

# RCVS news

RCVS NEWS / JUNE 2020

*Text-only version of  
RCVS News email*

# RCVS Council agrees in principle to wide-scale legislative changes

At its meeting on 4 June 2020, RCVS Council agreed to consult on a series of recommendations for new veterinary legislation, which, if enacted, would see wide-scale reforms to how the veterinary professions are regulated.

The Report of the Legislation Working Party, presented by its Chair Professor Stephen May, contained recommendations that were grouped into five key headings: embracing the vet-led team; enhancing the veterinary nurse role; assuring practice standards; introducing a modern and compassionate 'fitness to practise' regime; and, modernising RCVS registration processes.

The principles underpinning these proposed reforms included the need for greater clarity, flexibility and future-proofing; that the disciplinary process should be forward-looking with public protection at its heart; and, that the vet-led team should fall under a single regulatory umbrella.

We will launch a full consultation on the proposals later this year but, in the meantime, we have published a range of information with more detail about the LWP's recommendations:

**[https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/news/rcvs-council-agrees-in-principle-to-wide-scale-legislative/?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Referral&utm\\_campaign=RCVS](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/news/rcvs-council-agrees-in-principle-to-wide-scale-legislative/?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Referral&utm_campaign=RCVS)**

**[https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/blog/a-step-change-in-veterinary-regulation/?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Referral&utm\\_campaign=RCVS](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/blog/a-step-change-in-veterinary-regulation/?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Referral&utm_campaign=RCVS)**

**[https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/our-consultations/legislation-working-party-report/?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Referral&utm\\_campaign=RCVS](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/our-consultations/legislation-working-party-report/?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Referral&utm_campaign=RCVS)**

# RCVS Council votes to hold consultation on changes to disciplinary system

At its June 2020 meeting, RCVS Council decided, by majority vote, to consult with the professions on possible changes to the disciplinary system. The proposed changes were developed with the aim of making our system more compassionate and modern, whilst maintaining public protection at its heart.

At the meeting, which took place on Thursday 4 June 2020, Council members were asked to decide on how to proceed with three specific proposals on reforming the disciplinary system.

These had come out of the discussions held by the Legislation Working Party (LWP) but, unlike the majority of the recommendations made in the LWP Report, which was also presented at the meeting, they do not require new primary legislation so were discussed and decided on separately.

The specific proposals are:

- a change to the standard of proof used in deciding whether or not the facts of a case are proven from the current criminal standard ('beyond all reasonable doubt'), to the civil standard ('on the balance of probabilities'). It is important to note that this standard is only applied to deciding on the facts of a case. The decision as to whether the proven facts amount of professional misconduct remains as currently;
- the introduction of a 'Charter Case Protocol' in which, cases that meet the threshold for a full Disciplinary Committee hearing, but which might be likely to attract a low sanction, may be concluded without a public hearing. Suitable cases may include those where factors such as insight or remediation have been shown. Instead of a disciplinary hearing, the case may be concluded in a more proportionate manner, for example, via a system of publicly-issued warnings and/or advice;
- to end the current system of initial review of complaints via a Case Examiners Group with the more complex of these cases then reviewed subsequently by the Preliminary Investigation Committee. Instead a single-stage review process with complaints considered by a number of 'mini-Preliminary Investigation Committees' with three members would be used. This would simplify the system and potentially speed up the concerns investigation and disciplinary processes, thus reducing the stress of the process on all parties. Full Preliminary Investigation Committee meetings (involving five Committee members) would still take place to consider the most complex cases.

Acknowledging some of the concerns that have been raised about changing the standard of proof, RCVS Registrar Eleanor Ferguson explains:

"The RCVS is now one of just a few regulators that still uses the criminal standard of proof in determining the facts of a case. We have sought these changes as part of our ongoing aim to develop a compassionate and forward-looking disciplinary system with the protection of the public absolutely at its heart, whilst also acknowledging the huge toll the process takes on the mental health of veterinary professionals.

"Research that we carried out into the impact of changing the standard of proof indicated that it would not lead to a major increase in cases being referred from the Preliminary Investigation Committee to the Disciplinary Committee. Importantly, the number is likely to be very low because the standard of proof only applies to proving the facts of a case; the judgement as to whether proven facts amount to serious professional misconduct will follow the same process as at present.

"We estimated that during 2019, there could have been just two more cases brought to DC under an altered standard of proof, with an additional three cases that were borderline but probably wouldn't have proceeded any further. Conversely, we also estimated that three cases that did go to DC during 2019 would probably not have done, had the 'Charter Case Committee' option been available.

"Ultimately, the aim of the RCVS in regulating the veterinary professions is to protect the public and animal welfare as well as upholding the reputation of the professions. We believe these changes will better achieve that aim."

