



# Vet Graduate Programme Handbook

**Vets4Pets**



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# 1 | THE GRADUATE PROGRAMME



**Our award-winning Graduate Programme is designed to give you the best possible start in every way.**

So, as well as helping you develop your professional skills and commercial understanding, our comprehensive training covers the softer skills needed to care for animals and their owners. Join us and, with our ongoing support and emphasis on your wellbeing, you can realise – and maintain – your full potential.

We're all about doing the right thing for pets and their owners. And that starts with developing, empowering and supporting our graduate vets to be their very best. With hands-on surgical training and courses in subjects like cardiology, endocrinology and dermatology, our Programme gives you the confidence to put your knowledge into practice.

As you build your future with us, you'll have the best of both worlds – working in a locally-owned practice, with the support network and stability of a large, successful business.

It all comes together to make you an all-round better practitioner.



*In 2020 we won an award from the Institute of Student Employers in their Development category, for delivering the best Graduate On boarding and Induction Activities Programme for 2020. We are thrilled to have received this award, as we are truly committed to delivering a best in class Graduate Programme, which puts graduates at the very centre.*



# 1 | THE GRADUATE PROGRAMME

## *continued*



Our two-year Graduate Development Programme, designed by vets with extensive practice and industry experience, puts you at its centre. It helps develop your medical, surgical and professional skills with one aim: to help you realise your potential. The programme runs alongside your employment in practice, and includes 10-11 days of a combination of clinical and non- clinical CPD organised per year.

### Three Key Stakeholders

#### The Practice

Practices will deliver an environment for a new graduate to thrive in by providing clinical support, active communication, appropriate expectations, encouraging environment and time.

#### The Graduate

Graduates will actively support their practice by being open, honest, conscientious, engaging and proactive.

#### Support Office

Colleagues will support in facilitating the development of an outstanding, professional partnership between practice and graduate, by having CPD opportunities, points of contact, clinical and wellbeing resources.



*Together with our award for the best Graduate Onboarding and Induction programme 2020, more recently we were shortlisted as a finalist for the Graduate Scheme of the Year Award as part of the Personnel Today Awards. We feel extremely proud of this achievement and were delighted to be up there alongside some other really inspiring finalists!*

# 1 | THE GRADUATE PROGRAMME

## *continued*



**We also believe support outside of your practice is really important, which is why we launch our programme with a 2 day induction, giving you the opportunity to meet with other graduates on the programme, who have just embarked on the same journey. You will also have an opportunity to network with many other colleagues from a variety of areas across the business.**

You will be assigned a dedicated graduate buddy, a graduate who is 1 or 2 years ahead of you on the programme, and a talent ambassador, who is someone that is able to offer additional clinical or holistic support, a number of those being JVP's from other practices. You of course will also have access to your dedicated Graduate Team, who are here to support you every step of the way, a Clinical Development Manager and Area Relationship Manager who are field based and who know each of your practices as individual environments, plus many more supportive colleagues, including a clinical community of more than 1,300!

Our structured CPD is delivered by highly experienced and specialist vets and covers a range of clinical, wellbeing, leadership and professional development subjects, over the course of two years you'll have access to over 180 hours CPD. A number of these events include networking dinners, giving you some much needed downtime with fellow grads and presents an opportunity for networking with other colleagues.

As well as the CPD offering, we will always let you know about external CPD webinars that are available that may be of interest to you, and from time to time we will work with suppliers to deliver additional bespoke webinars for you to complete in your own time.

## 2 | THE GRADUATE TEAM

**The Graduate Team are all here to support in giving you the best start possible.**

We understand how important your first job is, which is why our passionate and dedicated Graduate Team will work with you in matching you to a practice that best suits you. From the moment you submit an application, you will be supported each step of the way.

Hopefully you will find this handbook useful but we encourage you to get in touch with us if you have any further questions or if you wish to discuss the Graduate Programme further.

