

## **Kennel Club Charitable Trust Bursary Post-Training Report: I Made it!**

By Casey Plain

I probably have quite an unusual backstory to my Nursing training, but I am looking forward to explaining it. I spent almost 10 years in a 2.5 vet, Small Animal practice in Dundee as an Animal Nursing Assistant (ANA). I absolutely adored my job, my colleagues, the clients and the pets. The more time I spent in practice the more I yearned to learn about effective and safe nursing. Studies I undertook during this time included my formal ANA training, a summary on Complementary Therapies, the Companion Animal and Avian SQP qualification via AMTRA and the City & Guilds Level 2 Certificate in 'Assisting Veterinary Surgeons in the Monitoring of Animal Patients under Anaesthesia and Sedation' via the College of Animal Welfare.

As an affiliated member of the British Veterinary Nursing Association, I was very aware of the changes happening in Veterinary Nursing with regards to the proposed Royal Charter; such as the strict regulation of the profession and the possible protection of the Veterinary Nurse title. I felt frustration that there seemed no way for me to undergo my training due to financial constraints, despite yearning to apply. In 2015, I finally found an avenue I could pursue. I applied for the Veterinary Nursing HND taught at the Barony SRUC campus. I qualified for a student loan which would help cover tuition fees and before I knew it I was asked to attend an interview.

In actual fact, my life was changing considerably and I was 6months pregnant when I attended the interview. I was accepted onto the course and, although wary I was taking on too much, my practice also supported this decision (although block release meant it was tough-going on their staffing levels). I took these blocks unpaid and paid all fees myself. It was difficult, but I loved the course and was so grateful to have finally found a way in. I embarked on my 1<sup>st</sup> year training in summer of 2016, with my baby boy aged 7weeks old.

College was fantastic and the learning facilities available to us at the Barony were second to none. We had a functioning operating theatre, an exotics department, a laboratory, and stables with live horses, a wildlife hospital and a working farm. We attended practical classes in these departments on a rotational basis and my all-time favourite was to be on the farm. I fed growing calves, restrained and treated sheep with oral medication, administered topical parasite treatment to cows and even passed a stomach tube to a new-born calf in order to give it its first colostrum feed. It was terrifying and exhilarating, and all done under the close watchful eye of a professional farmer. I was on maternity leave for the majority of my 1<sup>st</sup> year at college, although I managed to upkeep my training hours in practice by attending practice voluntarily and on flexi-hours, at my own accord.

On returning to work after maternity leave, I was beginning my 2<sup>nd</sup> and final year of VN training. We were beginning to really focus on the nursing role itself and the topics were much more relevant to life in practice; such as pharmacology, radiography and laboratory. OSCEs were also now a very real part of my life, and I found myself becoming disheartened by my lack of personal growth within my small practice. I sent out a few C.V's in order to

get feedback on what practices were looking for when recruiting nurses; and to my disbelief I was contacted by a nursing manager at St Clair Vet Group in Fife. With the unfaltering support of my fiancé, I took the leap and accepted the Student Veterinary Nurse position offered to me. At around the same time, I received notification that I had been awarded a Kennel Club Charitable Trust Bursary! This could not have come at a better time as it meant I could pay off debts accrued during my 1<sup>st</sup> years training.

My final year of training was intense, with the added pressure of NPL completion date and the looming OSCE exams. We had weekly practice sessions for the practical exams throughout our college blocks, and also underwent a set of mock OSCEs under exam conditions in order to prepare us for the real exam. Unfortunately, I failed my mocks by a huge margin. Ironically, this actually greatly benefited me because it allowed me to identify my faults and gave me time to deal with my anxieties. I also made an 'OSCE Box' which I kept at work and would take out and practice all the various tasks whenever I had the chance.

During my final year, we had to complete an assignment which encouraged us to reflect on area of our NPL progress. We had to analyse how we originally felt about certain tasks and compare it to how we felt after working on these areas. It was good to review my progress this way and I felt it allowed me to measure my competence and confidence in the required 'day one' practical skills. I was really able to see my growth. Part of the assignment was also to include a '5 point plan' for the future and I had to consider what my future goals might be. I remember stating that I would like to complete my NPL successfully, pass my exams and my OSCE's, and I expressed interest in undertaking the Veterinary Nursing Emergency and Critical Care (ECC) certificate. I also mused that I would like to expand my family and hopefully work part time in the near future.

I am thrilled to be able to say that I attended my graduation ceremony on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017. I passed all my written and practical exams and I excelled in my OSCE exams. I actually crumbled when I read the notification email, I just couldn't believe that I had finally done it. My colleagues were all over the moon for me. I can also happily report that I am making moves toward enrolling in the ECC certificate, whilst expecting my second baby mid-July. I couldn't be happier at my current practice. We do 1<sup>st</sup> opinion, referrals, stem cell treatments, ophthalmology and orthopaedics. I adore all my team mates, and genuinely look forward to going into work every day. I have enjoyed every aspect of my journey, and can honestly say that if you are willing to push yourself beyond your comfort zone and put the work in; that dreams genuinely can come true!