

EFFICIENT ADAPTABLE COHERENT FLEXIBLE DURABLE CUSTOMER-FOCUSED FAIR INDEPENDENT OUTCOME-FOCUSED PREDICTABLE

First Rate Regulator Initiative Qualitative Research

On behalf of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons



Sally Williams & Associates

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This research report has been prepared for the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) by Sally Williams and Abi Almond. It is part of the RCVS First-Rate Regulator initiative, which seeks to deliver improvements across the organisation to ensure that it is regulating as effectively as possible.

The RCVS has sought to understand how it is perceived, both internally by staff and council members, and also by key external audiences, including organisations representing veterinary surgeons and nurses, and governmental sponsors, as well as individual veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and practice managers. This report, on the themes emerging from qualitative interviews and focus groups, is part of a wider programme of multi-stakeholder engagement activity.

Key messages

What the RCVS is doing well

- Respondents welcomed the opportunity to participate in this research, seeing it as a sign that things are changing within the RCVS
- The appointment of a new CEO is taken as evidence that the RCVS is modernising – as were other changes in the pipeline (e.g. new Legislative Reform Order and the appointment of a new Board)
- There is optimism for the future – the RCVS IT and basement overspend was considered a low point that respondents were putting behind them. There are high expectations that the CEO will make a positive difference
- The RCVS is perceived as a good, fair and just regulator, and is considered to have been discharging its duties well
- The Legislative Reform Order (LRO) is considered to be a good change, not least in offering greater assurance to the public about impartiality

Areas for improvement

- The Legislative Reform Order may not go far enough – change to the Veterinary Surgeons Act may be required to enable the RCVS to be a First Rate Regulator
- The ability of the RCVS to be both regulator and Royal College is a source of concern for external stakeholders in particular
- Communication with the professions has improved greatly in recent years, but lack of engagement is an ongoing issue
- The RCVS needs to work harder to demonstrate its relevance and to be more proactive – the professions are in a period of rapid moving change and the RCVS needs to keep abreast of this
- The RCVS also needs to do more to show it is open, transparent and outward-facing – including a willingness to work collaboratively with stakeholders

Areas for improvement (continued)

- There is a need to alter perceptions that the RCVS is an 'old boys' club', and to demonstrate that it is a modern, up-to-date organisation. Retaining the traditional elements whilst becoming less formal and more approachable will be a challenge
- A greater focus on animal welfare and engagement with the public is a recurring theme
- There are calls for clarity over the position of veterinary nursing within the RCVS – if separation is not an option, then a more inclusive and collaborative working relationship would be valued
- There would seem to be opportunities to improve the efficiency of RCVS Council meetings, to clarify member roles (the balance between strategic and operational) and to review the structure of Council and its committees
- Improved internal communications, increased resourcing, and better IT systems are priorities for RCVS staff

