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1 **Improving student engagement in veterinary business studies.**

2

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20 **Abstract**

21

22 In a densely packed veterinary curriculum, students may find it particularly
23 challenging to engage in the less overtly clinical subjects, yet pressure from
24 industry and an increasingly competitive employment market necessitate
25 improved veterinary student education in business and management skills. A
26 curriculum intervention (formative reflective assignment) is described that
27 optimises on workplace learning opportunities and aims to provide better
28 student scaffolding for their in-context business learning. Students were asked to
29 analyse a business practice they experienced during a period of extra-mural
30 studies (external work placement). Following return to the College, they were
31 then instructed to discuss their findings in their study group, and produce a
32 group reflection on their learning. In order to better understand student
33 engagement in this area, individual and group components of the assignment
34 were analysed. Thematic analysis revealed evidence of various depths of student
35 engagement, and provided indications of the behaviours they used to engage at
36 different levels. Interactive and social practices (discussing business strategies
37 with veterinary employees and student peers) appeared to facilitate student
38 engagement, assist the perception of relevance of these skills, and encourage
39 integration with other curriculum elements such as communication skills and
40 clinical problem-solving.

41

42 **Key words:** Workplace learning, veterinary business, social learning, reflection,
43 critical analysis, graduate attributes, formative reflective assignment.

44

45 **Introduction**

46

47 Within veterinary medical education, there is an increasing need for high quality
48 business education, and strategies to facilitate student engagement in this area.

49 The veterinary industries in the USA and the UK have experienced
50 unprecedented recent change. Graduates are entering an increasingly feminized
51 profession, with a resultant shift from a typically male to typically female
52 leadership style,^{1,2} and one where employment in corporate-owned (rather than
53 single veterinarian-owned or veterinary partnership) is increasingly the norm.³

54 As such, the owners of such practices tend to have improved knowledge of client
55 relations, resource optimisation and profit maximisation, and contemporary
56 veterinary employee is expected to balance animal care against the financial
57 performance of the practice.^{3,4} An increase in non-veterinarians working in
58 veterinary practices has occurred alongside other forces threatening to drive
59 down veterinary salaries (including feminization of the profession).⁵ Some
60 researchers in the USA have also proposed that increasing graduate numbers,
61 resulting in increased competition for graduate employment, may decrease
62 salaries to such an extent that salary income fails to outweigh students' financial
63 investment in their education. ⁶

64

65 These changes to the profession demonstrate the importance for veterinary
66 students to engage with business education, in order to enhance their
67 employability and justify a reasonable income. However, studies suggest there
68 remains a deficiency of business skills in veterinary graduates in both the USA⁷⁻⁹
69 and UK.¹⁰ Despite reports of a number of different curriculum interventions to

70 address this issue,^{11,12} recent evidence suggests there remains a large gap in the
71 business competencies of veterinary graduates compared to the expectations of
72 their employers.^{13,14} Business skills identified as being of particular relevance to
73 new graduates included weaknesses in their competence in communicating
74 about finances with clients and a lack of confidence in charging for veterinary
75 services.¹⁴ Business orientation, frequency of financial data review, employee
76 development, negotiating skills, client loyalty, leadership, client retention and
77 new client development have also been recognised as deficient.¹⁵

78

79 There are a number of challenges to implementing business teaching in the
80 veterinary curriculum. These are typified by highly intensive, content-laden
81 courses, with little space remaining for less overtly clinical competencies.^{16,17}
82 Some institutions have looked to solve this problem by adopting co-curricular
83 activities to provide at least some of their business teaching.^{12,17} However, this
84 reinforces the message that such content is optional and not core to the success
85 of the early career veterinary practitioner. The lack of perceived ability of many
86 veterinary faculty to support the development of business knowledge and skills
87 in their own teaching has led to business content being represented by discrete
88 focussed sessions inserted into the curriculum, frequently taught by non-clinical
89 faculty.^{18,19} Such an approach neglects integration in problem-solving, potentially
90 achieved by considering business-related information alongside clinical
91 decision-making, and encourages a surface learning approach.²⁰ Student
92 preferences for learning more overtly clinical material further challenges
93 engagement in deep learning. Improving the student experience of learning
94 veterinary business therefore needs to consider approaches for encouraging

95 student-centred deep learning.²¹ Appropriate strategies may optimise on
96 improving student motivation, establishing relevance and providing scaffolding
97 methods to help the students integrate business and clinical problem-solving.
98 They should also avoid the addition of large amounts of content to already-filled
99 timetables, but not achieve this by relying on optional or elective modules.