You can contact us anytime via our shared email address **[vetgraduates@vets4pets.com](mailto:vetgraduates@vets4pets.com)**

*"I still remember how nervous I felt 10 years ago applying for jobs roles. My own experiences of that time and of supporting new graduates in practice have shaped our focus for the Programme so we take a friendly and personal approach to recruitment, making sure you can talk to us from the moment you apply right through to when you start in practice. It's important to us that you make the right decision for you so we'll work with our practices to make sure you have all the information you need. Our recruiters work within our graduate team which is great for us as it means we get to follow you through right from recruitment to your first years in your role and for you it means continuity and support from those with a real understanding of life as a veterinary graduate."*

**Dr Emily Bridges MRCVS**, Programme Lead



**Dr Emily Bridges MRCVS**

Programme Lead

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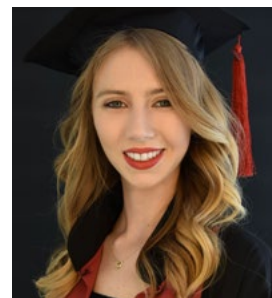


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### 3 | VETS4PETS AND COMPANION CARE VETS



#### **Vets4Pets and Companion Care Vets - local pet healthcare experts**

Vets4Pets is proud to be one of the largest veterinary groups in the UK with a national network of practices (of all shapes and sizes) run by partners who enjoy clinical freedom and the autonomy to do things their way.

Beyond all else, we're committed to animal health and welfare, and we absolutely put pets first. The most powerful relationships we have are with pets and their owners. This is at the heart of everything we do and always will be. Our practices are supported by dedicated business professionals based in our Support Office who have the expertise to help them thrive.

#### **Our Values**

- We put pets first
- We take pride in what we do
- We work as a team
- We make it fun
- We get better every day
- We do what we say we'll do

### 3 | THE PETS AT HOME GROUP



**The Pets at Home group also includes our Retail Division which includes our Pets at Home superstores and our Groom Room salons.**

Our stores represent a unique environment and provide a practical, fun and unique experience for pet owners.

We'll help owners select the right food for their pet with nutrition consultations, help test the water is safe for their fish tank before new fish are introduced, and help socialise a new puppy with socialisation and training classes - and much more. We're also online and our customers can order their pet products for home delivery or collect in store.

Because we are a specialist pet care business everything we sell is tested specifically for pets, which is something we believe makes us unique, giving the customer peace of mind that they are buying a quality item which has been responsibly sourced and tested and is specific to an animal.

When we sell a pet to a new owner we use our unique Pet Pad process which ensures a prospective owner understands the welfare needs of their pet to be, asking customers to sign to say they have understood how to look after their new family addition.

Because pets are at the heart of everything we do, we believe that everyone who is a part of our group has a special responsibility to help keep pets happy, healthy and safe. Our retail colleagues are trained to standards which are endorsed by many of the leading animal care and charity bodies in the UK, and we are leading the way in regulating the pet grooming industry by working with accredited training providers to enable colleagues to train for certification in this profession.



## 4 | MAKING A DIFFERENCE



**At Pets at Home we have an ambitious plan, to become ‘The Best Pet Care Business in the World’. A key part of delivering this in a sustainable way will be our most cherished assets: Our People and our Culture.**

Across the whole Group we are passionate about pets and the bond that exists between pets and the people who love them. Our vision is to become the most responsible pet care business in the world.

### **The Pets at Home Foundation**

The Pets at Home Foundation mission is to create a better world for pets and the people who love them. Established by Pets at Home in 2006, raising over £35 million to help pets in need across the UK. The Pets at Home Foundation believes that every pet deserves a loving forever home therefore over the years we are proud to have worked with over 1300 rescue and re-homing organisations across the country who strive to help pets in need find their forever loving homes.

Rescue and rehoming remain at the very heart of our charity, but the great news is we now also support charities who help people through pets. More information can be found [here](#).

### **The Woodland Trust partnership**

The Pets at Home Group partners with the Woodland Trust as our carbon mitigation provider. Through the trust’s carbon scheme the Group invests to mitigate our remaining buildings’ carbon energy. Our Group electricity contract is renewable and has been since 2017. This means that every building across the Group is carbon neutral in relation to its energy use! Another part of our partnership with the Woodland Trust is the Pet Memory Scheme. This has been developed from an idea first created by a number of our 2019 veterinary graduate intake who thought it would be a great initiative for both the environment and client experience if trees could be dedicated in memory of pets that pass away.