Research objectives

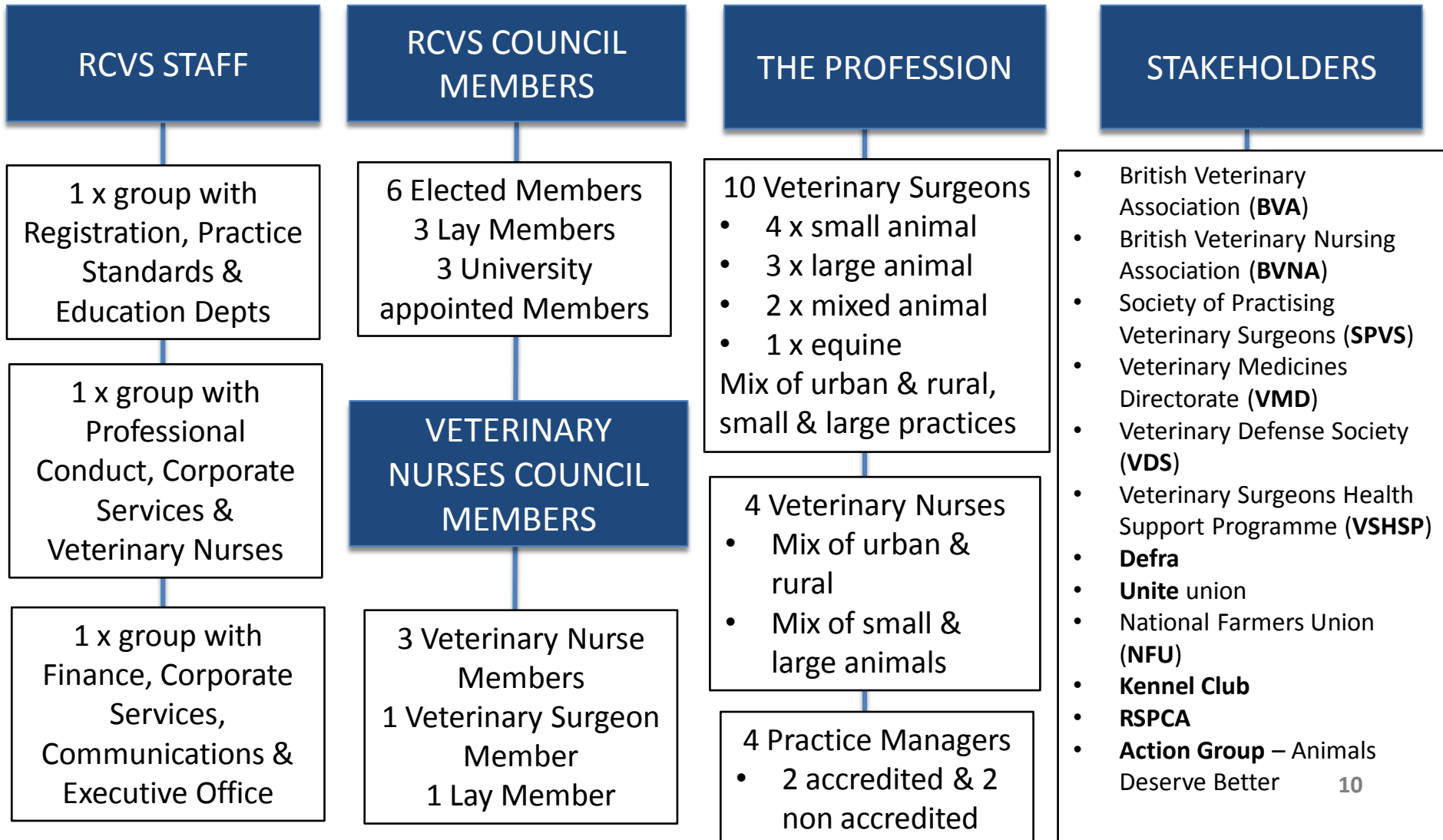
Research objectives

- Understand how the RCVS is perceived internally (staff , RCVS council members and veterinary nurse council members)
- Understand how the RCVS is perceived externally (the professions, practices and stakeholder organisations)
- Understand what strengths and weaknesses it is perceived as having
- Identify key priorities and challenges for the RCVS
- Identify any changes needed to achieve its goal of being a First Rate Regulator

Method

- A qualitative approach was taken to gain depth of feedback and to supplement a wider online survey of the professions
- A mix of methodologies were used depending on the target sample
- 3 focus groups, lasting 90 minutes, with RCVS staff members at RCVS offices
- 47 telephone interviews (each lasting 30-60 minutes) with:
 - members of the RCVS Council and the Veterinary Nurses (VN) Council
 - veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and practice managers
 - External stakeholder organisations
- The research took place between November 2012 and January 2013. All interviews were conducted by Abi Almond, an experienced qualitative researcher

Sample



Views of stakeholder organisations

Overview of stakeholder organisations' views

- Respondents consulted with others within their organisation before taking part in the research, so the views expressed, on the whole, are views of the organisation not the individuals interviewed.
- The key issue for most stakeholders is openness and collaboration. There is a perception that the RCVS has not been good at this in the past, although improvements have already been observed.
- Another pressing issue is the role of the RCVS, with many wanting it to separate out its functions (of regulator and Royal College), in line with other professions (such as doctors, dentists and pharmacists).
- Some stakeholders want the RCVS to demonstrate a stronger focus on animal welfare, with a feeling that this is not always as high in RCVS' mind as it should be.

Stakeholder organisations on contact with the RCVS

- Most stakeholders report good contact with the RCVS and perceive the individuals they deal with to be: professional, helpful, dedicated, intelligent, good to work with, available when required, and efficient.
- Areas for improvement arise from perceptions that the RCVS is slow in its responses, has a tendency to be reactive rather than proactive, errs on the side of caution in its advice/opinions, and is sometimes considered to have an arrogant attitude towards stakeholder engagement.
- There is a desire for a more collaborative and open style of working (e.g. sharing of databases with some key stakeholders).

We both need to be more open with each other as there is still a feeling that we are hiding our cards behind our backs.

They don't always appear to be transparent, but if you ask, they will tell you, it's just that they aren't very forthcoming.

