

The 177th Annual General Meeting of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, held virtually via an online platform on Friday 10 July 2020 at 10am.

The President, Dr Niall Connell, chaired the virtual meeting, welcoming members of RCVS Council and Veterinary Nurses Council, in addition to other members of the professions and their guests who were in attendance. In his welcome, Dr Connell noted the unprecedented circumstances of having to hold an AGM virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic and that, while ordinarily these meetings would be held in person, there was important business that could not be delayed.

The Registrar, Eleanor Ferguson, reported that the notice of the meeting had been published on the website of the *Veterinary Record* from 8 June 2020. The President also read a statement from Her Majesty the Queen as Patron of the RCVS.

1. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting, held on Friday 12 July 2019, which had also been made available online, were confirmed and approved as a correct record.

2. Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2019

The President formally presented the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2019.

3. Questions

The Registrar stated that, ordinarily at this point in the meeting, there would be the opportunity for attendees of the AGM to ask questions from the floor but that, due to the virtual nature of the meeting, this would not be possible. The RCVS had, however, invited members to submit their questions by email ahead of the meeting and had received two questions in advance.

The first was from **Dr Daniella Dos Santos MRCVS**, President of the British Veterinary Association (BVA), who was submitting her question on behalf of the organisation's members.

Her question was as follows:

I would like to ask the RCVS to set out more detail on its reserves strategy. We note in the Annual Report & Financial Statements 2019 that the RCVS reported £18.7m in reserves – £10.1m above the target of £8.6m. Specifically, I would like to ask the following questions:

- 1. The report states that the difference “was being retained to provide funds for planned projects and the estate strategy.” Detail of the estates strategy is confidential but how*

much of the £10.1m is being earmarked for the estates strategy and how much for the planned projects?

- 2. Covid-19 has demonstrated that many office-based workers can work well from home. In light of this are you reassessing the need for larger accommodation as part of the estates strategy?*
- 3. Covid-19 has put a lot of financial pressure on veterinary professionals. Will you consider using the substantial reserves to offer a reduction in annual renewal fees?*

The Registrar thanked Dr Dos Santos for her question and gave the following answer:

The RCVS has a reserves policy to provide resilience for the organisation in the event of unexpected costs or financial losses and funding for future activities under the Strategic Plan.

As published in our Annual Report, we are currently holding reserves ahead of our usual formula, in order to fulfil our estates strategy.

In RCVS News, November 2018 edition, we reported that we had begun the process of selling our Westminster headquarters and would move to different premises. The published intention is to sell Belgravia House then lease it back while we find a suitable property, thus allowing us maximum flexibility around both funding and timing.

The sale of the building and the move is being overseen by our Estates Strategy Project Board, headed by former RCVS President Dr Barry Johnson and including current and former RCVS Council members and staff.

We have been based at our current premises in 62-64 Horseferry Road for 25 years and, due to the need for more up-to-date, modern facilities, and to accommodate higher staff numbers, over the past few years we have been looking into our estates strategy, and this forms part of our current Strategic Plan.

Alternatives, including maximising and improving the use of current space, as well as considering moving some functions out of Belgravia House or expanding the current premises by adding or expanding floors, have also been explored.

We are also now reviewing our needs in the light of the coronavirus pandemic, but even putting our need for increased space on one side and the potential changes to work patterns as a result of Covid-19, Belgravia House requires major refurbishment in key areas such as air-conditioning and lifts. This refurbishment would require staff to vacate the premises for up to 18 months, which would be costly and disruptive.

Relocating involves many costs, including the sale and purchase costs of a new building, stamp duty, professional advisors and removal costs, as well as refurbishment costs. Many of these costs have to be negotiated and, until agreed and approved, are commercially sensitive. Therefore, the amount of the current reserves that has been allocated for the estates strategy is confidential, as revealing it may affect our bargaining position and we are keen to get the best deal for our members.

With regard to members' fees, each year RCVS Council considers the level of the annual retention fees for veterinary professionals as part of the budget-setting exercise.

Annual retention fees for vets are not increasing for the fee year 2021/2. However, we would not propose to reduce the annual retention fees at the present time, as the reserves have been built up for specific purposes.