## 4 | MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### *continued*



### Our Better World Pledge

Our social value strategy - called Our Better World Pledge - is focused on making real and tangible differences. We split our approach into 3 pillars each with their own goals - Pets, People and Planet.

Each of the three pillars has an ambitious, long term goal. These goals are supported by 10 discrete targets that will drive our performance forward over the next few years, along with 20 clearly defined and agreed actions. We will add to these over time as we develop more initiatives and work towards our ultimate aims.



#### **Pets**

By 2030, positively impact the life of every pet in the UK



#### **People**

By 2030, enhance the lives of one million people through our shared love of pets



#### **Planet**

By 2040, become net zero

For more information, [click here](#).

## 5 | BENEFITS AND REWARDS

**Here at Vets4Pets we really appreciate our colleagues, and strive to provide an excellent range of benefits and rewards that leave them feeling valued and motivated.**

### **Salary**

Guaranteed starting salary of at least £34,000 rising after each year on Programme.

### **CPD**

Over 180 hours of CPD.

### **Support**

A VetGDP Adviser in practice, regional support and graduate community.

### **Career Development**

A fantastic Next Steps programme to help you further your career with us once your time on the programme has finished, and access to the Nottingham L7 Apprenticeship Programme for CertAVP.

### **Group Colleague Discount**

20% discount for you (plus one family member). This can be used in Pets at Home stores and online, Groom Rooms and Companion Care and Vets4Pets practices.

### **RCVS and BVA Membership**

Support office will pay for your membership fees whilst you are employed with us

### **Cycle to Work Scheme**

All colleagues can access the cycle to work scheme! This means you can spread the cost of a new bike or accessories/equipment for an existing bike and get tax relief on it.

### **Lifestyle Discounts**

Access to a discount and offers platform which gives you great offers on shopping, eating out, gym memberships and much more.

### **Group Pension Contributions**

All colleagues joining practices are given the option to opt into our Group pension scheme. If you join us then you can choose what you want your contribution to be.

### **Pet Plan Insurance Discount**

All colleagues and their family are eligible for a competitive discount off Pet Plan insurance policies. [Click here to view more information](#)

### **Life Insurance**

Four times salary life insurance for all employed colleagues.

### **Your Reward Hub**

Access all your company benefits, wellbeing support and reward information as well as incredible everyday discounts on shopping. You can send e-cards to recognise and celebrate your colleagues too!



## 6 | WELLBEING



**We know that in the veterinary profession the word wellbeing is mentioned regularly, but we are genuinely passionate about wellbeing and it is one of our core priorities for all colleagues.**

Your wellbeing is really important to us, on starting the Graduate Development Programme, you will receive a tailored Wellbeing Guide and a gift as a little reminder to look after your own health and happiness.

Throughout the non-clinical part of the programme, wellbeing is highlighted regularly with group coaching sessions to discuss topics. You'll also receive a Wellbeing Guide to help you reflect on the good things, your successes and accomplishments.

We host a summer celebration for our graduate colleagues who have completed their first year in practice, which involves clinical education, but is also combined with having fun!

Vets4Pets and Companion Care want to create a community that takes a really proactive approach to Mental Health and for all colleagues to feel like they have the support needed. We have over 200 colleagues trained as Mental Health First Aiders across the business and this number is growing weekly. We have a Facebook Wellbeing page, which is a great platform to share tips, support one another, and most importantly – have a laugh!

All graduates on programme will receive a subscription to the Headspace App, this is an invaluable tool to support you in lots of areas including managing anxiety, struggling to sleep, low self-esteem and much more!

## 7 | NEXT STEPS



**Next Steps was introduced in 2020 to support those who have completed the Graduate Programme in continuing with their professional development.**

It's really important to us that we continue to support our graduates beyond the graduate programme, which is why in 2020 we launched our Next Steps Programme.