Stakeholder organisations on the RCVS' strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
A good regulator	Antiquated processes & attitudes
A good educator	Not open & transparent enough
Maintains standards throughout the profession well	Not sufficiently engaged with public, profession & stakeholders
A respected, professional and dedicated organisation	More reactive than proactive
Good staff	Communication could be improved
Practice Standards Scheme	Journey to disciplinary processes not transparent enough
Good work accomplished on the Health & Performance Protocols	

They are a good Regulator and a good educator – we are the envy of the rest of the world in terms of educational standards (USA aside) & this is down to the RCVS upholding standards.

They tend to be defensive rather than developmental.

Stakeholder organisations on the role of the RCVS

- Many identified a need for the RCVS to separate its role as a regulator from that of a Royal College (in line with other professions), with some stakeholders speaking passionately about the need for an end to self-regulation in a belief that the RCVS is not currently impartial.
- The LRO will go some way to support this, but further change is needed. The expense of a separation is another consideration.
- In the meantime, stakeholders seek greater clarity over RCVS' roles, as this is an area of confusion for the public, the profession and within RCVS.
- There is some concern that the RCVS takes on roles that are outside of its remit – particular concern about Scientific Review Body role, which some feel is only acceptable under the Trust, which is independent.

Regulation should come away from the Charter – as it confuses themselves as to what their job really is – and it confuses us sometimes too.

Really the role of the Regulator is to safeguard the interests of the people who use the services of people who are on the register – but it comes across that their main interest is safeguarding members.

Stakeholder organisations on the Veterinary Surgeons Act

- There are differing views on this. Some stakeholders want to see more radical changes and think this can only happen if the Act is changed. Others are not keen to open up the Act – fearing opening ‘a can of worms’.
- Either way, there is a drive for a definitive decision on whether or not the RCVS will seek to change the Act.

They are trying to make changes without going into the VSA – but we are going round the houses. It would be a lot of hard work and would take a long time, but we're willing to do it.

We don't want to open up the Veterinary Surgeons Act now – there are too many issues around – it works for us now and it's like opening up Pandora's box...

Stakeholder organisations on the RCVS mission statement

- There is broad support for the RCVS' mission statement, except for the final sentence – *'an impartial source of informed opinion'* – which caused controversy. Many feel that it is not possible for RCVS to be an 'impartial source' if it is also the regulator.
- Some would like to see a greater emphasis on the health and welfare of animals. There is a view that this is being achieved almost as a bi-product of other activities (monitoring standards etc.), but it is not in the forefront of everything the RCVS does.

I don't see RCVS actively prioritising animal welfare – all they do is encourage individual vets to do it, but what are they doing beyond that?...Animal welfare needs to more clearly permeate all their decision making.

They do it by implication rather than by activity. What are they actually doing to protect public health?

Stakeholder organisations on the RCVS values

RCVS values	Stakeholder views
Open	Improvements still needed
Fair	Considered to be fair
Understanding	Varies according to stakeholder
Forward-thinking	Improvements still needed
Accountable	Improvements still needed – the ‘overspend’ issue often quoted
Consistent	Considered to be consistent
<i>Suggested new value: Compassionate</i>	<i>Some would like a commitment to animal welfare specifically reflected in the values</i>

Specific issues raised by stakeholder organisations

Decisions or clearer positions sought from the RCVS on:

- Whether selected stakeholders can have access to RCVS' database (as previously)
- Whether RCVS is working towards the idea of a Veterinary Team (VSs, VNs, other para-professionals etc.), as desired by some younger members of the profession
- Issue of negligence not being covered by the Veterinary Surgeons Act and a narrow interpretation of what constitutes negligence
- Whether VNs should become a self-regulating, independent body
- Issues of over-prescribing to farm animals; anti-microbial resistance; specialisation of VSs; data protection and client confidentiality (VSs are not always sure of their position); CPD (greater checking of VSs in particular)

Issues where the RCVS is doing good work already, but could take more of a lead:

- Using the Practice Standards Scheme to promote the profession to the public
- Ensuring that the interests of 'ordinary' VSs are fully considered, not just VSs who own practices, and VSs in corporate practices
- Greater support for VSs undertaking Extramural Studies and Postgraduate Professional Development
- Encouragement/support of whistle-blowers

Stakeholder organisations on future priorities for RCVS

- Stakeholders feel that a great deal of progress has been made in recent years and that the RCVS has all the 'ingredients' of a First Rate Regulator.
- Key priorities now are:
 - Clarity about role of RCVS (separation of regulatory and Royal College roles)
 - More collaborative working and openness (for the RCVS to take the initiative, to be more visible and responsive)
 - Greater engagement with the profession and public ; and putting animal welfare at the heart of all decisions
 - More proactive, forward-thinking and modern in its approach (no gowns/wigs, greater use of email)
 - Greater support to VN department to enable VN profession to develop

I'd like to see a clear idea developing about what the College's role really is and then doing that well rather than fiddling around with some of the peripheral issues.

