



BVNA
British Veterinary
Nursing Association

Protect the Title Campaign Survey Results

May 2023

Introduction

Welcome to this report on the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) surveys surrounding our campaign for statutory protection of the title 'veterinary nurse'.

In this report, we outline the results from these surveys, which were open between 26th September and 31st December 2022, and received over 12,000 responses. The surveys were designed to provide an overview of how those within the veterinary profession feel about the issue of protection of the title, plus how it may or may not affect them, their patients and the public. Members of the public were also surveyed, to provide more detail on the current understanding of the role of the veterinary nurse amongst the general public, and how they feel about the potential use of unqualified staff.

We are supported in our 'Protect the Title' campaign by the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). Following the work of the RCVS Legislation Working Party (LWP), statutory protection of the title 'veterinary nurse' has already been recommended to the Government (Defra) by the RCVS Council. This recommendation forms part of proposals for wider legislative change to the 1966 Veterinary Surgeons Act. We anticipate that this 'Protect the Title' report will help to support this ongoing work.

We hope you find the results useful and insightful, and at BVNA we look forward to continuing to lead the conversation surrounding this important issue. We would also like to thank all the participants who took the time to complete the surveys.

Comment from BVNA and BVA:

"This report, which follows on from the preliminary results we published in February, gives a taste of some of the comments we received, and gives our recommendations following the survey. It is clear from this report, and the overwhelming number of responses we received, that protection of the veterinary nurse title is both needed and wanted by the veterinary profession and the public. Veterinary nurses said overwhelmingly, that title recognition is crucial to feeling valued in their work.

It is vital that we keep up the pressure to get our title protected, and make not only the wider public, but also the government realise how important this issue is. Pet owners deserve to be assured that the people looking after their pets are fully trained and qualified, and veterinary nurses should be recognised for the hard work and training they go through to deliver expert care."

Charlotte Pace RVN

BVNA President

"Looking deeper into the survey results and feedback from both the veterinary profession and the public, it is clear to see that there is a lot of support for statutory protection of the title 'veterinary nurse'. I can empathise with veterinary nurses who feel frustrated that their hard work and qualifications are not recognised properly due to their title not being protected. I share these frustrations and can see how upsetting it is for so many RVNs who have worked hard to achieve their qualifications, and in many cases pursue further training to achieve high levels of expertise throughout their careers, regardless of which path they take. I am not surprised that most members of the public believe it is very important that their pet is cared for by a fully qualified RVN, or that some of the responders stated that they felt 'shocked' at finding that this might not be the case. This is why we

need to keep up the momentum and continue to work closely with our partners at the BVA and RCVS. If we continue the work set out by this survey with more scrutiny, we can use any findings to further support this campaign, which is another positive step towards statutory protection of the title.”

Alex Taylor RVN

BVNA Senior Vice President

“Dedicated and highly skilled, veterinary nurses are critical to the care of animals in practice and essential to the smooth day-to-day running of vet businesses. It’s therefore unsurprising to see the appreciation for the good work they do reflected in the strength of feeling, from both vets and the public, who feel only nurses who are qualified and regulated should carry the title Registered Veterinary Nurse.

“What BVNA’s survey particularly highlights is a lack of awareness amongst pet owners that any unqualified person can use the title veterinary nurse while working in practice. This is concerning and demonstrates the importance and need for it to be protected to help uphold client trust as well as ensure high standards of care and animal welfare.

“The title and those who hold it deserve respect and the security of knowing it is protected and BVA will continue to support and engage with BVNA’s fight for this formal recognition. However, there’s no need for vet practices to wait, they can start to have these conversations with their teams today and put in place the changes needed.”

Malcolm Morley MRCVS

BVA President

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Survey of the veterinary profession

1. Profile of respondents

The survey was compiled, circulated and promoted by BVNA. It was supported by partners and stakeholders, including the BVA and RCVS, to attract a wide range of respondents across the veterinary profession. The survey of the veterinary profession received **8,302 responses**.

1.1 Role

The majority of responses came from registered veterinary nurses (RVNs), student veterinary nurses (SVNs) and veterinary surgeons, whilst other members of the veterinary team also made a contribution including veterinary care assistants (VCAs), receptionists and practice managers.

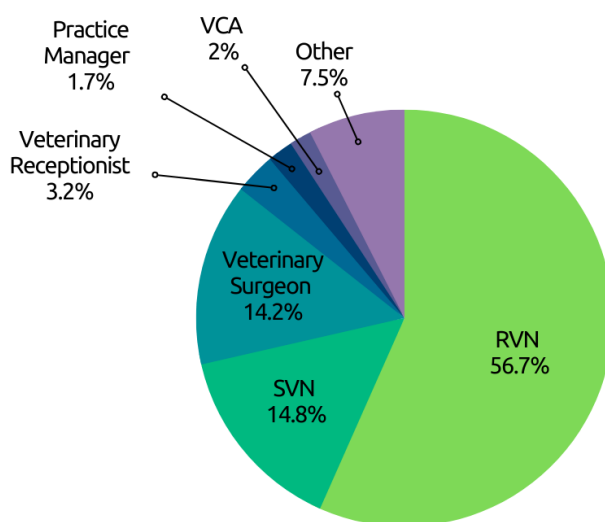


Figure 1: Role of respondents within the veterinary profession

1.2 BVNA membership

Respondents were asked whether they were BVNA members; the majority of responses came from non-members (63%).