The second question received by the RCVS ahead of its Annual General Meeting was from **Alastair Welch MRCVS**. His question was as follows:

Do members of the Council agree with me that the Registrar should stop spending RCVS money on expensive barristers and private detectives, trying to work out whether any Councillors or RCVS employees have leaked the details of the rumoured sale and lease-back of Belgravia House, and should instead divert any spare resources to improving the woeful performance of the concerns department which seem unable to meet their own (modest) targets?

Furthermore, do members of Council recognise that, were the College to be more open and transparent and stop trying to hide the 'estates strategy' and many other important matters, the College would be a more accountable organisation, individuals would not feel compelled to 'whistleblow' and the wider membership might well hold the College in somewhat higher regard than the lowly position in which it currently resides?

The answer given by the Registrar on the day was as follows:

As with our answer to Dr Dos Santos, the estates strategy, including the sale of Belgravia House, has been in the public domain since November 2018 although, for the reasons listed above, there are good reasons around commercial sensitivity for aspects of the estates strategy being dealt with confidentially.

A leak of confidential information would be likely to amount to a breach of the Code of Conduct for Council Members, and Council has in place a clear policy to deal with such a situation. This policy, and not the Registrar, sets out the processes to be followed. It is vital for the integrity of the organisation that, where transgressions occur, Council members are held to account just as individual members may be held to account in their professional activities.

We would also like to make a point about the use of the term ‘whistleblower’ in Mr Welch’s question. This is a specific legal term. It does not relate to the airing of personal grievances or likes/ dislikes about an organisation, nor is it about disclosing sensitive commercial information during commercial negotiations.

As a final point, the Professional Conduct Department, which is responsible for the concerns investigation process, is fully resourced and, contrary to Mr Welch’s assertions, the performance is not as he describes, although there will always be areas for improvement. In our full, published answer, we will include further statistics, and information, around compliance with our key performance indicators.

Thank you.

As the above answer indicates – the RCVS is publishing the following additional information about the performance of our concerns investigation and disciplinary procedures in these minutes in order to fully answer the question submitted by Mr Welch.

The RCVS Professional Conduct Department has a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the different stages of the concerns investigation and disciplinary processes relating to the time in which it takes to either close a case, or refer it to the next stage of the process.

In terms of Stage one of the concerns investigation process, in which a Case Examiner Group looks at the facts of the case to decide if it constitutes serious professional misconduct, the KPI is that cases should be closed or referred to the Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) within 4 months.

Stage two of the process is when a case is referred to the PIC which determines whether or not there is a realistic prospect of proving that what the veterinary surgeon has, or has not, done amounts to serious professional misconduct. The KPI for this stage is that simple cases (meaning those that do not require expert reports or formal statements) should be closed or referred to the Disciplinary Committee within seven months.

The figures given below relate to the period from July 2019 to July 2020 and shows the quarterly performance of the concerns investigation process in meeting the KPI. It should be noted that the KPIs are targets and are constantly monitored and additional resourcing can be brought in where there are concerns about them not being met.

Stage one cases that met the KPI averaged by % on a quarterly basis

	Mean average
July - September 2019	86
October – December 2019	74
January – March 2020	73
April – June 2020	84

Stage two simple cases (ie those that were closed by the Preliminary Investigation Committee without recourse to taking formal statements, sourcing expert opinion reports and so on) that met the KPI by quarter (%)

	Mean average
July – September 2019	81
October – December 2019	83
January – March 2020	91
April – June 2020	91

Complex cases dealt with at stage two of the concerns investigation process are generally few in number and these cases are reported in detail to the Preliminary Investigation/ Disciplinary Liaison Committee.

4. Council elections: new members

The Registrar then turned to the results of the 2020 RCVS Council election confirming that there was again a record turnout with 8,834 veterinary surgeons, or 26.2% of those eligible to vote, doing so. By comparison, in the 2019 RCVS Council election, 8,234 veterinary surgeons voted making for an overall turnout of 25.5%.

The Registrar read the report of Civica Election Services (formerly Electoral Reform Services) relating to the election of RCVS Council members as follows:

Order	Nominee	Votes
1	Dr Kate Richards	4,399
2	Dr Richard Stephenson	3,943
3	Dr Melissa Donald	3,807

The Registrar declared that those named were elected Members of Council for a period of four years. The Registrar congratulated Dr Richards and Dr Stephenson, who had both previously been members of Council, on their return and Dr Melissa Donald on her re-election.