They need to look more in advance towards the demands that might be coming towards the profession – move the veterinary profession forward quicker. They need to be more forward focused.

Views of the professions

Veterinary Surgeons (VSs)

Veterinary Nurses (VNs)

Practice Managers (PMs)

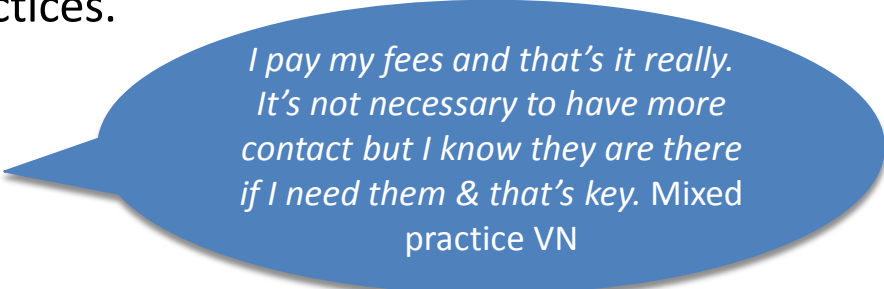
Overview of the professions' views

- The RCVS is perceived as being a fair and respected regulator – there is little enthusiasm for a move away from self-regulation.
- The introduction of the new Legislative Reform Order is thought to be a positive step (mainly for public perception), but there is a keenness to ensure that serving VJs are still on the Disciplinary Committee.
- The key issue is a perceived lack of engagement by the RCVS with the profession – the RCVS is seen as out of touch with their working lives, to lack understanding of the working pressures that VJs, VNs and PMs are under, and that it is only there for when someone complains against them.

They need to inspire the profession – they need to work with them not against them and come out of their ivory tower...I think Nick is brilliant and he'll make a huge difference...he's come 20 years too late in a way! PM

Professions on contact with the RCVS

- Most of the sample have little contact with the RCVS. They pay their fees, read RCVS communications (e.g. RCVS News, emails and the reports on Disciplinary Committee proceedings).
- Occasionally they will contact the RCVS for advice – for VNs this is mainly advice about CPD. A minority vote once a year.
- Some also have contact regarding the Practice Standards Scheme (working towards it).
- In this context, the RCVS is thought to be efficient (renewing of fees), helpful (giving advice), and encouraging (Practice Standards).
- This level of contact is all that the majority wants, as they are fearful of further communication with their regulator (seen as bad news).
- A minority would like more ‘non-regulatory’ contact, to feel the RCVS is in-touch with them and their practices.



*I pay my fees and that's it really.
It's not necessary to have more
contact but I know they are there
if I need them & that's key. Mixed
practice VN*

Professions on their relationship with the RCVS

- Overall, a somewhat confusing relationship with the RCVS:
 - On the one hand, it is their regulator and, as such, both feared and respected.
 - But it is also their Professional Body, where they feel an ownership and close involvement with how 'their' money is spent. This is evidenced in the controversy about the overspend on IT and the basement refurbishment.
 - There is also a sense that the College does not pay them enough attention or engage with them sufficiently (as demonstrated by the very low voting figures each year).
- Some recognise that it is hard for the RCVS to get it right when trying to juggle both its roles.

I just see that we pay a lot of money to the RCVS & we get clobbered by them. Large animal VS

They say they serve the general public but it's the profession that pays for them. Small animal VS

Professions on the RCVS' strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
A good regulator – fair and balanced	Distant, aloof
Judgements	Old fashioned and out of touch with modern practices
Reputation of profession is high, due to good regulation	Not enough young, serving VSs on Council
High quality of staff employed	Too formal (gowns etc.)
The more dealings they have with the RCVS, the more positively it is perceived	VNs not seen to be core focus of RCVS (BVNA seen as more approachable)

I think they do a good job of keeping vets as a respected, honest profession. Small Animal VS

RCVS represents vets more than nurses – nurses are pushed to one side. But it is starting to improve as there are now VNs sitting on main Council. Large animal VN

Professions on the role of the RCVS

- Primarily seen as a regulator and most are keen for regulation to continue to be conducted by experienced members of the profession (the only ones able to judge).
- Maintaining the registers is a key role and generally done well (though rogue practitioners sometimes slip through the net).
- Educational standards are well maintained. The quality of graduates is thought to be good, though some feel they could be more practically-orientated and identified knowledge gaps about large animals. Some concern that new universities will mean too many VSs in future.
- High standards are maintained through the Code of Professional Conduct; although more clarity needed in some areas (e.g. the definition of 'animals within your care' for VSs working on farms in particular).
- There is little evidence that the RCVS is promoting the professions externally, although recognition that this does not sit well with a regulator. Yet, VNs want the RCVS to do more to explain their roles and qualifications to the public.
- There is little sense that the RCVS provides informed and impartial advice, but this was again thought to be difficult for the RCVS given its regulatory role.