This is an exciting incentive, which awards grants of up to £1000 to support with ongoing development. This is an amazing opportunity for Vets that have completed the graduate programme and might be starting to think about what's next.

We awarded 10 grants in 2020, investing in a variety of development activities for graduates, ranging from certificates in surgery, medicine and behaviour to volunteer placements abroad and ultrasonography and acupuncture training.

We have recently launched our 2021 Next Steps Programme and once again look forward to supporting our very talented Vets!

## 8 | FAQs

### **When does the programme start?**

The programme officially launches in September with our 2 day induction, however, your start date in practice will be agreed between you and the practice, and you can absolutely start in practice prior to the programme launch date.

### **Do qualify for the programme?**

If you have a valid veterinary degree and have graduated in the last 12 months, you would qualify for a place on the programme.

### **Do I get paid whilst doing my CPD?**

Yes. Everyone who is part of our graduate development programme receives paid release to attend the programme's CPD. The programme also covers all of your expenses whilst attending each event.

### **Will I be expected to work sole charge?**

You will only work sole charge when you and your Practice Partner both feel you're ready. One of our programme commitments is that this must be a mutual decision.

### **Can I choose my practice and location?**

Absolutely, we will always work with you and put you forward to practices that align with your location preferences. We will talk to you about all available options, but the choice will always be with you.

### **If I secure a place on the programme, does the Group or does the Practice employ me?**

You will be employed directly by the practice on a permanent basis. The two year programme runs alongside your contract and is designed to support and complement your role in your practice. Your permanent contract will remain in place once the programme is finished - there is no requirement to reapply or move elsewhere. Importantly, there are no financial tie-ins for you, and if you chose to leave your practice, you will work your notice period the same as any other vet. We hope that doesn't happen, but we're on hand to support you if you are considering moving on.

### **Is there any financial tie in by joining the programme?**

There is NO financial tie in associated with joining our graduate programme. We want everyone who joins our programme to be happy and flourish, and do not wish for anyone to feel anxious or worried about a financial penalty should things not work out or personal circumstances change.

For more FAQ's, **click here** to visit our webpage.



## 9 | TESTIMONIALS

### **“My graduates teach me as much as I teach them.”**

**Leigh-Anne, one of our Vets4Pets Practice Owners, talks about the qualities she looks for in her graduates and what it takes to be the best vet for pets and their owners.**

“Taking on new graduates is really rewarding. My aim is to get them on their feet, so they can spread their wings and fly.

The graduates are amazing because they’ve just finished five years of university, where they’ve been taught everything to the absolute highest standards and their knowledge is very up to date. I do loads of continued professional development, but they teach me as much as I teach them.

So, what do I look for when I take on a new graduate? In a nutshell, having the right attitude and personality is vital. I always look for someone who is keen to learn and good with people as well as animals. For example, I really love it if they’ve had a job in some kind of customer service, like bar work. This matters because, as well as getting on well with the practice team, you need to be able to deal with different kinds of pet owners, customers and situations.

We’re a business that’s here to offer the best possible care for pets, but we also have to look after their owners. They can be distressed when

they come to us, and so they aren’t always their best selves. It’s our job to nurture them through the experience, and that can be quite tough if you’ve never been in a customer-facing situation.

Being a vet can be an emotional rollercoaster and so you have to be quite resilient but, with Vets4Pets, there’s a real emphasis on supporting mental health and wellbeing. Our culture is very open, and we encourage each other to talk about how we’re feeling if we’re not having a good day. I’d like to feel that, in my practice, no-one would feel ashamed of saying they were struggling – and if someone’s a bit withdrawn, we make them a cup of tea and ask if they’re okay.

To be a successful vet you need to be a strong team player, and a good decision-maker and time-manager. What might surprise some graduates, is that you also need commercial acumen. While you have to do what’s best for pets and their owners and build a rapport, you also need to understand the business aspect. The Vets4Pets Graduate Programme gives graduates training in soft skills and commercial understanding as well, and this is just one of the things that makes it stand out for me.