Turning to RCVS Council members appointed by the Veterinary Schools Council, the Registrar confirmed that Professor David Argyle, from the University of Edinburgh, Professor Susan Dawson, from the University of Liverpool, and Professor James Wood, from the University of Cambridge, had each been appointed for further four-year terms.

It was also confirmed that Matthew Rendle and Belinda Andrews-Jones, as the new Chair and Vice-Chair of VN Council respectively, had been appointed to RCVS Council as the two veterinary nurse members.

5. RCVS Council retirements

The President, Dr Connell, said that, ordinarily, there would be an opportunity to say goodbye to Council members in person and give them a gift but that they would still be saying a formal goodbye and outlining the contribution of each.

Starting with university-appointed Council members, Dr Connell confirmed that the College would be saying farewell to five retiring members. These were:

- Professor Ewan Cameron, University of Glasgow (nine years' service), whose contributions to the Education Committee and the delivery of the RCVS Statutory Examination were noted.
- Professor Gary England, University of Nottingham (nine years' service), whose contribution as the first chair of the Advancement of the Professions Committee was noted.
- Professor Richard Hammond, University of Bristol (three years' service), whose contribution to the Graduate Outcomes Initiative was noted.
- Professor Ken Smith, Royal Veterinary College (one year's service), whose contribution to the Education Committee and its work on Day One Competences was noted.
- Professor Chris Proudman, University of Surrey (five months service), whose achievement in leading Surrey to formal accreditation by the RCVS was noted.

The Registrar then went on to acknowledge and thank the five retiring elected members of Council. These were:

- Lucie Goodwin (four years' service), whose contributions to Veterinary Nurses Council and the Mind Matters Taskforce were noted.
- Dr Kit Sturgess (seven years' service), whose contributions as Treasurer of the RCVS since 2017 and member of various bodies including the Covid-19 Taskforce, Finance & Resources Committee and IT Project Board were noted.
- Chris Barker (eight years' service), whose contributions to various committees including the Standards Committee, Finance & Resources Committee, Preliminary Investigation and Disciplinary Liaison Committee and Legislation Working Party were noted.
- Amanda Boag (eight years' service), whose achievements as President of the RCVS in 2018-19, Treasurer from 2014 to 2017 and member of the Officer Team from 2014

to 2020, as well as her contribution to a number of committees, subcommittees and working groups, were noted.

- Professor Stephen May (16 years' service), whose achievements as President of the RCVS in 2017-18, a member of the Officer Team and various committees and as a key player in initiatives such as the Graduate Outcomes Project, the Legislation Working Party and reflection-based learning was acknowledged.

6. Veterinary Nurses Council election, appointments and retirements

The Registrar reported the results of the 2020 Veterinary Nurses Council election, the first since 2017, confirming that as well as having a record number of candidates standing for the election, there was also a record turnout with just over 17% of the VN profession casting their vote.

She confirmed that the two people elected to VN Council this year were Matthew Rendle, who was re-elected for a three year term with 1,028 votes, and Claire Roberts, who joined VN Council as a new member with 839 votes.

The Registrar also confirmed that, at an extraordinary meeting of VN Council taking place in June, Matthew Rendle had been elected as the new Chair of VN Council, replacing Racheal Marshall, and that Belinda Andrews-Jones had been elected Vice-Chair, replacing Liz Cox. At the same meeting VN Council agreed that Dominic Dyer would be re-appointed as a lay member for a further three-year term and that Stephanie Richardson and Sarah Fox would be brought on as new lay VN Council members.

Dr Connell then went on to give his thanks to the retiring members of VN Council: Wendy Drinkwater, who had stood down in January, Professor Susan Proctor and outgoing Chair of VN Council Racheal Marshall.

7. Date of next AGM

The next AGM was provisionally agreed to take place on Friday, 9 July 2021 at One Great George Street.