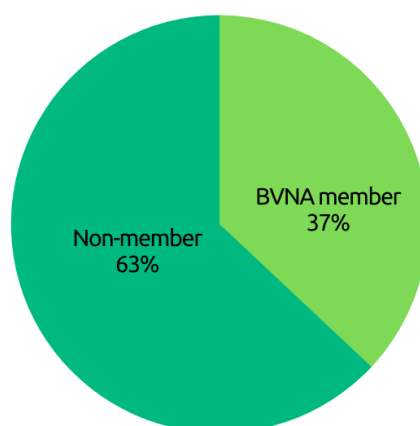


Figure 2: BVNA membership status of respondents within the veterinary profession

2. Awareness and perception of the 'veterinary nurse' title

2.1. Awareness and perception amongst the veterinary profession

The majority of respondents (82%) were aware that the title 'veterinary nurse' was not protected prior to completing the survey.

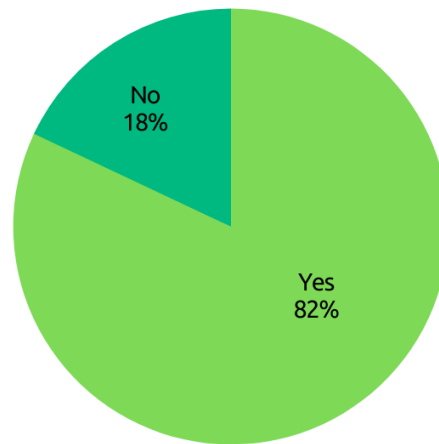


Figure 3: Awareness from respondents within the veterinary profession that the title 'veterinary nurse' was not protected

The overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) strongly agreed that the title 'veterinary nurse' should have statutory protection.

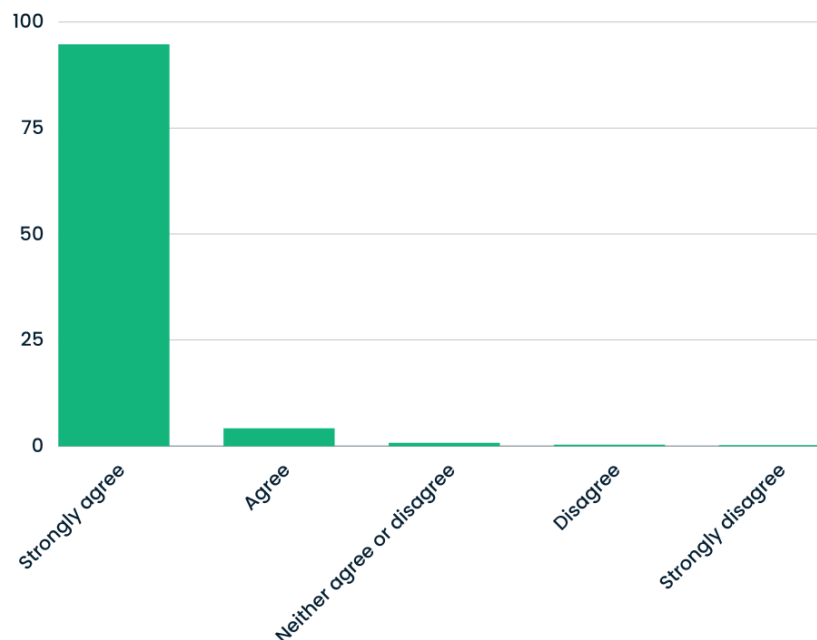


Figure 4: The extent to which respondents from the veterinary profession agreed that the title 'veterinary nurse' should be legally protected (%)

Respondents were given the opportunity to qualify their response with an open-text comment; a selection of these are as follows.

Respondent comments:

“I don’t want my clients to be misinformed and take incorrect information from someone calling them a VN when they are not. RVNs work very hard to qualify and they deserve to have a protected title.”

“We work so hard and deserve the recognition with a protected title. It diminishes the hard work when you see at other practices people referring to themselves as a “veterinary nurse” when they’re not. I feel this move forward will give that boost to the veterinary profession that we all drastically need in this current time.”

“It upsets me knowing after I qualify, I would have worked this hard for a title that is unprotected. I find it frustrating when I keep people in practice, they identify themselves as a vet nurse, you ask them for help with something and then find out they're not qualified.”

“A lot of hard work and study goes into becoming a vet nurse, clients should know the differences in staffing and who is looking after their animal - like a human in a hospital.”