100

101 The veterinary business teaching at the Royal Veterinary College
102 (UK) sits within the broader curriculum professional studies strand, and includes
103 material on teamwork, finance and veterinary costs, marketing, and corporate
104 and independent veterinary practices. The content is led by the Senior Lecturer
105 in Business, supported by input from faculty from the College's Small Animal
106 Hospital and those responsible for ethics and communication skills teaching.
107 This team approach to content delivery, provided through lectures, small group
108 activities and communication skills role play sessions, is intended to integrate
109 business knowledge, clinical problem solving and client- and team
110 communication. However, through our assessment strategy, we have realised
111 that when faced with a professional dilemma, students are better able to
112 rationalise a solution from the perspectives of animal welfare and the client, and
113 less able to incorporate consequences for the veterinary business in their
114 arguments (unpublished data).

115

116 This paper firstly describes a veterinary business curriculum intervention that
117 aimed to improve student motivation by establishing relevance to the early
118 career veterinarian, facilitate a deeper learning approach by using a student-
119 centred, in-context active teaching strategy, and encourage integration by asking

120 students to consider the business implications of activities they experience in the
121 veterinary workplace. Assignments were then analysed to better understand
122 engagement in this area, and answer the research questions: What behaviours do
123 students utilise to engage in a veterinary business assignment, and what level of
124 engagement can be identified?

125

126

127 **Methods**

128

129 *The intervention*

130

131 A formative business assignment was given to students at the end of their third
132 year, following the delivery of veterinary business content and immediately prior
133 to the students' entering a period of external veterinary practice placement
134 (extramural studies, EMS) . The students were asked to write a short (100-150
135 words) statement, analysing the implementation of a particular theme from the
136 veterinary business teaching in one of the practices they visited. The assignment,
137 written as a model answer for the students, is presented in Appendix 1. Students
138 could choose from a list of topics (provided in Appendix 1), or select their own
139 theme from the business teaching. On returning to the College at the start of their
140 fourth year, students discussed and compared their experiences in their study
141 groups (allocated by the College at the start of Year 3). Within each group
142 (designed to include six students, with occasional groups of 5 or 7), they then
143 together wrote a closing statement, reflecting on the group's learning from this
144 assignment. Assignments were then submitted as group submissions.

145

146 *Analysis of student engagement*

147

148 The assignments were analysed by this paper's first author, using the six-step
149 approach to thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke.²² On first read, as
150 well as providing an overview of the data, the topics selected by individual
151 students for their initial practice analyses were noted. Assignments were re-read
152 and coded according to examples of student engagement: what the students
153 learned from the assignment, how they approached it and the types of learning
154 strategies they employed. The assignments were then analysed again in order to
155 generate themes relating to the students' engagement in the assignment. At this
156 point it became evident that the assignments included evidence of three domains
157 of student engagement:²³ Cognitive (the depth and complexity of learning
158 achieved), Affective (positive and negative evaluative statements and the overall
159 tone of their writing) and Behavioural (the strategies the students utilised to
160 identify and describe business material). Further interrogation of the data was
161 therefore performed to identify examples of student engagement in each of the
162 domains of this framework. Cognitive engagement was evaluated using an
163 frameworks described previously.^{24,25} Higher levels of cognitive engagement and
164 complexity of learning were assumed with evidence of cohesive rather than
165 fragmented understanding (the student identifies connections and relationships
166 between phenomena), awareness of alternate perspectives, and demonstration
167 of patterns and underlying principles rather than reporting descriptions of
168 events.²⁵ To improve the reliability of the data analysis and interpretation, the
169 data was reviewed for a second time by this paper's second author, who verified

170 consistency in the themes generated. Analysis of student assignments was
171 approved by the institutional ethics committee, reference 20140121H.