Professions on disciplinary matters

- Overall, the RCVS is perceived as fair, just and balanced in its judgements (though a minority perceived it as too strict, lacking sufficient breadth of sanctions, out of touch and slow).
- Many VSs are fearful of a complaint being made against them (a reason why they are such avid readers of disciplinary hearing reports).
- For those who have had a complaint made against them, the experience was generally better than they feared and the RCVS was considered to have treated them fairly. They understood why the RCVS had to investigate the complaint (which had not been upheld), so they were content.
- Negatives include that the process is slow and communication needs to be better – contact from the RCVS is minimal during the process (they would have liked more, as it is a stressful time). One VS wasn't told the outcome until he phoned to ask.
- A lack of communication was also an issue for those who had complained to the RCVS about another VS – they would have liked more information.

Professions on the RCVS values

RCVS' values	Professions' views
Open	RCVS was generally considered to be open and fair; disciplinary hearings reported fully and judgments seen to be fair
Fair	
Understanding	Not always in touch with the modern day profession
Forward-thinking	Probably the weakest element, seen to be more reactive than proactive
Accountable	'Overspend' had rocked some of the profession's confidence in levels of accountability
Consistent	As far as they could tell (mainly from reading the reports of hearings)

Professions on the Practice Standards Scheme (PSS)

- Those within the Scheme are generally positive about it – the experience was often better than their expectation of it beforehand. Being part of the Scheme also takes care of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) regulations (and the RCVS is perceived as easier to deal with than the VMD).
- The process of becoming accredited has variously helped practices to: build team spirit in the practice; attract new staff to the practice; act as a reassurance to the public similar to a 'kite mark'; and, help ensure that standards in the practice are maintained.
- Some thought it should be made compulsory to ensure standards are upheld uniformly.
- However, some failed to see the benefits of becoming accredited – extra paperwork and expense, little perceived value to clients, and not relevant for some farm vets (no consulting rooms, out on farm majority of the time etc.)

I would like there to be random inspections...I think that minimum standards should be imposed and checked on all practices. It's time to weed out the cowboys.

Large Practice VS

Professions on future priorities for the RCVS

- There is a desire to see the RCVS stand up for the professions more (e.g. on the tightening of EU regulations around antibiotics).
- The regulation of para-professionals and clarity about who can do what (especially in farming) is another priority area.
- Greater clarity around VN qualifications and educating the public about these.
- Better CPD courses for VNs – especially for those returning to work after a career break.
- More recognition for PMs (e.g. having their names included in the directory and put on the website).

There are big threats on the horizon, eg. a lot of jobs that were once being done by a vet, or at least supervised by a vet, are being done by other agencies, the farmers are looking elsewhere & we need a lot more clarity on what can and can't be done. Farm work is changing rapidly.

Large Animal VS

Views of RCVS council members

Overview of RCVS council members' views

- Council members believe they are discharging their regulatory functions to a high standard.
- However, there are issues with how Council is run and its structure. These give rise to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction and a sense that changes are urgently required to ensure the smooth running of Council in the future.
- The proposed new Board is seen by many as a step in the right direction.
- A key debate concerns the RCVS' dual role as regulator and Royal College. But whilst issues are acknowledged, there is little appetite for a clean separation – most feel that the new Legislative Reform Order (LRO) will go a long way to addressing perceptions of a lack of impartiality.

RCVS council members on the structure of Council

- Many express concerns about the current structure and composition of Council, whilst acknowledging that this is largely governed by the Veterinary Surgeons Act (VSA).
- There is an issue about the **size** of the Council (too big), the **age** of Council members (on the older side), the proportionate **lack of women** (compared to the profession as a whole), and the **term of service** for Council members (too long) and the **term of Presidency** (only one year).
- There is an issue about the **balance of member type** (centering on academic vs. elected membership) and on the **selection of committee members** (with more emphasis needed on competencies for the specific committee).

I think people shouldn't stay 20 years on Council because there is a limit to how much you can contribute and you need to have a fresh intake of new blood.