“For clients’ protection, they are trusting the lives of their pets with someone who may not have adequate training, without their knowledge. It’s important for them to be able to distinguish who has and hasn’t had training in their field. Also to appreciate the work that has gone into getting an RVN qualification, and the knowledge they have.”

“Veterinary nurses are trained professionals and should be recognised as such, it should be easy to know if someone caring for an animal is trained and gained qualifications or not.”

“RVNs train for a long time to gain their title. There is a long list of skills that veterinary nurses have. I strongly believe that, for example, only RVNs or SVNs should be able to do things such as monitor anaesthesia. I believe that it can be dangerous for someone who is not a qualified veterinary nurse to undertake such tasks, as they generally do not have the same level of knowledge as someone who has undergone years of training. Veterinary nurses gain knowledge to enable them to react quickly to changes that other personnel might not. Further to this, by not protecting [the] title, it undermines the years of hard work that RVNs have put in in order to become a part of their profession.”

“There is a large amount of training that goes into getting the qualification RVN. It is very upsetting and demoralising when someone can just come along and call themselves a nurse with no prior training. Nursing in the human sector is protected - why can't it be the same in veterinary?”

“We train very hard for many years to a very high standard and so for the profession to continue to train [veterinary] nurses, only registered [veterinary] nurses should be able to practice as that. It’s getting better but the public do not understand the standard to which we are trained, and so do not have confidence in our expertise. How can they when anyone can call themselves a veterinary nurse?”

“Having a protected title ensures adequate training of individuals, and a deep knowledge and understanding of veterinary care. This is very important to me as a veterinary surgeon as I rely on nurse colleagues all the time in my work, and I need to trust their competence particularly for things like monitoring general anaesthetics.”

2.2. Veterinary perception of public understanding of the veterinary nursing role

Respondents were asked to consider their perception of public understanding about the difference between an RVN/SVN and someone who is not qualified, but calls themselves a 'veterinary nurse'.

The majority of respondents (63%) felt that the public have no understanding of this issue.

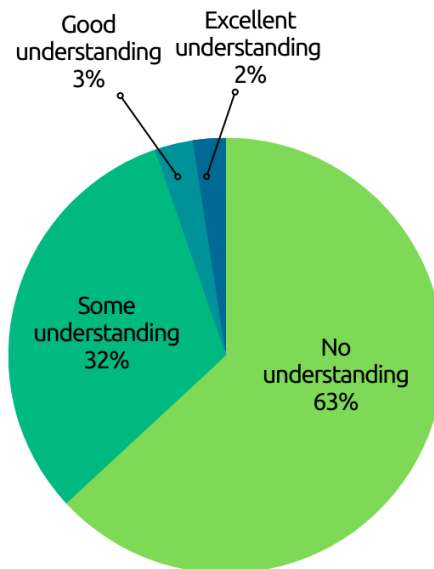


Figure 5: Respondents' perception of public understanding about the difference between RVNs/SVNs and unqualified personnel using the 'veterinary nurse' title

3. The use of the title 'veterinary nurse' by unqualified members of staff in practice

Respondents were asked whether they knew of anybody working in practice who is not registered with the RCVS, but either calls themselves a 'veterinary nurse' or is referred to by others in this way. Nearly half of respondents answered 'yes'.

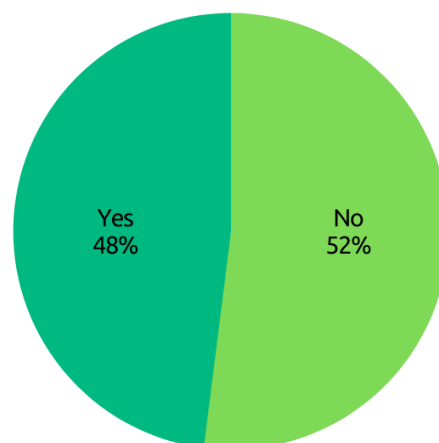


Figure 6: The proportion of respondents who report knowing a person working in practice who is not registered with the RCVS, but is using the title 'veterinary nurse'

BVNA response:

This result was the most surprising as the numbers reported are high. We were aware anecdotally that there are personnel working in practice who are using the title 'veterinary nurse' but are not registered, but were unaware of the scale.

This is an area where we feel further research is required to get a far better understanding of the data and its implications for the profession. It may be that the results vary from region to region or by practice size, but it is something where we need a better understanding to ensure that animal health and welfare is the overriding priority. The BVNA will be distributing further surveys to better understand this data, and its implications.

We would hope that this initial response starts to generate a conversation within the profession, amongst partners and within practices about the scale and how we respond to this. Even as we work towards legislative change, we see significant opportunity to begin the change at a practice level by ensuring staff are referred to and titled appropriately.

4. Perceived impact on the veterinary profession

Respondents were asked a series of questions to obtain their feedback on how they felt protecting the 'veterinary nurse' title would make a difference to their role and profession.

4.1 Every day work life

The highest proportion of respondents (50%) felt that statutory protection of the title would make 'a lot of difference' to their every day work life; 33% of respondents felt it would make 'some difference'.