172

173 **Results**

174

175 Table 1 lists the business topics selected by the students according to the
176 frequency of their selection: the five most commonly selected were strategies to
177 improve client relations, use of social media, segmenting markets, quality of the
178 practice website, and the pricing of services and products. The least commonly
179 selected were management style, service marketing, and prevalence of ‘upselling’
180 (the strategy by which clients are persuaded to purchase additional products and
181 services).²⁶

182

183 The first theme identified during analysis related to the behaviours used by
184 students to engage in the assignment. This was most frequently describing a
185 business strategy observed in a single EMS practice, for example using social
186 media to educate clients about the importance of vaccinations. Other students
187 took advantage of the fact they visited multiple different practices over the EMS
188 period, and compared business strategies they observed in each, for example
189 different pricing strategies. Some students chose to critique an aspect of business
190 practice they had seen, for example failure of a supply chain resulting in poor
191 stock availability. A small number of students approached the task by describing
192 a clinical case and its business implications. In one such example, the
193 management of a costly surgical complication was described:

194

195 *“The owners, vets and practice manager consulted about how to take this further.*
196 *In the end, it was agreed that the practice would charge only for medications, and*
197 *waive the hospitalisation fees in order for the cat to be provided with the necessary*
198 *treatment and keep costs as low as possible for the client. This obviously went down*
199 *well and improved client relations.”*

200

201 Although most students appeared to use their observations of business
202 approaches, some students had questioned veterinarians. This identified
203 opinions surrounding employment in corporate-owned compared to
204 independent practices, business-related activities performed by the practice staff
205 during quiet times, and staff members’ attitudes surrounding some of the
206 strategies implemented:

207

208 *“[An IT intervention] generates work for the practice particularly in the quiet*
209 *months when they can go out and do risk assessments with farmers and check on*
210 *routine preventative medication and biosecurity; this also allows vets to talk to*
211 *farmers about plans for the future... vets need to work to get the clients on board*
212 *with the scheme to make sure they feel that they are getting benefit out of it rather*
213 *than it being just [seen as] a way for the practice to make money.”*

214

215 The second theme related to demonstration of cognitive engagement. This was
216 most frequently at a descriptive level, explaining benefits of a business strategy
217 to a single stakeholder (usually the veterinary practice):

218

219 *“Being able to provide owners with discounted plans is a good way to improve*
220 *client-practice relations and secure income. One of the practices I attended*
221 *provided a ‘start ahead’ pack... [which] includes a yearly booster, 12 months flea*
222 *and worm treatment and 20% discount on consults for the next year. This is a great*
223 *idea as it covers everything the owner needs for the year at a lower cost.”*

224

225 Some students demonstrated a higher level of complexity in their understanding,
226 as evidenced by their recognition of challenges or risks associated with certain
227 business practices, or tension resulting between client, practice, and practice
228 staff. At this level, competing stakeholders in business decisions could be
229 appreciated:

230

231 *“The practice launched a Healthy Pet Club [discounted pet health payment scheme]*
232 *during my time on EMS. It is a great business idea as it ensures a regular direct*
233 *debit income for the practice... One area that wasn’t so clear to the new clients was*
234 *that this was an additional cost to pet insurance. The vets had to spend quite a bit*
235 *of their consultation time telling first time owners that the scheme was only for*
236 *preventative health care...”*

237

238 *“All [these strategies] are implemented to help build relations and possibly loyalty*
239 *of the client, over and above basic care. The vets at this practice feel there is a lot*
240 *more emphasis on profit”*

241

242 *“The practice policy... is generally that excellent client relations are essential for*
243 *client loyalty and long term financial gains. There were multiple incentives/ deals*

244 *offered... Many of the vets believed that the practice was losing money by offering*
245 *these services free or subsidized but the practice partners firmly believed that these*
246 *costs would be made up via long-term client commitment to the practice.”*

247

248 A final theme in cognitive engagement was recognising conflict in the
249 professional role, as employees of small businesses, but with professional values
250 rooted in altruism and animal health:

251

252 *“The increasing push to sell additional products and services is divisive among*
253 *practices, with many staff members uncomfortable with feeling obligated to sell*
254 *products they don’t themselves use, and which may not be particularly beneficial to*
255 *the client.”*

256

257 Examination of the topics selected by the students provided no evidence that
258 topic selection influenced depth of cognitive engagement. Although some topics
259 were only represented as simple descriptions (e.g. the 7Ps of marketing), these
260 were in general less popular, so conclusions about their propensity for a higher
261 level learning approach were difficult to make.