It can be daunting for a graduate to think ‘Oh, I’m a vet now’, so this Programme must be reassuring – that there’s someone looking out for you and making sure you’re confident in what you’re doing. It’s about knowing that your education is going to continue and that you’re not completely on your own. I think this really would have appealed to me when I graduated.”

## 9 | TESTIMONIALS

### *continued*

**“This Programme gives me the best of everything.”**

**Laura, one of our Vets4Pets graduates, talks about how she’s becoming the vet she wants to be, with the training and support she enjoys through our Graduate Programme.**

“The Vets4Pets Graduate Programme has given me the ideal foundation to build my career. I feel as though I’ve had ten times more training than I need, and the support you get is fantastic.

The practical experience you get day-to-day is a great refresher for what you’ve learned at university. You might have learned something in theory, but the practical application of it means you understand it in a different way – and in a supported environment, which is vital for building confidence.

In terms of the Continuing Professional Development which is a requirement to maintain our licence to practice, the Programme maps everything out for you. There’s no additional pressure to organise this yourself and it literally covers everything. I have a mentor who I can discuss my clinical practice with, and any other issues to do with learning and development. There’s a real emphasis on building the Programme around your needs. We all do a questionnaire that identifies your strengths and weaknesses, which helps you focus on how you can build on or address those through your training.

I also have the benefit of my practice manager’s experience and perspective. As I apply the theoretical procedures I’ve learned at university, I’m developing my own thoughts and observations and it’s incredibly useful to be able to discuss this.

We also have regular group discussions that involve the whole practice and, between us all, we can arrive at the best decisions which support the best outcomes. There’s a network of other graduates you can learn from too, so you’re not in a bubble. You can reach out and share experiences with other people who are doing the same things as you at the same level. It’s a good benchmark for my development, to help reassure myself that I’m on the same page as my peers.

It’s a rewarding job, and I love it, but it can be stressful at times. When you’re caring for sick animals, you’re also having to support pet owners who can be upset and emotional. The Graduate Programme is great at equipping you with the skills you need to deal with this. We also have access to an app that focuses on mental health. It’s important to look after this aspect of your practice, and we discuss this quite openly.

Vets4Pets pay us well too and don’t tie you into their Programme, which I think shows they have confidence that their scheme will work for you. It’s certainly worked for me, anyway!

Overall, the Programme gives you the infrastructure you need to build a solid foundation for progress. I know that I can keep learning and that I’ll be supported by my mentor, practice manager and wider network of peers. There’s support from every angle, and that helps me on my way to becoming the vet I want to be.”

## 9 | TESTIMONIALS

### *continued*

**“I love having the freedom to do things my way.”**

**Helen, one of our Vets4Pets Practice Owners, busts some of the myths about being a vet as part of a wider business.**

“Essentially, it’s like having the best of both worlds. You have the stability of being part of a reputable nationwide organisation, with all the benefits of a locally-owned community practice.

Vets4Pets are very good at giving you the freedom to do things your own way. You have the support you need, when you need it, but they don’t micromanage you. You might think that a corporate wants to have more say in what you do, but this isn’t the case with Vets4Pets. The link to Pets at Home enables us to offer more complete care, as we can suggest a wider range of products to owners, but it’s never about the hard sell. It’s always about focusing on what’s best for the pet.

For example, if we’re in the process of introducing a new flea and worming treatment, Vets4Pets might suggest a preferred option

but nothing is ever forced on us. Instead, we can act depending on our own shared experience as a practice. There is a lot of discussion around diagnostics and clinical approach, which is important for the development of the whole team. Sharing experience and observations and talking these things through is how we get the best outcomes.

Our clinical standards are very high and we offer gold-standard care to all clients, regardless of their budget. We want our service to be as good as it possibly can be, and I think this shows in the very good reputation we have with our customers – people try to register with us because of word-of-mouth recommendations.

Because we want the best for pets and their owners we have the highest expectations of our team, and we have a lot of quality graduates who are very proud of what we offer.

I find it hugely rewarding investing in fresh graduates, both professionally and personally. It’s good to know that you’ve helped someone get their career underway and, if and when they leave for another practice, you’ve done your bit to put another well-trained vet into someone’s community.”





**Vets4Pets**