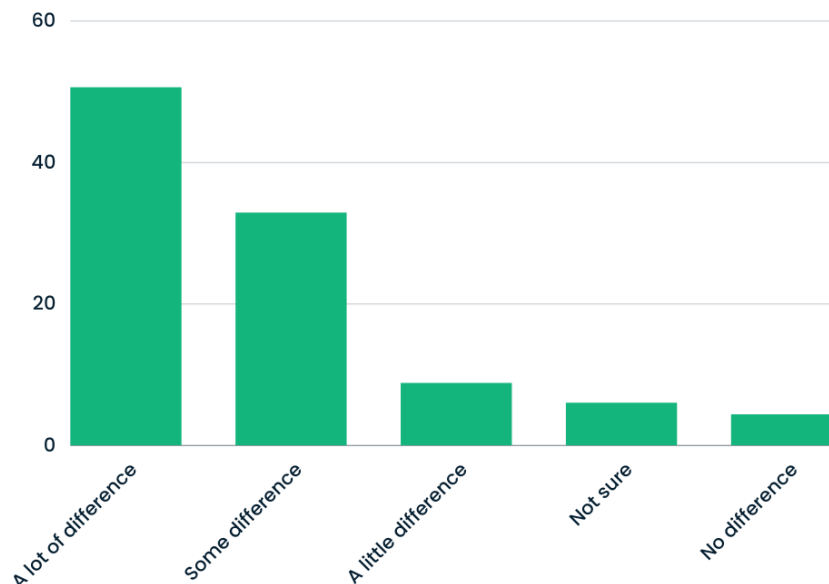


Figure 7: The extent to which respondents from the veterinary profession felt protection of the title 'veterinary nurse' would make a difference to their every day work life (%)

4.2 Feeling the veterinary nursing profession is valued

An overwhelming majority of respondents (99%) felt that statutory protection of the title would help veterinary nurses feel their profession is valued.

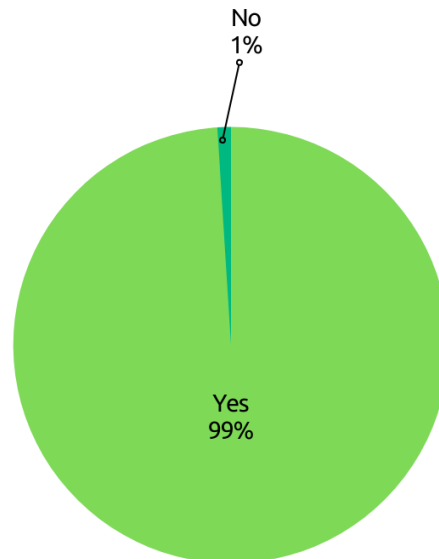


Figure 8: The proportion of respondents from the veterinary profession who thought that protection of the title would help veterinary nurses feel their profession is valued

4.3 Veterinary nursing profession as a whole

When asked how much of a difference protecting the title would make to the veterinary nursing profession as a whole, 75% of respondents felt it would make 'a lot of difference'.

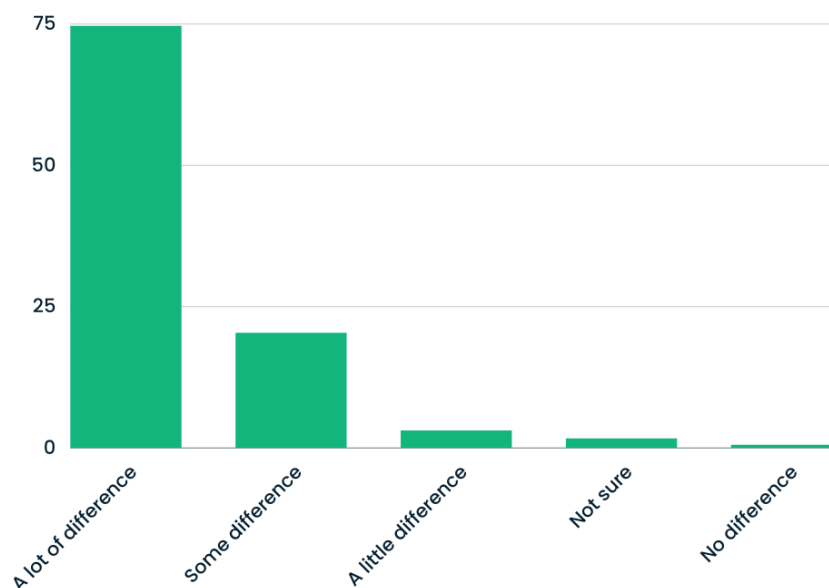


Figure 9: The extent to which respondents from the veterinary profession felt protection of the title would make a difference to the veterinary nursing profession as a whole (%)

4.4 Impact on retention

When asked about the impact of protection of the title on retention of veterinary nurses, feelings were slightly more mixed – whilst 75% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that protection of the title would impact upon retention, 20% neither agreed or disagreed.