262

263 The third theme, students’ affective engagement in this exercise, was gauged by
264 looking for evaluative words or statements in their reflections, and by
265 considering the overall positive or negative tone to the texts. In general, most of
266 the writing was positive in tone, with the students reporting favourably on
267 identified business approaches. A small number of texts contained evaluative

268 words or statements that demonstrated discomfort with the practices the
269 authors had observed:
270
271 *“Upselling is to persuade clients to opt for additional or more expensive products or*
272 *services, to increase the revenue per consultation... I saw examples of this in almost*
273 *every vets, with the upselling of kennel cough vaccinations, wormers, flea*
274 *treatment and microchips... arguably advantageous but not always critical.... they*
275 *would sneakily slip [these] into a consult. In addition some practices offered the*
276 *kennel cough vaccination for dogs who never socialised, which was slightly*
277 *unnecessary and maybe even untrustworthy. One could argue that vets are doing*
278 *their job... but to the client who only came in for a routine vaccination costing £30,*
279 *it is easy to see why they may feel cheated when faced with a £100 bill... I can*
280 *imagine that as a vet knowing that I was trying to upsell products to increase*
281 *revenue, I may feel quite deceitful.”*

282

283 *Evaluation of Group Reflections*

284 Analysis of group reflections indicated a number of areas that were particularly
285 impactful to the students. In addition to those that were identified frequently in
286 the individual task (social media, client relations), discounted/ paid-up-front
287 health plans and competitive costing were mentioned with high frequency in
288 these summaries. Most groups concluded that these were areas of particular
289 importance for practices to remain profitable, with some exploring this further
290 and focusing on the challenges of integrating their responsibilities to animal
291 health and the client with responsibilities to the business. Most groups identified
292 that they would need to develop methods of remaining competitive, principally

293 by achieving competitive costs for services, in order to be successful in their
294 practices.

295

296 When reflecting on what they had learned from this experience, most groups
297 included a concluding statement about how the assignment had contributed to
298 their understanding of veterinary business:

299

300 *"It certainly brought to our attention the necessity of understanding business*
301 *principles to run a successful clinic. We noticed that, as students, we are very*
302 *focused on scientific principles and understanding medicine... In order to be able to*
303 *do what we love – treating animals – we have to also understand business."*

304

305

306 **Discussion**

307

308 The described student assignment represents an approach to scaffolding
309 engagement in learning aspects of veterinary business studies, and aimed to
310 achieve this by encouraging students to reflect on their veterinary business
311 learning while undertaking clinical workplace learning.²¹ The assignments
312 produced by the students represented their contextual application of the
313 business material. Based on the conceptual framework used²³ some students
314 achieved this at a higher cognitive level than others. Analysis of the data
315 provided examples of student behaviours that encouraged higher level learning
316 outcomes, such as comparing the implementation of similar business strategies

317 across several practices, and discussing implications of various business
318 strategies with veterinary employees.

319

320 The topics selected by the students, both in their individual analyses and in the
321 group discussion, were not surprisingly those that can be driven by junior
322 veterinarians in the practice team, for example social media activities and
323 practice websites. Areas where graduates will be required to communicate
324 business concepts to their clients, such as discounted health plans, were also
325 frequently selected. Strategies such as management style, team engagement and
326 marketing approaches may impact how graduates work and their work
327 environment, but were discussed infrequently. Students who had chosen to carry
328 out the task by interviewing veterinarians identified information about staff
329 views on upselling, pricing strategies, and employment in different practice
330 ownership systems. Encouraging students to contextualise their learning
331 through conversations with veterinarians, rather than by relying on simple
332 observations, therefore appeared to be beneficial in identifying different
333 perspectives and achieving a more cohesive understanding of business concepts.

334 Institutional actions to help facilitate this (such as building relationships with
335 practice staff and having a shared approach to developing students' learning
336 activities) may therefore be of benefit in supporting student engagement.

