifications from countries outside the EU and other States with which the Council does not have mutual recognition agreements were dealt with. Four



candidates sat the registration examination, one person passed, one person passed having repeated one subject and two candidates failed the practical examinations.

Veterinary Nursing. There are currently 5 colleges in the State which provide veterinary nursing education which is approved by the Council. The RCVS has had talks with the committee with a view to exploring joint accreditation of colleges with veterinary nursing courses near the border. Joint accreditation would mean that students from these courses could get work experience on either side of the border without committing an offence. St John's College, Cork has been contracted to provide the course for provisionally registered nurses to enable them to join to full veterinary nursing register by the 31 December 2012 when the provisional registration category will cease. The majority of this course is provided on-line on a modular basis with the minimum requirement for candidates to travel for classes and assessments.

The Council appointed a panel of experts to conduct a joint visitation with EAEVE to access the MVB degree in UCD. The panel of 6 experts visited the university over 5 days in October and will produce a report for consideration by the Council in early 2011.

The EU Directive concerning the mutual recognition of professional qualifications is being reviewed by the European Commission with a view to making changes which should come into effect in 2012. The Council has participated in this review process and has made submissions to the relevant EU directorate.

### **Practice Premises Committee**

*Membership of Committee – listed in another section of the Report*

The number of premises registered with the Veterinary Council by the end of 2010 was 634. There were 19 new registrations in 2010. All practices had been notified of their inspection and only 5 inspections did not take place for various reasons. Random visitations began in 2010 to audit close out conformances. The procedure is that Certificate of Suitability (COS) holders notify in writing (self certification) when they have completed the tasks agreed at the assessment and within the time limits specified.

The committee met on three occasions. A review of the various standards was initiated in March to be finalised by May 2010 in preparation for the next phase of the scheme beginning in 2011. This review was informed by meeting with Veterinary Ireland, feedback from the administration and the assessors and a questionnaire from the users (practices that had been inspected). The next Certificate of Suitability would be valid for two years until the end of 2012. Following a meeting with the Irish Medicine Board more emphasis would be placed on pharmacovigilance in the standards. Introductory meetings took place during the year with both the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority. Concerns were expressed regarding the possibility of duplicity of actions by differing statutory bodies all charging fees. Closer cooperation between the statutory bodies was desirable and further contacts were to take place.

As the four period 2006-2010 was coming to an end the contracts for the current assessors came to an end. The panel of assessors delivered a remarkable performance considering their start up time of May 2008. A new recruitment process would begin in 2011.



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### **Veterinary Liaison Committee**

*Membership of Committee – listed in another section of the Report*

Para professionals & Schedule 8. Both of these issues were raised directly with the Minister for Agriculture and Food in January 2010, where the role of the Council as a statutory body whose broad based expertise in animal health, welfare and public health provides a foundation for legislation in these areas.

### **Conjoint Committee**

*Membership of Committee – listed in another section of the Report*

The Conjoint Committee concentrates on addressing national and European veterinary matters and draws its membership from the Council, Veterinary Ireland and the Veterinary Officers Association.

The committee held three meetings during the year. P Talty, S O’Laoide and V Beatty attended the two FVE General Assembly meetings in June and November 2010 representing the Veterinary Council. In addition, the general council meetings of Veterinary Ireland were attended by members of the Conjoint Committee as observers.

The committee as an inter organisation forum also discussed other matters during the year which included the following:

World Veterinary Year – the committee encouraged each constituent organisation to embrace the opportunity presenting by the designation of 2011 as World Veterinary Year to highlight the importance of the veterinary profession to Ireland;

Animal transport – a template presentation was developed for delivery at clinical society meetings addressing the issue of the certification of animals as fit for transport;

Acknowledged vet – the committee supports FVE efforts to develop an educational programme which would allow for the recognition of certain veterinary practitioners who have completed the programme as ‘acknowledged vets’ in their particular field.

VETERINARY COUNCIL OF IRELAND

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