8. Meeting of the RCVS Council to elect President, Vice-Presidents and Treasurer

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Dr Caroline Allen
- Derek Bray
- Christine Middlemiss

Declarations of interests

The following declarations of interest were raised:

- Dr Cheryl Scudamore removed 'Director of Anatomic Pathology – Nationwide Labs' from her list of current employment.
- Dr Kate Richards is a Non-Executive Director of Scottish Agricultural College Commercial Ltd

Matters for Decision by Council

Approval of the Presidential Team and Treasurer for 2020/21

The Registrar asked Council to approve the appointment of the new Presidential Team and Treasurer for 2020/21 as follows:

President:	Dr Mandisa Greene
(Senior) Vice-President:	Dr Niall Connell
(Junior) Vice-President:	Professor David Argyle
Treasurer:	Professor Susan Dawson

The Presidential Team and Treasurer appointments were approved.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Council meeting was confirmed as:

Thursday, 3 September 2020 at 10am

9. Speeches and investitures

Racheal Marshall, outgoing Chair of VN Council

The first pre-recorded video speech was given by Racheal Marshall who gave an overview of the past 12 months in her role, highlighting the importance of the ongoing VN Futures project, the development and take-up of the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing qualifications and the importance for veterinary nurses of the report of the Legislation Working Party, which contained a number of recommendations that would enhance the role of the profession.

She thanked her colleagues on VN Council, RCVS Council and the professions at large for their support and then passed on the VN Council Chair medal for Matthew Rendle to take up the role.

Matthew Rendle, incoming Chair of VN Council

In his pre-recorded video Matthew Rendle thanked Racheal for her work over the past two years, particularly in the last few months in dealing with coronavirus and its impact on the education of student veterinary nurses in particular.

Matthew reiterated his commitment to continue to represent the voice of veterinary nurses and help raise awareness of the role and its importance, as well as aiming to achieve greater clarity about what the role entails. He also thanked his family, friends and colleagues who supported him in his career and in becoming Chair of VN Council.

Dr Niall Connell, outgoing President

Next was a pre-recorded speech by Niall Connell as outgoing President during which he highlighted the unusual nature of the latter half of his presidential year in light of the coronavirus pandemic and its associated challenges. He also highlighted the significant achievements of the RCVS during his year in office including approval of the University of Surrey veterinary degree, a Practice Standards Scheme communications campaign, Mind Matters Initiative and ViVet project symposia and the approval of new Day One Competences stemming from the Graduate Outcomes Project.

He also went through some of the extraordinary measures that the RCVS and its Covid-19 Taskforce had to introduce because of the current crisis and some of the College's activity on the international stage.

Finally, he thanked his family, fellow Council members and the staff of the RCVS for their support, in particular singling out RCVS CEO Lizzie Lockett for steering the RCVS through such difficult times.

Investiture of Dr Mandisa Greene as RCVS President 2020-21

Following the outgoing President's speech and farewells to Amanda Boag and Dr Kit Sturgess as retiring members of the Officer Team, Niall Connell, in his final task as RCVS President, welcomed Mandisa as his replacement, giving an overview of her career on Council thus far and handed over the Presidential chain of office. Because of the virtual nature of the meeting, the actual chain of office was not exchanged but Niall Connell's chain was made by Amanda Boag's daughters while Mandisa Greene's chain had been made by her sons.

Upon her investiture as President Dr Greene thanked Niall for his contribution and the way he had dealt with the significant challenges of his presidential year in a cool, calm and collected way. Niall was then presented with the past-President's badge.

In her first official duty as President Mandisa also formally welcomed on board Professor David Argyle as Junior Vice-President and Professor Susan Dawson as Treasurer.

A pre-recorded address from Mandisa Greene was then played in which she acknowledged the significance and achievement of her being the first person from a minority ethnic background to hold the office of President and her desire to use the role to promote veterinary science and careers to people from underrepresented groups.

She then went on to speak about the 2020 – 2024 RCVS Strategic Plan and how she looked forward to working with colleagues to deliver its key aims around compassion, clarity, courage and confidence.

She set out her personal priorities for the presidential year including greater outreach to veterinary students, signalling her ongoing admiration of and support for her colleagues from the EU working in the UK and promoting the importance of the general practitioner vet as being the backbone of the profession.

Finally, she thanked the RCVS staff who had made the unprecedented virtual Annual General Meeting possible and, with that, the meeting was closed.