The BSAVA provides a structured bank of online resources around professional and clinical skills for the veterinary profession. Whether you are a new or recent graduate, returning to work after a career break or an employer supporting a newly qualified graduate in your practice, the comprehensive resources have been designed to maximize learning and development opportunities. This report features the experiences of two newly qualified vets and how the PDP matched resources can help for a smooth transition into practice life.

Ellie Morris graduated from Bristol Vet School in the summer of 2017.

I’m now 3 months into my first job as a small animal vet. During my final year, I did 6 weeks of EMS at the same practice I am now working for, so settling in has been relatively straightforward. I knew everyone well already and had previously had a chance to focus on things like using the computer system and familiarizing myself with practice protocols while I was still a student. However, I was still nervous about coming back as a real vet, taking responsibility and working unsupervised for the first time. How much had I forgotten since finals? Would finally being a vet, after all these years of working towards it, be what I’d hoped? How hard would it be to transition from student to staff, both in my own mind and in the eyes of my colleagues?

My first week was thankfully very straightforward – I was eased in gently with half-hour consult blocks and reception only gave me simple problems at first. Before long I’d asked them to just treat me like any other vet as I was keen to get stuck in and wanted to challenge myself. I’m the sort of person who would rather be thrown in at the deep end and have help available if I ask for it rather than have my hand held, so my practice gave me just the right balance of support and challenge. It’s also been a confidence boost to know that the other vets trust my clinical judgement and are happy for me to manage my own cases without looking over my shoulder all the time. It helped that one of my colleagues had graduated from the same university as me and also joined the practice as a new graduate a few years earlier, so the senior vets had a rough idea of what to expect in terms of my competencies and how to support me. I started doing out-of-hours after 3 weeks, but I’ve had a scheduled backup vet for the first 3 months, which has been great for when I’ve encountered new problems overnight. Recently I’ve been needing to phone for backup less and less, which has been really satisfying.

About a month in, things really kicked up a notch. Not only was August/September quite a busy period for the practice but I was now working to the same rota as the other vets, and had a busy workload. I had a few crazy weekends on-call, with lots of really varied and challenging cases, plus a run of a few very training and emotional situations. One case in particular involved managing a very sick dog while dealing with abusive owners, the VDS and the RSPCA. The outcome was unpleasant and difficult for the whole team, and while I feel I dealt with everything as well as I could have done, everyone involved was exhausted and disappointed with the situation.

What with this situation, on top of learning new things every day and managing cases I didn’t have much experience of, I had a few weeks of going to bed around 8 pm every night and sleeping for most of any days I had off! After a fairly easy first couple of weeks, finally getting a taste of working hard and being a real vet came as a bit of a shock to the system. By this point many of my friends had also started work and our WhatsApp group was full of questions about cases and photos of weird and wonderful conditions. Everyone reassured each other with the news that we were all finding it hard and it was really interesting to see how our experiences compared.

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Hannah Bills-Brown graduated from The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in the summer of 2017.

First 6 months in practice... where has that time gone? When people said it is only after vet school finishes that the hard work begins they were completely right! However, along with a lot of hard work has come an equal amount of enjoyment and laughter. My first 6 months in practice has been a steep learning curve and has rapidly taught me more about myself and the veterinary world than my last few years at vet school ever did. By the end of vet school I was feeling ready to take the next step. I wanted to embrace the responsibility of making my own decisions, taking on my own cases, as that was the only way I was going to increase my confidence and trust my instincts. I have been lucky to find a practice where there is a hardworking and very helpful team of nurses to guide me through. Without them answering many questions when I was doing things for the first time. I wouldn’t have been able to settle into the job anywhere near as quickly. In my practice there was also another new graduate starting whom I knew from Edinburgh. Having someone in the same boat as me during this crucial time has been very beneficial for us both. It allowed us to ask stupid questions without being embarrassed and we were able to remind each other of bits of tutorials or lectures that had slipped out of our minds.

I had a 2-week induction period where I first shadowed another vet and then started consulting by myself with support from my boss and the nurses in the prep room. Now, 6 months in I’m feeling a lot more confident with the bread-and-butter consults, having sorted out in my head a method of working-up common problems and explaining this to owners without the vet jargon. It took me a while to overcome the feeling that clients were somehow losing out by seeing me because of my inexperience. Speaking to my friends in practice this seems to be a common feeling with new graduates. Over the last few months my self-confidence has improved and I know that as long as I am aware of my limitations I can provide as good a service to clients as my colleagues.

Something I’ve found challenging in the consult room is the many ‘Dr Googles’ that come through the door. During my EMS placements I was aware that many people now turn to the internet for their veterinary advice ahead of visiting their vet. When it’s only you in the consult room it can be very daunting and can throw you off a bit. In my first week I had a lady wanting me to change my treatment plan for her Romanian dog that had contracted campylobacter because the people on her forum had recommended otherwise! Situations like this can portray the image that people are distrustful of our knowledge and skills as veterinarians. However, I have found a lot of the time it is simply that they want the best for their pet, and when I think about it, it’s only natural in today’s society to research what you don’t know about when the resources are so easily available.

I’ve attended a range of useful CPD in my first few months in practice. I enjoy this learning along with the job; I find it less stressful than vet school in the way that you can relax and absorb the information without worrying that you’re going to be tested on the content in a few weeks’ time. I have thoroughly enjoyed my first 6 months in practice. Despite all the preparation in vet school, there has been so much that you just have to learn on the job, from using the computer system, to developing productive long-term working relationships. I think my top tip for upcoming graduates would be: be patient and give yourself time to find a practice that suits you and will support you. There are lots of opportunities out there and it is hard to know first time around what kind of environment you will thrive best in, so keep an open mind to all jobs that may come up and take your own development needs seriously. But most of all - if you have graduated vet school, you are prepared and you can do it! Dive in and don’t be afraid to make mistakes. All I can say is bring on the next 6 months!