



PTAS Project Report (for REGULAR PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title: Development and evaluation of a contextualised intervention to embed resilience training into the core veterinary curriculum

Project type:

B Innovation Project (introduction and evaluation of an educational innovation, usually taking a practical approach)

Principal Investigator : Stacy Spielman

Schools/department : Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies/ Vet Med Education Unit

Team members (including Schools and Departments) : Rachel Whittington, Kirsty Hughes, Rob Ward, Brian Mather, Victoria Macklin, Susan Rhind (all from Vet School). Will Medd (Independent Resilience Coach/Author “Get Sorted”)

For further details, please contact:

Project teams must submit a report within 4 months of the conclusion of their project.

Copies of dissemination material (eg journals/newsletter articles, conference papers, posters should be listed and attached (separate to the word count). The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

Report (maximum 1500 words)

What did you do?

With a view to embedding resilience training into the veterinary curriculum, we piloted an online resilience course developed by an independent resilience coach, Will Medd (author of the “Get Sorted!” workbook, which formed the basis of the online programme). It was decided that the course would be rolled out to all students on year 2 of the five-year BVM&S (professional veterinary) degree programme. A two-hour introductory workshop was designed to not only deliver information about joining the online course, but **to build veterinary and personal relevance around the concept of resilience**. Examples were given from the news and vet biographies, as well as a discussion of what the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons expects in terms of resilience. To demonstrate the type of stress build-up we are referring to, we created two bespoke short videos highlighting two different examples of “vet stress” on the job. The first video shows a (mock) student attempting, unsuccessfully, to place an IV cannula in a dog’s vein for the first time; the second shows a vet working through an exhausting weekend on call without support.

The workshop also contained two group exercises designed to allow the students some reflection on what “success” and “failure” mean to them, as well as looking at the dreams and fears of being a vet. This workshop was delivered on-campus by veterinary teaching staff. Referral information for student support, student counselling and the Vet Helpline was given at the end of the workshop for any students wanting further support for any issues arising as a result of the reflection process.



The online course itself, which we re-titled “Vet Sorted”, was delivered over 10 weeks, with a new module available each week. An hour a week was timetabled for the students to use the computer labs to complete the assignment: we felt the timetabling was important to establish a sense of importance to the course- we wanted the students to feel they had ample official time to complete it- although the computer labs went unused during these sessions. The author, Will Medd, was available for support for the online modules, both for students and for staff running the course on-campus.

Participants were invited to get involved in research involving measuring their own resilience at the start of the online course, and again a year later. It was felt the testing should be done at the same time of the year, to rule out seasonal effect on mood/perception of resilience. We are currently preparing to rerun the resilience scales on the participants by online survey. Feedback forms were also collected from the group, and the students were required to write a reflection about their experience with the Vet Sorted course at the end of the semester, to be submitted as part of their portfolio.

What did you find out?

Although many students reported some benefits to the workshop and online course, there was some resentment coming through the early feedback forms. Some participants felt the material was “patronising”, or common sense type of information that does not require a workshop. This is not an uncommon reaction to wellbeing or “professional skills” classes, which are sometimes perceived by students as not being as relevant to being a vet as clinical/medical education. A few students expressed a sense of concern or worry about their own capacity to look after themselves well enough to thrive or “cope” as a vet.

As part of the assessment, students were asked to write a longer reflection for their portfolios. The majority of these reflections demonstrated clearly that certain concepts, such as their perception of “success” vs. “failure”, had been impacted during the course. **Of note, the modules on recognising and dealing with your inner critic, and on reframing negative into positive, both were mentioned repeatedly as having an impact.** (It should be noted that a focus group later in the year voiced that students were positively biased when writing these reflections, as they felt they would be “down-marked” for any negative reflections.)

Overall, about 75% of the portfolio reflections reported positive experiences with the course as a whole (workshop and online modules). 14% of the reflections were negative overall, and 11% were neutral. Although we no longer have access to the online modules as a standalone course, feedback was incorporated into the development of a new two-hour workshop, called “Resilience in the Veterinary Profession”. We kept all the exercises which students found had the most impact, as well as keeping the bespoke “vet stress” videos, which form the basis of a hearty discussion with the students now.

One of the most common comments from students was that the course should not be mandatory, but instead available to those who are interested. Indeed, those students who felt most interested in the course received the greatest impact. However, there were examples of students who were originally displeased with doing the course, but in the end took away something useful out of it. This begs the question: do you mandate a reflective course, in the hopes that some will receive a benefit anyway, or do you allow it to be optional, giving the most benefit to those interested, but missing out on some students who may have benefitted more than they thought they would?

How did you disseminate your findings?



The pilot study has been presented as a poster both at the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative in Edinburgh, January 2017, and at the 2017 Veterinary Education Conference in Liverpool, UK (poster attached- note not all data was available when preparing poster). When all the data has been compiled (including the resilience scales still to be run on the group), the paper will be written up to be published in a relevant veterinary journal such as the Journal of Veterinary Medical Education (anticipated submission date December 2017).

What have been the benefits to student learning?

Our students have sometimes expressed difficulty in finding personal relevance during professional skills classes on the BVM&S course. We feel we addressed this well with the creation of bespoke videos which specifically highlighted profession-specific scenarios that the students could relate to. Although the students have not been through these stressful situations themselves yet, the time is close enough to kick off the thought, "How will I cope with this?", allowing a critical conversation to happen within the workshop. It is part of our goal to demonstrate this level of relevance for all of our professional skills classes, and thus we can take this forward into other classes.

Another large impact on student learning is the discussion of the concepts of failure and success. Through the group exercises, students learn that their perspectives and beliefs can either hold them back, or allow them to grow. This simple lesson will hopefully carry through to the rest of their studies, and we hope to the rest of their careers, where they will need to assimilate "failure" as a more positive concept, if they are to feel "successful".

How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?

There is an increasing need for resilience reflection and training across all fields. It is hoped that the University will make courses like "Get Sorted!" available and accessible to any student who would want to engage with it. The videos Will Medd produced for the Get Sorted modules have now been gifted to us for use across the University, so there is scope for at least making the information available to every University of Edinburgh student. The project also provides evidence that adjusting the content of such generic courses to map to the relevant discipline can be a worthwhile endeavour and is worthy of consideration elsewhere in the University.



Financial statement:

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:

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