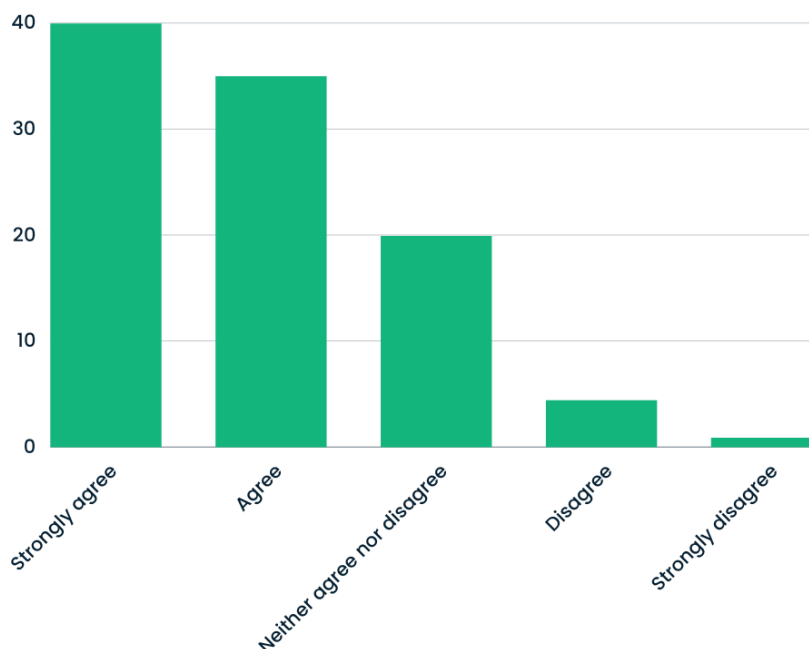


Figure 10: The extent to which respondents from the veterinary profession agreed that protection of the title would impact on the retention of veterinary nurses (%)

Respondents were given the opportunity to qualify their responses with open-text comments; a selection of these are as follows.

Respondent comments:

“It will improve professional identity, it will also mean that [veterinary] nurses can fight for more competitive salaries as someone who isn’t a veterinary nurse, but calling themselves one, can be differentiated in salary.”

“[Veterinary] nurses are leaving due to poor pay and working conditions. Not sure if having a protected title will change that, can only hope it will.”

“Until there are more of us, better pay, better shift patterns, better promotion of the job in schools and more accessibility into the profession, we will still see burn out, compassion fatigue and with the cost of living increasing, nurses debating their financial priorities.”

“There are many factors for [veterinary] nurses leaving the profession, low pay, long hours, stressful clients, high responsibility. I don’t think protecting the title would necessarily persuade people to stay in the profession. I do think it would lift morale and make us feel more valued.”

“There are some other pretty big issues affecting the profession, but increasing recognition of and respect for [veterinary] nurses would be a start.”

“Feeling recognised for your qualification would mean feeling valued and appreciated. I think it would also give us more ability to look at salaries and structured pay scales that would help improve wages for [veterinary] nurses and ultimately make them stay in the profession longer. Feeling valued and appreciated and paid for your experience helps [veterinary] nurses stay motivated and interested in staying in the profession.”

“I think many leave the profession due to burnout and not being paid enough. Maybe getting the title protected is a step in the right direction for the respect and recognition for our work. In turn if we are paid adequately for our roles, as not anyone can be a “veterinary nurse”, then more would stay in the profession.”

“Unfortunately low salaries post qualification, compassion fatigue and toxic environments lead to low salary retention more so than a title.”

“I think generally RVNs are not recognised or appreciated. A little appreciation goes a long way and think this would help encourage RVNs to be recognised and feel appreciated and stay in the profession for longer.”

“In addition to the title being protected, there needs to be other changes too.”

“It is disheartening to feel unprotected in your role which coupled with the intensity of the role in current climates may lead to leaving the profession completely.”

“I do believe retention would increase as wages would be better and match human nurses more as we would be seen as a recognisable profession and could charge for our services. People would be more aware of what we do and that being an RVN is a career to be proud of which not everyone can claim to be.”

“I think the only thing that would aid retention would be salaries relative to their knowledge and experience, and a less stressful workplace.”

“I think it would help retention, as people will know people cannot call themselves a [veterinary] nurse if they are not. Which should make [veterinary] nurses more proud to be a registered veterinary nurse.”

“There are many reasons why nurses are leaving the profession, but a lack of feeling valued is definitely one of them. Protecting the title will assist in RVNs feeling valued, and give them the foundations of being seen as skilled individuals able to find their niches. I think it could also encourage seeking further qualification as it will be more recognised, and in turn help build a foundation for salary discussion - a huge reason RVNs leave the profession and feel demotivated at the moment.”

BVNA response:

As nearly 75% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that protection of the title would impact on retention, these results suggest that respondents feel there is a relationship between these two areas. It is BVNA’s view that statutory protection of the title would enable veterinary nurses to feel more valued and respected within their roles, which are important factors contributing towards retention. However, in a wider sense, we also recognise that retention and ‘feeling valued’ are multifactorial and complex issues currently being faced by the entire profession.

