**Innovation and creativity in assessment – LIVE Teaching Development Award 2016**

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Within our teaching, one of our most important goals is that our assessment is based on the skills that represent graduate success. Based on our research, we know that veterinary graduates who succeed in their first job are those who can communicate well with clients, and work collaboratively with clients and other stakeholders to resolve complex and often emotionally difficult situations. We also know that in veterinary practice, a “creative” approach to problem-solving is often required – for that (not so unusual) scenario that doesn’t follow any textbook. To enhance these important graduate outcomes within our assessment strategy, this year we introduced a new assessment to the BVetMed. In an in-course assignment (worth a significant proportion of the 3rd year grade), we asked students to analyse their experience in communication, working in a team or managing ethically difficult situations, and plan their ongoing learning to develop as future veterinarians. To encourage creative competence alongside communication, teamwork or ethical problem-solving, we also allowed the assignment to include an optional non-traditional or “creative” element, of the students’ choice.

We weren’t sure what to expect, but we were astounded by what our students produced. Approximately 10% of the year group chose to incorporate something non-traditional in their assignment: poetry, music, paintings, cartoons, maps, board games, photos and a short play. In their accompanying text, many students explained how being able to use a non-traditional approach had helped them to analyse and critically appraise their skills. Students, such as those whose work is shown, wrote that being able to paint, draw or sketch had helped them depict complex experiences, such relationship breakdown and its emotional impact. Another student, who had experienced difficulties communicating her concerns about animal welfare on a farm, used colour to demonstrate a feeling of being overwhelmed by negative emotions, and inability to communicate effectively as a result.

Often the creative elements of students’ submissions represented something the students found troubling or difficult: challenges relating to communication during value conflict, or anxiety arising from decisions not to treat wounded or unwell animals. Being able to articulate these experiences in a non-text way seemed to help students to analyse their relevant skills, before subsequently identifying literature and resources to help them manage similar situations more effectively in future. Our research (Armitage-Chan & May, 2018) shows that similar challenges contribute to frustration and poor career satisfaction within the profession: the experience of clients with different priorities to the veterinarian, and dejection experienced when value differences or financial limitations preclude treatment. We hope that by providing our students with a variety of ways to express, analyse and resolve their challenges, they will graduate and being these enhanced resilience skills to their veterinary life.

The most impactful outcome of the award is that it has led to further funding, which has come from the Council on Veterinary Medical Education in 2019, so the work continues. A publication is currently being written.

*Armitage-Chan, E & May, S A 2018: Identity, environment and mental wellbeing in the veterinary profession. Veterinary Record, 183, 68.*