

CPD at the Royal Veterinary College

A guide for e-CPD courses

This document contains some practical information and advice which will aid you in your participation of e-CPD learning with the RVC.

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Background information

The first commercial veterinary e-CPD course in the UK was launched by the Royal Veterinary College in May 2003 using a model pioneered by Professor Gilly Salmon at the Open University. This is an ideal mode of study for busy veterinarians, stimulating, relevant and interactive courses conducted online by subject specialists. The courses are hosted within the RVC Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) where participants can access the course materials, participate in group discussions and online sessions, carry out online tasks, and collaborate with a small group of professionals in sharing experiences.

Once registered, all participants are issued with a unique ID, which will allow them to access the VLE and their particular course. Participants will be given detailed guidelines on how to navigate within the VLE and advice on how to participate effectively in an online course. The resources delivered via the VLE can include course notes, published papers, cases, images and radiographs if relevant, and useful Web links. There will also be a discussion board and various online tasks.

The e-CPD courses are run completely online, so there is no need to travel to a distant venue or take time off work. However, for most RVC e-CPD courses participants are expected to commit at least six hours per week to carrying out the set coursework and collaborating actively with their online colleagues. No advanced computer skills are required to take the course apart from a basic confidence in working on the Internet.

There are also some courses that have an online, real-time 'live' meeting place where you can listen to a lecture being given, as well as watch the PowerPoint presentation, view images or video, ask questions, draw on a 'whiteboard', and interact with your fellow students. For these sessions, which are run using an online classroom, participants will be issued with detailed instructions on how to join and participate in the online session. You will need to make sure you are an administrator on your computer and can install the required small software component. If you are unsure, please contact your system administrator.



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Computer requirements

Hard disk space	At least 2 GB
CD-ROM drive	Double speed or faster (recommended)
Operating systems	Windows Client: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windows 2000/XP/Vista/7 • Pentium III 500 MHz processor • 256 MB RAM Mac Client: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mac OS X 10.2.8, 10.3.9, 10.4 or 10.5 • G3, G4, G5 or Intel Processor Solaris Client: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solaris 10 (SPARC only) • UltraSPARC IIc 30 Linux Client: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Hat Linux (RHEL4), Novell SUSE 9 or 10 • Pentium III 500 MHz processor • 256 MB RAM
Display	Resolution 600 x 800 (minimum) 1024 x 768 or higher (recommended) 256 colours (minimum), 65536 colours or higher (recommended)
Modem	Minimum 56 K dial-up or broadband connection (strongly recommended)
Audio	Soundcard with speakers and microphone or headset
Software	Essential: Internet browser such as Internet Explorer 7 or above, Mozilla Firefox 3.5 or above or Safari 3 or above. Suggested: Adobe reader (for reading PDF documents); Word processing programme (such as Microsoft Word or Pages for Mac)

English language requirements

You should have an advanced level ability to work in English to participate in an e-CPD course. It is necessary to express your ideas efficiently and effectively, therefore your ability to read, write and understand the English is essential. If English is not your first language and if you require further guidance regarding the level of language proficiency required please contact the CPD office for guidance before registering.

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Essential information

You may find it useful to keep a record of some details relating to your course. We have created a simple form below where this information may be stored if you wish. We have filled in some contact details for your reference.

Website address for course	www.ble.ac.uk
My username (<i>this will be sent via email to you approx. one week before the course starts</i>)	
My password (<i>this will be sent via email to you approx. one week before the course starts</i>)	
Email address I have stated as my contact during this course	
Course tutor(s)	
Technical help	ecpdhelp@rvc.ac.uk
CPD office	cpd@rvc.ac.uk Tel: 01707 666865 Fax: 01707 666877

Before the course starts

If you have not received an email with your username and password details by 5 days before the course is due to start, please check your spam/trash folder and if there is no email with these details please contact the CPD office. If you find emails from CPD are going in to your spam/trash folder please change your email settings to allow emails from the 'rvc.ac.uk' email addresses so further course correspondence may reach you.

Please check that you have everything you need to participate on the course, and that your computer is ready.

For some courses you will receive a course book in the post to accompany the course. These notes are sent to the address you provided at the time of registration, and are posted out where possible to reach you during the week before the course commences. However, the notes are also available to view within the online course so there should be no delay in your being able to start looking through the course material. For some courses a CD is also provided with course material, so please check the envelope carefully. If you have not

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received your course notes by the end of the first week on the course please contact the CPD office.

