Student attainment in the first year of a master's degree in veterinary nursing: Do entry qualifications matter?

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1. Background

Lifelong learning for VNs is encouraged by the RCVS, who have accredited eligible postgraduate (PG) courses since 2019. The higher education sector has also been actively encouraged to admit applicants who do not have undergraduate qualifications to enter graduate courses based on work experience and prior learning[1].

Entry to the VN profession is achieved through parallel pathways of degree and diploma-level qualifications which results in PG courses admitting students from varied academic backgrounds. For non-degree students, it is unclear what impact this academic leap to master's level has.
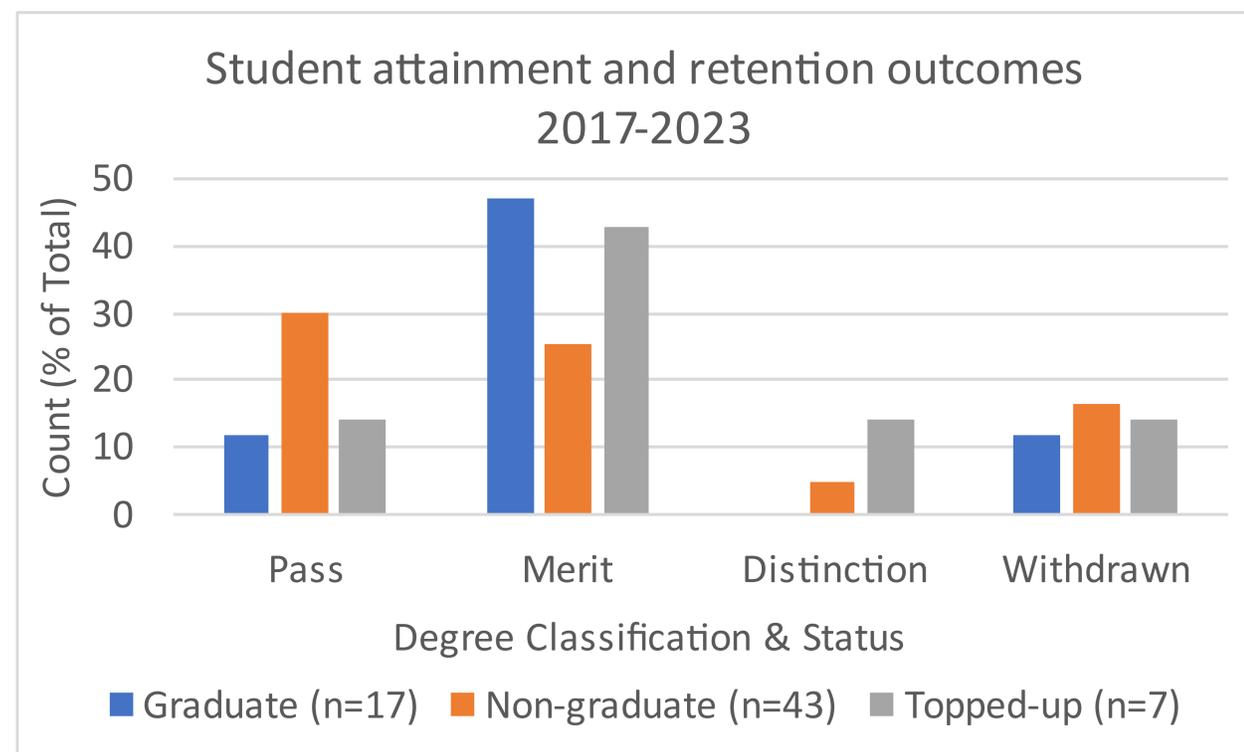
2. Aims & Hypothesis

This study aimed to describe student attainment & retention at the end of the 1st year (60-credits) of an online 3-year MSc in Advanced Practice in Veterinary Nursing.

We hypothesized that the level of initial VN qualification would not impact on student attainment or retention.

3. Methods

- 67 student admissions records reviewed (2017-2023).
- 41 (60%) students had completed 60-credits.

- Students:
  - 95.5% female / 4.5% male.
  - 76.1% UK/Ireland / 23.9% international.
  - Median age 34 years (22-53 years).
  - Median time qualified 7 years (0-32 years).

- Potential associations were assessed using Fisher's exact test:
  - Outcomes: 'attainment' and 'withdrawn'.
  - Input variables: 'primary VN qualification', 'Other pre-VN degree held', and 'Prior learning undertaken'.

4. Results

Student attainment and retention outcomes 2017-2023

Count (% of Total) vs Degree Classification & Status (Pass, Merit, Distinction, Withdrawn)

■ Graduate (n=17) ■ Non-graduate (n=43) ■ Topped-up (n=7)

5. Discussion

Attainment was high for all students on the APVN programme and indicates that, like nurses, VNs from non-traditional academic backgrounds can succeed at master's level study[1].

Higher education admissions policy which provides credit for work experience and prior learning is valid for VN applicants looking to undertake PG study.

Overall attrition rates were lower than figures for mature students[2], but entrants may require additional support to prevent early withdrawal.

References
1. Donoghue, J., et al. (2010) Recognition of prior learning as university entry criteria is successful in postgraduate nursing students. Innovations in Education & Teaching International, 39(1), 54-62.
2. HESA (2022) Non-continuation: UK Performance Indicators, available from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation [last accessed 15 June 2023].