Survey of the public

Members of the public were surveyed to provide more detail on the current understanding of the role of the veterinary nurse amongst the general public, and how they feel about the potential use of unqualified staff. This survey was also distributed and promoted by BVNA, which included outreach to veterinary practices to share the survey with their clients.

The survey of the public received **3,926 responses**.

5. Pet ownership

Of the responses received, 91% came from those who were a pet owner/caregiver.

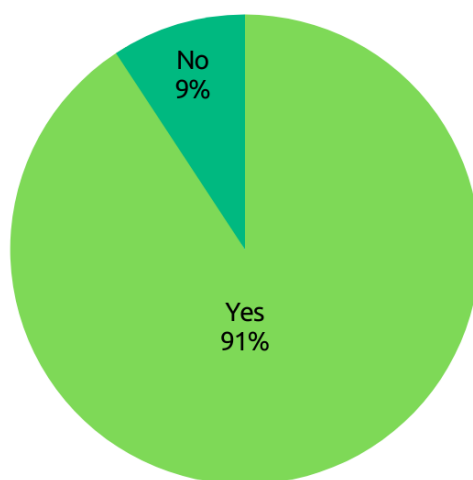


Figure 11: The proportion of respondents within the public survey who were pet owners/caregivers

6. Public awareness and perception of the ‘veterinary nurse’ role and title

Respondents were asked a series of questions to gain insight into their understanding and perception of the role of an RVN, plus statutory protection of the title ‘veterinary nurse’ and the implications this may have on staff in practice.

6.1 Understanding of the RVN role

Respondents were asked to consider their perception of their own understanding of the role of an RVN. The largest proportion of respondents (41%) indicated that they felt they had a good understanding of the role.

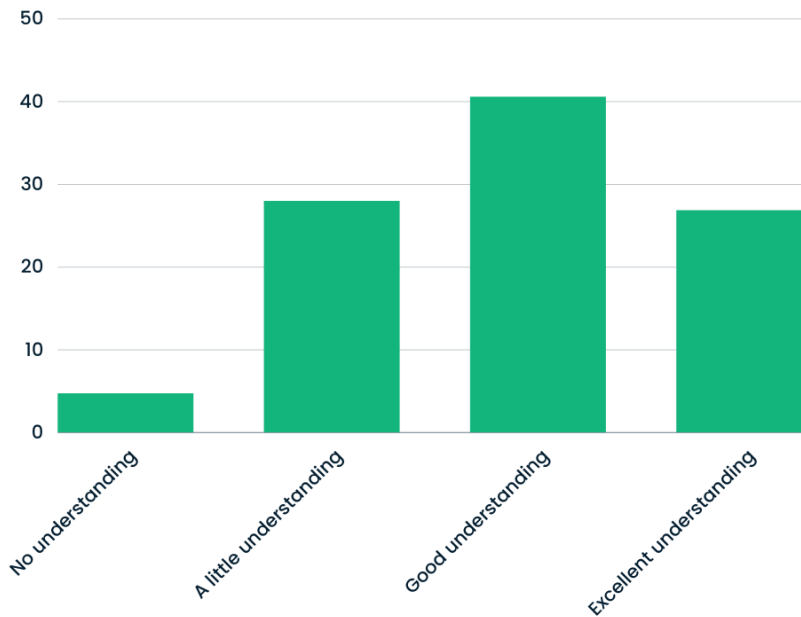


Figure 12: Respondents' perception of their own understanding of the role of an RVN (%)

6.2 Public perceptions of the 'veterinary nurse' title and role

When asked whether respondents would assume that someone calling themselves a 'veterinary nurse' would be fully qualified and regulated by a professional body, an overwhelming majority (91%) responded 'yes'.

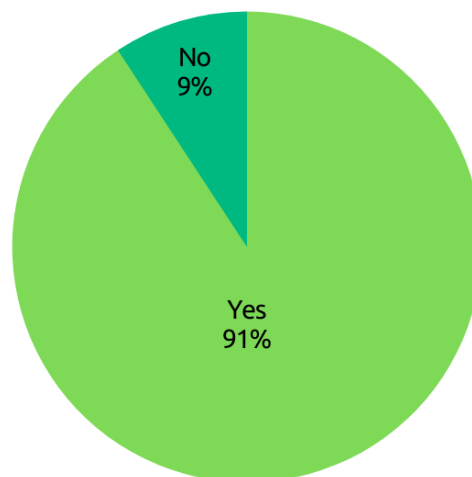


Figure 13: The proportion of respondents who would assume that the title 'veterinary nurse' would be used by those who are fully qualified and regulated by a professional body

Respondents were then asked if they were aware that the title 'veterinary nurse' is not legally protected in the UK; the majority (76%) responded that they were not aware.