337

338 Compared to simple descriptions of business policies that were perceived as
339 universally beneficial to practice and client, some students demonstrated a more
340 multi-perspective and analytical level of understanding. Examples included
341 students who chose to compare several practices, critiqued an individual

342 practice's business strategy, or identified strategies that may be perceived poorly
343 by clients or employees. Again, reflecting on these findings is useful in devising
344 better ways to scaffold higher level learning for workplace students. Specifically
345 prompting students to consider a business strategy from two viewpoints or to
346 compare its implementation in different practice types (high income vs low
347 income areas, small animal vs mixed practice, large multi-veterinarian hospital
348 vs small clinic) may help students develop their analytical skills in this area.

349

350 The group discussion element of the assignment yielded some findings not
351 apparent in the individual analyses. The complexity of managing different
352 responsibilities (to animals, clients and the business) and the recognition of the
353 need to act in a way that conflicts with their value priorities (to treat animals)
354 were particularly emphasised in group, compared to individual, reflections. That
355 social co-construction of meaning through shared reflection can result in
356 identification of concepts not apparent in private reflections has been recognised
357 previously²⁷ and emphasises the value of social learning, particularly of complex
358 or less tenable issues.²⁸ Encouraging students to discuss their experiences
359 appeared to support them in moving from simple, uncritical reporting of a
360 business practice to a more complex way of thinking: appreciating risks and
361 benefits, and raising awareness of personal conflict.

362

363 **Conclusions**

364

365 We did not attempt to evaluate the success of this assignment in enabling
366 students to achieve high level and long term learning outcomes, and we do not

367 know whether engagement in the task will predict more successful application of
368 business knowledge when the students enter the workplace. As this was not a
369 test of knowledge or knowledge application, we also do not know whether the
370 students will be better placed to address employer concerns about new
371 graduates' business competences.^{14,15} This study was instead targeted at
372 improving curriculum design through appreciative enquiry: identifying the
373 active learning approaches and analytical and relativist strategies utilised by
374 some students, in order to improve the scaffolding support provided in a
375 curriculum area typified by poor engagement. On the basis of our findings we can
376 report that students engaged in the veterinary business content when this was
377 contextualised in the workplace and made relevant for the early career
378 practitioner. Interviewing employees, peer discussion of learning, and
379 identifying positive and negative implications of practice, were beneficial
380 strategies for supporting deeper learning. Further work is needed to encourage
381 integration with wider curriculum elements; this was evident when students
382 connected the business implications of practice to a specific patient or client, and
383 when they commented on the client communication implications of particular
384 business strategies. Such examples were generally brief and descriptive, but
385 encouraging students in these activities, and scaffolding them better by including
386 prompts for analysis, has the potential to better support students in achieving
387 higher level learning outcomes.

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479 **Table 1: Themes selected by students during individual assignments**

480 127 students participated in the exercise and submitted work.

Business Theme:	N
Strategies for improving client relations	21 students
How the practice uses social media	18
Segmenting markets: puppy & kitten plans, geriatric care programs etc	13
Quality of the practice website	12
Pricing of services and products	12
Different personalities in the workplace and playing to people's strengths	11
Methods of staff motivation	8
The supply chain of key products in the practice e.g. pharmaceuticals, food	7
Team engagement	6
Prevalence of 'up selling' products and services to clients	4
How various elements of the 7 Ps of service marketing are employed	4
Evidence of Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y Management style	1
Other:	
Corporate practice	2
Use of technology	2
Health care plans	2
Broadening services	2
Stock maintenance	1
Resource (time) management	1

481

482 The first 12 themes were provided by the tutor. Those listed under 'Other' were

483 independently selected by the students.

484 **Appendix 1: Business skills formative assignment (including sample**
485 **answer and generic feedback)**
486

487 Professional Studies group assignment – Business
488 skills

489 Task: In their DL groups, students are to reflect upon the ‘business’ material in
490 the Professional Studies strand and comment how it is/was relevant to EMS
491 experience.
492