Elected member

RCVS council members on how Council is run

- There is considerable concern from Council members about how the Council is run. Areas for improvement include:
 - **Introducing a stronger structure to meetings**, to support better adherence to meeting rules (length of time to speak, not repeating points etc.) and limit the length of meetings.
 - **A more formal induction for new members**, to ensure they fully understand the role of Council (strategic rather than operational), the distinct roles of committees, and their own role on Council (particularly for elected members, to ensure they understand they are not representative of particular issues or constituencies).
 - **A suggestion of the introduction of more pre-Council meetings**, to allow for more informal debate of issues before they come to Council.

I think we could be a first rate regulator if a lot of the minutiae of micro-managing was taken away from Council and committees.

Elected member

Elected members feel they are representing the profession in a political kind of way. They are meant to be representative of the profession but not representing them – that's an important distinction. Lay member

RCVS council members on the RCVS' strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
An excellent regulator	Lack of engagement with profession and public
Outstanding staff	Too much pomp and ceremony
Monitoring standards – particularly on Day 1 competencies	Reactive not proactive
University accreditation system	Disciplinary process is too slow
Maintaining the Register	Royal College function not as well developed as those of regulator
Practice Standards Scheme	Internal IT systems
Walks of Life Programme	

The profession should be very proud of the College. And the calibre of staff working at the College is excellent too. The Officer team also care passionately about the profession. Lay member

It is supposed to have a Royal College function & they do that very badly.... University member

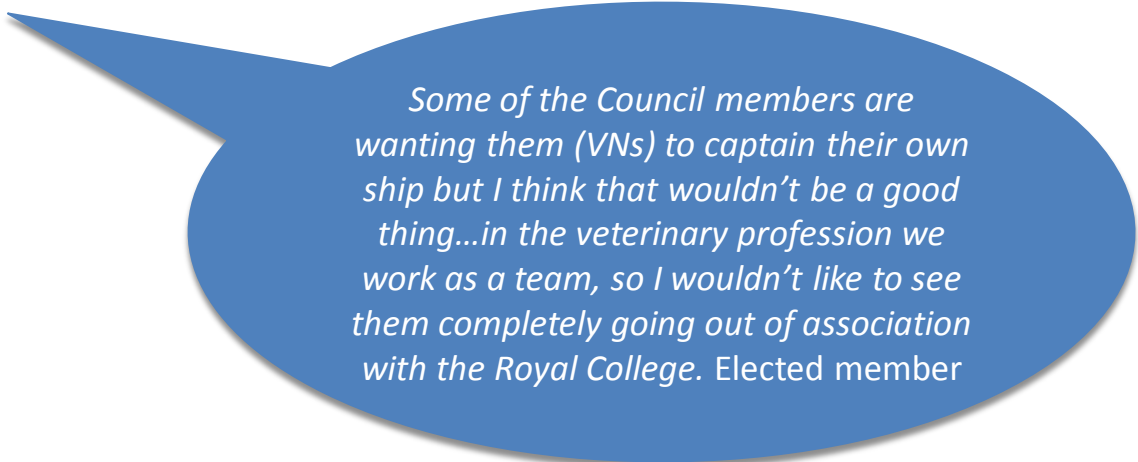
RCVS council members on the role of the RCVS

- There are differing views amongst council members as to whether the RCVS should continue to have dual roles – most agree that the dual roles lead to confusion within RCVS, the profession and (probably) the public.
- However, separating the two roles is not always thought to be ideal:
 - financial consequences (particularly for a free-standing Royal College, with no guaranteed income from fees)
 - a sense that the LRO needs to be given time to work before other more radical solutions
 - it could lead to conflict with the British Veterinary Association (BVA) (encroaching on what they may see as their ‘patch’).

Regulator & Royal College functions...can be done by the same body, it doesn't need to be one or the other, but it just needs more clarity. University member

RCVS council members on Links with VN Council

- Mixed opinions from council members as to whether VN Council should be kept together with main Council (as currently) or whether they should be working towards a separation and independence.
- Arguments for keeping the 2 Councils together:
 - VNs and VSs work as a team in the profession, so should be regulated together
 - Too expensive to separate
- Arguments for fully separating the 2 Councils:
 - VNs are a fully fledged profession and should now stand on their own two feet



Some of the Council members are wanting them (VNs) to captain their own ship but I think that wouldn't be a good thing...in the veterinary profession we work as a team, so I wouldn't like to see them completely going out of association with the Royal College. Elected member

Views of members of the Veterinary Nurses (VN) Council

Overview of VN council members' views

- VN Council members believe they are making good decisions and working well.
- Areas for improvements:
 - Greater communication and respect between the two Councils and within the RCVS
 - Better understanding amongst public about the role of veterinary nurses
 - Keeping in mind that the RCVS' core focus is the welfare of animals and the public
 - Protecting the title of veterinary nurse (underway) to ensure that the profession is properly regulated