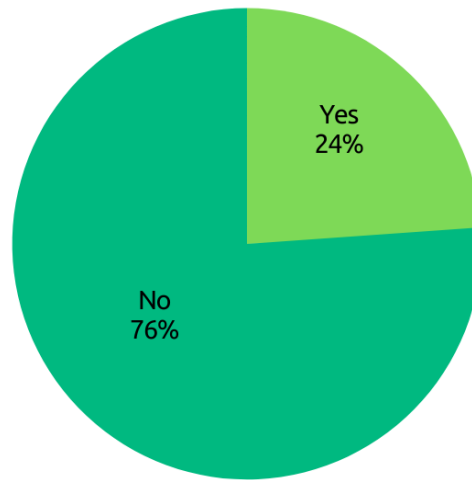


Figure 14: The proportion of respondents who did/did not know the title 'veterinary nurse' is not currently under statutory protection

Respondents were also asked whether they were aware that the term 'veterinary nurse' can be used by an unqualified person working in a veterinary practice. Once again, 76% of respondents were not aware.

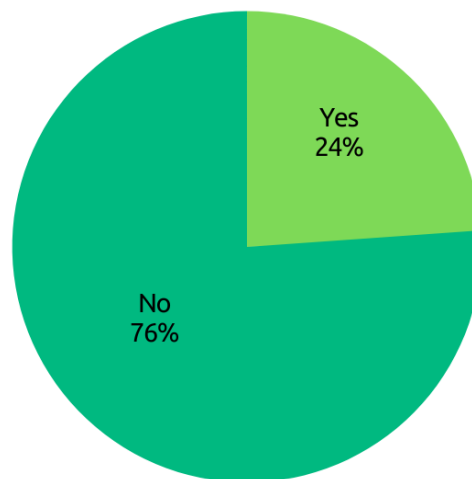


Figure 14: The proportion of respondents who did/did not know the title 'veterinary nurse' can be used by an unqualified member of staff

6.3 Perceived importance of the use of qualified staff

Finally, respondents were asked to consider how important it is to them that their pet is cared for by a fully qualified RVN. The vast majority (92%) responded that they felt this was 'very important'.

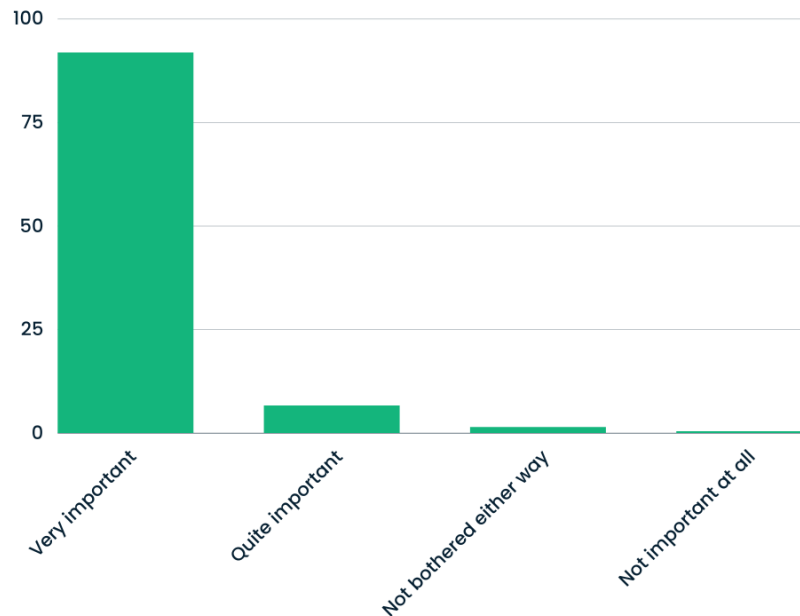


Figure 15: Respondents' perception of the importance of an RVN caring for their pet

Respondents were given the opportunity to qualify their responses with open-text comments; a selection of these are as follows.

Respondent comments:

"I would hope that the person I'm asking to advise me on the care of my pets has received training which allows them to be registered. 'Registered' makes me feel more secure in their ability and knowledge."

"As a human I would expect to be cared for by an appropriately registered professional and would extend this expectation to any living being - human or animal - in my care."

"I was shocked to learn that anyone could call themselves a veterinary nurse, without being professionally qualified. We wouldn't accept this for human nursing, so why should we accept it for animals? Those who are qualified have demonstrated an acceptable standard of training and competence and protection of the title would ensure that the public understands that their pets are being cared for by a qualified professional."

"Learning on the job skills is of course necessary to provide the best quality care for animals in all situations, however, calling yourself a veterinary nurse without qualifications would be the same as calling yourself a nurse. This leaves large margins for error in care provided to animals."

“I expect the best care and treatment for my animals and that can only be from a fully trained and qualified person.”

“I know from experience that it is the [veterinary] nurse who gives the care directed by the vet and I want that person to know what to do, and to recognise if something isn’t going well. The idea of an unqualified person monitoring my pet under an anaesthetic is horrendous.”

“Any treatment my animal has at a vets is not without risk. Therefore I need the assurances that the person administering treatment is registered and qualified.”