493
494 **Instructions:**

- 495 1. Select a theme from the list on p. 2 and write 100-150 words on a) how this is
496 relevant to the veterinary business environment and b) how it was observed
497 during your summer EMS. The main focus of this piece of writing should be
498 on the activities/approaches you witnessed, and/or what the practice did that
499 related to this theme, rather than reproducing the material from your lecture
500 notes. It might help you to think about the following questions:
501 a. What was the practice policy relating to this theme?
502 b. How did it affect or involve the vets working in the practice? Did it
503 influence their interactions with clients? With other staff? Their
504 rewards/pay?
505 c. What effect did it have on clients attending the practice?
506 Note – it might help to discuss this with one of the vets if it is not clear
507 how your chosen theme influences the vet’s professional life.
508
509 2. In your DL group, discuss your experiences during EMS relating to this topic.
510 Together, write a closing statement of 100-150 words that combines the
511 knowledge arising from the group’s EMS experiences. You may choose to
512 write about what similarities or differences your discussion revealed, or key
513 messages that, as a group, you learned from this discussion. There is a
514 timetabled session at the start of Year 4 (“Year 4 assignment”) for you to do
515 this.
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518 **Notes:**

- 519 • The list of themes is not exhaustive. Students are welcomed and encouraged to
520 identify additional business issues not listed below.
521 • Students are free to select any theme they wish, however you may find it
522 beneficial to try to cover different themes within your DL group.
523 • Articles in publications like the *Vet Record*, *Vet Times* and *In Practice* may
524 help with explorations.
525 • Please use the template on p. 3 of this document to complete this exercise.
526 Upon completion please email this to Liz Chan (echan@rvc.ac.uk),
527 Professional Studies Strand Leader. All assignments should be received by
528 30th September, which is one week after the timetabled assignment session.
529 You will receive written feedback on your work.
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532 **Topics for consideration:**

- The supply chain of key products in the practice e.g. pharmaceuticals, pet food, etc.
- Strategies for optimising client relations
- Methods of staff motivation employed
- Differing personalities in the workplace and playing to people's strengths
- How the practice uses social media
- Evidence of Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y management style
- Segmenting markets: puppy & kitten plans, geriatric care programmes, etc.
- How various elements of the 7Ps of service marketing are employed
- Quality of the practice website
- Prevalence of 'up selling' products and services to clients
- Team engagement
- Pricing of services and products

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535 **Intended outcomes:**

- 536 • Students will have revisited the 'business' material presented in the
537 Professional Studies strand, within the context of a practice visited during
538 EMS.
- 539 • Students will have considered the business/commercial elements of a
540 practicing veterinary business
- 541 • Students will have worked in groups to share knowledge and observations
542 about the business/commercial elements of a practicing veterinary business
- 543 • Students will have articulated the relevance of the business/commercial
544 aspects of a practicing veterinary business
- 545 • Written feedback will be provided. This assignment is aligned with the 4th year
546 exam Professional Studies question, and it is intended that the feedback will
547 help you prepare for this question.
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Professional Studies group assignment – Business skills	
<p>Student names (please list the full names of <u>all</u> the students in this DL group)</p> <p>Student 1: Liz Student 2: Betty Student 3: Beth Student 4: Bess Student 5: Lizzie Student 6: Elizabeth</p>	
Theme 1: Team engagement	<p>In-practice observation on this theme (100-150 words): Team engagement is highly relevant to the veterinary business environment because it has a direct impact on client perceptions of the practice and employee satisfaction. At one EMS practice, I noticed that team engagement was poor because the vets, nurses and administration staff all worked in isolation from each other and there was little non-clinical interaction between the groups. While varying personality types may account for this, it would be beneficial for some social activities or team-building activities to be held so we can all discover positive, non-work related aspects of everyone in the team. This will allow us to easily recognise that everyone has strengths. For a new vet in the practice this would be particularly important as improving my engagement within the team I would have more confidence asking colleagues for help and my clients would benefit from a more pronounced team approach to clinical problem solving.</p>
Theme 2: Use of social media	<p>In-practice observation on this theme (100-150 words): Social media efforts (e.g. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) were not part of my EMS practice's marketing strategy. The partners are concerned about the amount of time needed to keep the pages up-to-date and the RCVS Code of Conduct on client/patient confidentiality. Social media is an essential method of communicating with clients and keeping them informed of 'good news stories' helps foster trust between the client and the practice. The RCVS Code of Conduct on client/patient confidentiality is easily managed, it just means seeking the pet owner's permission before publishing any photographs. This is something I could easily volunteer to oversee as a new vet in a practice and I would investigate whether the rota can enable vets and nurses to have some free time to contribute stories – this may reduce time seeing patients but would have a positive effect on marketing the practice to clients, as well as improving motivation by reflecting on positive posts.</p>
Theme 3: The 7Ps of marketing	<p>In-practice observation on this theme (100-150 words): The corporate practice for my summer EMS placement showed numerous examples of the 7Ps of marketing being used. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price: The practice launched a new line of food for mature dogs (with Waltham). This was priced very low