Please log in to the course site at www.ble.ac.uk to familiarize yourself with the layout and structure of the course you are enrolled in. The course tutors will invite you to post a message to introduce yourself once the course is about to begin. You will find details of the tutors for each course within the course information.

Course website

You can access your e-CPD course from any computer with an internet connection, just use www.ble.ac.uk and enter your username and password. Any scheduled maintenance of the Blackboard site is noted on the log in screen for reference.

The screenshot shows the Blackboard Academic Suite interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Help', and 'Login' links. Below this is a 'Welcome' banner with a row of images. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Login Here:** A form with fields for 'Username:' and 'Password:', and a 'Login' button. Text above the form says: 'Have an account? Enter login information here and click the Login button below.'
- Scheduled maintenance:** A notice stating: 'The BLE (Blackboard) will require infrequent maintenance, which will be scheduled on the first Sunday night of the month between 11pm until 7am on the Monday (UK time). During this time, the service may be unavailable.'
- Browser Settings:** A section with the text: 'Use the button below to check if your web browser is properly configured to use Blackboard' and a 'Test Browser' button.
- Welcome:** A message: 'Welcome to the Bloomsbury Learning Environment - using the Blackboard platform. This joint initiative is undertaken by five of the Bloomsbury Colleges. For further information, visit www.bloomsbury.ac.uk/ble' and the Bloomsbury Learning Environment logo.
- Help & Support:** A section with the text: 'If you are having difficulty accessing the site, please check your College's Support Unit Website.' Below this is a table of links:

Colleges	Support Unit Website
Birkbeck	www.bbk.ac.uk/elearning/blackboard/
IoE	www.iel.ac.uk/itu/blackboard/
LSHTM	www.lshtm.ac.uk/its/blackboard/
RVC	www.rvc.ac.uk/Services/eMedia/
SOAS	www.soas.ac.uk/add/blesupport/

At the bottom of the page, there are logos for Birkbeck University of London, IOE (Institute of Education, University of London), RVC (Royal Veterinary College, University of London), and SOAS (University of London). The footer text reads: 'Copyright © 2004-2006 Bloomsbury Learning Environment'.

Once logged in to the Blackboard site you will see a list of the courses you are enrolled in on the right hand side of the screen. Any announcements are also listed. On the left hand side of you will see some contact details at the RVC.

It is a good idea to visit the site regularly each week of the course. You will find regular announcements (these may also be emailed to you), general course information, discussion board forums and other relevant resources.

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Netiquette

When participating in discussion boards and emails during the course it is important to be aware of 'netiquette';

- Please use a descriptive subject line in your postings so people know what your message is about.
- Try to avoid sending large attachments to people without warning them first.
- Avoid block capitals and obscure fonts as this can make messages harder to read and possibly misinterpreted.
- Don't expect to always receive an immediate answer to your message – it may be that people are able to respond quickly but time is often needed to consider appropriate answers, and of course not everyone is online all of the time.

Getting the most out of e-CPD

Many people find they participate far more in an e-CPD course than they first expected. To get the most out of a course try to join in with all activities, read other participant messages and respond as suggested by the course tutor, and have a go at quizzes and assignments. For some very busy courses the core work will not require you to read every posting as the course can become overwhelming. Your course tutor will advise you about this.

You may find it useful to save notes on your computer or with your hard copy course notes for future reference once the course access is closed on the website.

Work safely and comfortably. Make sure you take regular breaks from the screen and are aware of how you are sitting.

Further guidance

- **Downloading and reading a PDF file**
It is useful to set up a folder on your computer e.g. in 'My documents' before you start downloading any files. To save a PDF file to your computer: Right click on the document name, then choose 'Save target as' from the pop-up menu. A download box will appear briefly, followed by the 'Save as' dialogue box. This will ask you to indicate where you want to save the document and what you want to call it. Click on 'Save' to complete the download.

The end of the course

At the end of an e-CPD course there is usually an extension of access for two weeks. This is to allow time for participants to finish off any assignments and access the course material.

An email will be sent to ask for feedback via a brief online survey. This is usually sent during the two week extended time, or at the end of that period.

CPD certificates are posted to you once participation in the course and completion of assignments has been assessed. We aim to do this during or at the end of the extended access time and post these out to you as soon as possible. We hope to 'see' you on another e-CPD in the future!

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