VN council members on structure of VN Council

- Most feel that the VN Council is well run and makes good decisions, even though its decision-making powers are reliant on the goodwill of the main Council to be passed.
- Recent changes and some proposed changes are seen positively, namely:
 - A new education sub committee (previously a good deal of time in council meetings was taken up with discussing educational matters)
 - Accreditation of courses done by separate bodies (so no conflict of interest)
 - Separation of disciplinary process from VN Council (one step ahead of main Council in this)
 - Changes to when VN Council sits (not in busy Committee week)

The decision making process does work well but in theory those decisions could be overturned by RCVS Council...but that hasn't happened...as it's generally thought that VN Council should take responsibility for VN issues.

Probably $\frac{3}{4}$ of our Council time has been spent in making education decisions...but that meant we were asking some members of Council to make decisions on things about which they had absolutely no idea...& it was taking such a long time.

VN council members on role of VN Council

- VN Council members believe there is confusion within the profession about the role of VN Council. The difference is not always understood between Council being a regulatory body and a representative one.
- Council members themselves see its key priority being to fight for the recognition of VNs and to protect the title of 'Veterinary Nurse' in particular.

The role of VN Council to my mind is primarily about pushing towards the professional recognition of VNs and the recognition of the important role they play within the profession and the wider public.

VN Council is there for the welfare of animals and for the general public and I think sometimes the perception is that, particularly with new nurses, we're there to defend Veterinary Nursing, when in fact we're not.

VN council members on position within the RCVS

- Many want to stay within the RCVS rather than become a separate entity:
 - VSs and VNs work as a team so decisions should be made jointly
 - Better for the public and in animal interests to stay within RCVS
 - The profession is currently too small to have a separate VN body – it would be too costly to set up and run independently
- However, VN Council members would like the VN Council Chair to sit on the main Council (not just attend, as currently). They acknowledge that the RCVS has worked hard to ensure that a VN is represented on Council through one of its university members.

It is disappointing that we don't have a vote (on main Council) – we are a team and we work shoulder to shoulder and side by side.

I would like to see RCVS keeping the VNs under their wing. The nurses could if they chose set up another organisation but I think that would be quite foolish for a variety of reasons, one of which is financial.

VN council members on the RCVS' strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
A good regulator, despite its dual role	Out of touch – one of the last professions to join 21 st century
Protects the health and welfare of animals wells	Arrogant, old fashioned
Good communications (e.g. VN News, RCVS News)	Too much political in-fighting
	Defensive in attitude
	Too great a focus on international side to detriment of home affairs
	VNs not treated as equals within the organisation
	Greater consistency needed in VN education – standards too variable currently

Views of RCVS staff

Overview of RCVS staff views

- The RCVS is a good place to work and most are excited/encouraged by the recent appointment of the new CEO. Many of the issues that staff talk about are already being addressed since the CEO's arrival, and they feel better listened to as a result.
- Staff also feel that RCVS does a good job as a regulator and are proud of their contribution to that role.
- The key issue for staff is around a lack of communication and consistency.
- Some also feel under-resourced in their departments and complain about a lack of training and progression.
- There is a desire for greater appreciation of their work – both within the organisation as a whole and within Council.
- Relationships with Council are thought to be improving and staff look forward to a more collaborative way of working with Council in the future.

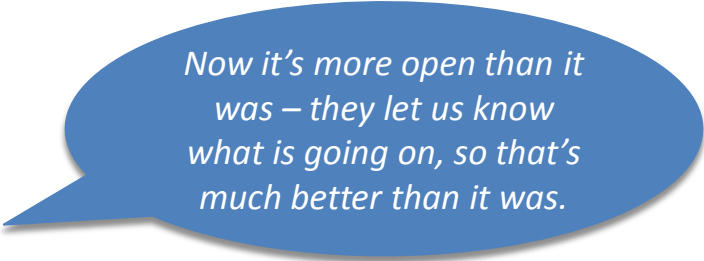
Staff views on the RCVS as an employer

- The RCVS is judged to be a good place to work:
 - Evidenced by length of time many have been employed
 - Colleagues are interesting and good to work with
 - There is a feeling of co-operation
 - The work is interesting and varied
 - Benefits are good (pension, holiday entitlement, flexible working hours)
- However, it is also an unsettling time for many:
 - Feeling of change in the air
 - Recent redundancies & their perceived suddenness was unnerving
 - Physical changes too (office walls coming down, departments moving floors)

There is definitely a lot of change happening as a result of the new CEO...knocking walls down, that sort of thing. There is an air of everything is changing...