	<p>compared to the other products so a penetration pricing strategy must have been used to rapidly reach customers and possibly stimulate word-of-mouth about the new product. As a new vet in the practice I would need to make sure I was familiar with a new diet, but also need to balance recommending particular diets where they may be a conflict of interest (e.g. financial incentive).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical evidence: Medical services are principally a credence good so lack physical evidence. The practice is an 'RCVS Accredited Practice' and has testimonials on its web site in an effort to provide clients with some tangible benefits and evidence of its services. • Process: The practice has a clear policy for the process of handling client complaints. This would be really attractive for selecting my first job as it was very clear how difficult situations are handled, and I could tell from this that I would have support in this area.
<p>Theme 4: Prevalence of 'up selling' products and services to clients</p>	<p>In-practice observation on this theme (100-150 words): Even though vet practices have to make a profit, I believe that up-selling is unethical as it taking advantage of an animal's poor health to make money. I found it very difficult to work at my summer EMS placement because there was a strict policy of each vet had to sell two 'dentals' per week. This meant asking clients about preventative care for their pets on a matter unrelated to the reason for this consultation. I found this very difficult to achieve and did not feel comfortable with speaking to clients about issues unrelated to the reason for the consultation. I appreciate that for some patients, this would mean dental disease was detected at an earlier stage and more severe pathology would be prevented, however my discomfort with this approach means I have learned from this experience that I will ask about 'up selling' when researching potential work.</p>
<p>Theme 5: Segmenting markets</p>	<p>In-practice observation on this theme (100-150 words): The segmentation of markets is a clever method of targeting different groups of clients, understanding their needs and thereby improving client perception of the practice. My EMS practice (a livestock vet), segments its clients based on their type of dairy herd i.e. small herd, large herd, mixed-farming and breeding centre. Being clear about the characteristics of each type of client enables the practice to tailor its knowledge and services (e.g. hiring of new staff, CPD expenses, purchase of new equipment, out-reach literature) to ensure that resources are being optimised while clients are provided with a targeted, high-quality service. I could see the benefits of this to the clients (they received more focused care) and to the practice (organisation of resources) as well as to the vets (they could develop a particular area of interest) although to a new vet I would ask whether I could take a less segmented approach and</p>

	experience all aspects of the practice, at least initially.
Theme 6: Strategies for optimising client relations	In-practice observation on this theme (100-150 words): Optimising client relations is one of the most important non-clinical task of a vet. My summer EMS practice had numerous strategies for this. For example, with a fee of over £150, the client is given a free bag of feed for the pet, there is a free text messaging service available to clients for reminding them to vaccinate their pet and a small children’s play area have been placed in the waiting room so clients feel comfortable bringing their children to the clinic and don’t panic when they have to wait for a consultation. I had not really thought about my role in client relations, focusing instead on treatment and diagnosis. However I could see that good client relations helped clients trust the practice and feel comfortable bringing their pets there – important if they were worried about their pet but felt they may be wasting time, concerned about spending money or worrying unnecessarily.
Closing statement (100-150 words): Our group discussed these themes and compared our experiences. It became apparent that veterinary practices are full of business management examples that help shape the motivation of the staff, the perception of the clients and, therefore, the high-quality provision of veterinary medicine to benefit the long-term health and welfare of animals. Even though we did not all work in companion-animal practices, we were able to identify the importance of business principles in all our EMS experiences. We found that we had different attitudes to the themes discussed but we agreed that client and the vet are equally as important as the patient.	

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Tutor feedback on this work: It was great to see so many examples of veterinary business content observed in the EMS practices. Considering the implications of this for the new vet in a practice, and also working through some of the pros and cons to the business interventions experienced, demonstrated a thorough grasp of the professional studies learning outcomes and a high level of analytical ability, enabling you to evaluate observed practice and make your own future plans in this area.