“It is a travesty that the term can be used by lay people with minimal experience. That is disingenuous to the public and bordering on fraud.”

“It is vital for pet safety that the people treating pets are suitably qualified to avoid harm being done. I am shocked that anyone can call themselves a veterinary nurse [and this title] can be used by someone unqualified!”

“Our pets are precious. We expect the best care from our vets and vet nurses. We depend on the nurses to take our place in comforting, consoling, reassuring them. We want our vets to be supported by the expertise of qualified nurses. It requires years of training. It is a vocation and we can be assured of the best treatment/care of this if there has been substantial animal nurse training in place.”

“I wouldn't want an unqualified nurse giving me care if I were ill, therefore the same should apply to our pets.”

“I should be able to trust that the information I am given by ANY vet nurse, will be backed up by formal training and verified exams, and supported with continuous learning.”

“Although every person employed within a veterinary institute is vital to the overall functioning of the practice, it fills me with increased confidence that my animals are cared for by individuals who have taken the correct qualifications and comprehend the animals needs to an advanced extent.”

“The public assumes that their pets are being looked after by qualified and registered veterinary nurses, in the same way as we expect such a level of expertise and accountability from nurses.”

“For someone to call themselves a nurse, you automatically assume that they are qualified in the same way that you would expect a nurse in a hospital to be fully qualified. The term nurse should be universally recognised as a term that carries a qualification with it.”

“A pet is a member of the family and needs expert care that can only be provided by suitably trained and qualified professionals. It is appalling that you don’t have to be qualified to call yourself a vet nurse.”

“If someone that hasn’t had the right training was looking after my pets, I wouldn’t feel very comfortable handing them over. I would always expect a fully qualified nurse to look after my children if they needed to go to hospital so I presumed it was the same at the vets as they are doing the same thing just with animals.”

“I see anything relating to a medical/scientific practice as a serious matter, especially when lives are involved (whether that be human or animal) so for someone to have the title of nurse I would expect them at minimum to have a regulated knowledge and training.”

Conclusion and future work

When the BVNA undertook this work, we felt that there would be a positive response to the survey and that most people within the profession would support the intended outcome of statutory protection of the title 'veterinary nurse'.

What did surprise us was the high volume of responses from both within the veterinary profession and the public, and the strength of that feeling.

It has highlighted that more research is required to get a more complete picture of the veterinary nursing profession, the working practices and the workforce to shape the profession for the future. The BVNA's role as the only independent representative body for veterinary nurses means we are ideally placed to carry out this work and lead the profession going forward.

One of the areas which has concerned us most was the high number of unqualified personnel using the title 'veterinary nurse' whilst currently working in practice. It is our intention to carry out further research to identify if this number is truly representative and will be also looking at regional data and variations by practice. This work will be carried out with the support of our partners, the BVA and RCVS. However, even as we work towards legislative change, we see a significant opportunity to start these conversations at a practice level. By ensuring staff are referred to and titled appropriately, we can ensure that animal welfare and client trust are both upheld.

We also seek to find a measure (or set of measures) that reflect the difference that statutory protection of the title would make to an RVN. This means understanding the workforce better, both now and for the future. We should also consider the impact other changes to legislation, including the latest review of 'under care' and technology, will have on the entirety of the vet-led team, to include RVNs. We currently have more RVNs and SVN's than at any time, yet retention and recruitment is still anecdotally reported as a major issue by practices large and small, across the UK.

The survey has also highlighted that there is further long-term work to be carried out on raising the profile and visibility of the RVN as a valued member of the vet-led team, recognising their role and contribution. From our data, it is clear that there is disparity between public perception and actual understanding of the role of the RVN. For example, 95% of respondents from our public survey claimed to have some level of understanding of the RVN's role, yet 76% did not know the title is not yet under statutory protection, and 91% would assume that someone using the 'veterinary nurse' title would be properly qualified and regulated. This reinforces the feedback from the responses we received from the veterinary profession, and demonstrates that there is a broad public misunderstanding of the RVN role. At BVNA, we are committed to continuing our work to champion the SVN and RVN role to improve public perception and recognition.

Change does not happen quickly, and we are aware of the previous campaign to achieve this same goal. It is our intention to continue this campaign until the Government takes on board the recommendations of the LWP, supported by our key partners the BVA and RCVS, which includes statutory protection of the title 'veterinary nurse'. We will actively work to raise public awareness of this issue, and gather more information to provide evidence to support the LWP recommendations. We feel that the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 is outdated and no longer fit for purpose, or reflective of the veterinary nursing profession of today and of the future.

Along with our partners and stakeholders, we will continue campaign to protect the title 'veterinary nurse' as part of a new Veterinary Services Act, that truly prioritises animal health and welfare.

Whilst we thank you all for your input, we will need your continued support and intelligence to ensure that the title 'veterinary nurse' finally achieves the legal protection it so rightly deserves.

The British Veterinary Nursing Association

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If you have any questions about the content of this report, please contact bvna@bvna.co.uk