Staff views on internal communications

- The key issue for many is a lack of communication – top down and inter-departmentally.
- Staff acknowledge that things are improving and the new CEO is seen to be making strides in this direction, but information is often received second-hand (rumour) or intermittently; some department heads are better than others at ensuring communication is passed down.
- Inter-departmental communication is seen to be poor, partly because of layout of offices (currently being addressed), but also due to a culture of ‘silo’ working.
- Most say they do not know many of the staff (or what they do) outside their own department. Calls for better communication on the intranet (e.g. photos, roles).



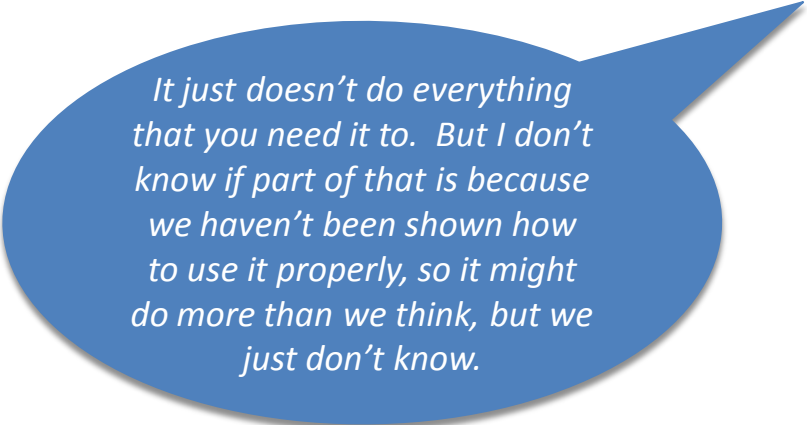
Now it's more open than it was – they let us know what is going on, so that's much better than it was.

Staff views on resources and training

- Many departments report feeling over-stretched – at limits of manageability – and more resourcing is sought in order to maintain standards.
- Concerns expressed over how decisions about staffing are made (overreliance on temps; perceived reluctance to promote internally; lack of recognition of skills of staff; utilising skills without giving financial or titular recognition; lack of definition of roles particularly in Professional Conduct dept).
- A feeling that the RCVS is inconsistent in its decision-making (not all departments or staff are treated the same).
- Staff also perceive that there is a lack of training available to them.

Staff views on 'the database'

- A daily irritant, considered not to be fit for purpose.
- Seen to be a result of poor planning and not listening to the needs of staff when the new system was upgraded.
- Ongoing issues as further upgrades have not been implemented due to a lack of budget (for consultancy).
- Considered to be a key priority to fix as it affects so many – and an issue known about outside the organisation too (concern that it could undermine the RCVS' reputation).



It just doesn't do everything that you need it to. But I don't know if part of that is because we haven't been shown how to use it properly, so it might do more than we think, but we just don't know.

Staff views on RCVS Council

- Opportunities exist to improve the relationship between staff and Council, which has been characterised by a 'them and us' culture historically. There is acknowledgement that relationships have already started to improve.
- There is a desire for Council to show a greater appreciation of their work, and for Council to better utilise the skills and expertise of staff. Some staff feel that Council members do not understand or value their role.

Staff views on the RCVS' strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
A respected organisation/regulator	Old fashioned, behind the times
Good international reputation	Inward-looking
Fair	Reactive, not proactive
Professional	Inconsistent
A good employer	Not sufficiently focused on animals
Traditional	
Changing for the better	

Staff views on the role of the RCVS

- Some staff question the viability of the RCVS' dual role. They perceive it as leading to confusion both internally and externally (profession and public).
- Staff believe the dual role creates expectations about what the RCVS can do; and when they cannot meet those expectations they are sometimes considered to be obstructive (e.g. only able to investigate certain types of complaint, and not being able to give definitive advice because of the need to be impartial).
- There is also a view that the Royal College function is not as developed as the regulatory role, especially in terms of research and scientific issues.

If the press phone for a comment about something, tuberculosis, something that you might expect a Royal College to have an opinion on, we don't give it as we are regulators and we have to remain impartial. So until we have a General Veterinary Council and a Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, I think there will be problems

Staff views on future priorities for the RCVS

- Staff consider the RCVS to be a good organisation and are optimistic for the future. Improvements are needed in terms of leading by example and being more efficient and better resourced.

Key priorities for staff:

- Improve lines of communication from top down and inter-departmentally (already started but needs to continue)
- Resolve issues with the database urgently
- Invest in more staff to ensure standards are maintained
- Increase staff motivation (through training courses, internal promotions, more positive feedback, consistency across the departments and better working relationships with Council)
- Become more outward-facing, including clarifying the dual role of the RCVS to the public and the profession