The consultation on whether to change the standard of proof as well as to introduce the Charter Case Protocol and 'mini-PICs' is now planned for later this year.

Further information about the proposals, including some of the arguments for and against changing the standard of proof, can be in the papers for RCVS Council - June 2020 (pages 70-97 of the bundle).

# Black Lives Matter: RCVS President's statement to Council

Speaking at the outset of last Thursday's online RCVS Council meeting (4 June 2020), President Niall Connell made the following statement in response to events surrounding the recent death of George Floyd in the USA:

"I'd like to say a few words about the events that have taken place in the world recently. Everyone will be aware of the images of George Floyd, pinned by his neck to the ground by a police officer in America and heard of his consequent death.

"Everyone is affected by this terrible event and we stand in solidarity with our black colleagues who too frequently encounter incidents of racism in their lives. We grieve with our friends and colleagues.

"I would like to reiterate that RCVS Council and staff are committed to diversity and inclusion in its fullest sense. Black lives matter.

"We are striving, through the work of the diversity and inclusion group and other initiatives to build a diverse and inclusive profession, that has zero-tolerance of any discrimination of any sort at any level.

"We understand that change takes time. By working together we aspire to move forward to embrace a better future."

Niall Connell, RCVS President

# Professor David Argyle elected RCVS Junior Vice-President for 2020-21

At the June meeting of RCVS Council, members elected Professor David Argyle to be the RCVS Junior Vice-President for 2020-21.

Professor Argyle FRCVS (pictured right) is Dean of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and has been an appointed member of RCVS Council representing the University of Edinburgh since 2011. Professor Argyle stood as one of three candidates for Junior Vice-President – the others being Dr Melissa Donald and Dr Danny Chambers – and was elected by majority vote by his peers on RCVS Council at its meeting on Thursday 4 June 2020.

In his election statement to his colleagues on RCVS Council, Professor Argyle said: “After serving on Council since the beginning of 2012 (and serving on Education, Standards, Recognised Veterinary Practice, Scientific Advisory and chairing the Advancement of the Professions Committee), and recently having had the privilege to serve on the COVID-19 RCVS Taskforce, I would like to offer myself to serve as Junior Vice-President for 2020/2021.

“Alongside the major issues facing the professions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to support the College in driving forward standards. This is a hugely challenging time for the professions, but also one of opportunity, and will require cohesive and inclusive leadership.

“The RCVS has set out an exciting forward-looking strategy with animal welfare and the public at its core, but also with a focus on the health of our professions (vets and nurses) and ensuring a strong future through innovative leadership and world-leading educational standards.”

Speaking after his election, Professor Argyle added: “With our new strategy it is important we maintain momentum in delivering our priorities alongside supporting the profession in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. I am immensely proud to be able to serve the College in this role and be able to make a difference for our professions.”

Professor Argyle is a graduate of the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Glasgow. After a period in practice he returned to Glasgow to complete a PhD in Oncology/Immunology. He was Senior Lecturer in Clinical Oncology at Glasgow until 2002 when he became Head of Veterinary Oncology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

In 2005 he returned to Edinburgh University to the William Dick Chair of Veterinary Clinical Studies. In 2009 he became the Dean for postgraduate research and international research for both medicine and veterinary medicine and in 2011 he became the Head of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies.

He is an RCVS/European Specialist in Veterinary Oncology and Diplomat of the European College of Internal Medicine in Oncology. His major research interests are cancer and stem cell biology.

Professor Argyle will take up the position of Junior Vice-President at the Annual General Meeting of the RCVS which takes place on Friday, 10 July 2020, where he will join the Officer Team of Dr Mandisa Greene as RCVS President, Dr Niall Connell as Senior Vice-President and Professor Susan Dawson as Treasurer.

RCVS Council members had previously elected Dr Kit Sturgess to be Junior Vice-President but he was not re-elected to RCVS Council during this year's elections.

# RCVS to hold first-ever virtual Annual General Meeting in July

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) 177th Annual General Meeting will be the first to be held virtually in light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and the associated government guidance on social distancing.

The Annual General Meeting will take place via a dedicated online platform on Friday, 10 July 2020 starting at 10am when RCVS Council will meet to approve the Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2019, welcome new members on to RCVS and Veterinary Nurses (VN) Councils and say farewell to retiring Council members. The AGM will also be Dr Niall Connell's final occasion as RCVS President as he passes the reins to Dr Mandisa Greene, who will be invested as President for 2020-21.

The full agenda for the day is as follows:

Welcome and opening remarks (10am)  
Annual Report and Statement of Accounts  
Answers to members' questions on the Annual Report  
Council elections: new members and retirements  
BREAK (11 – 11.10am)

Council meeting to approve President, Vice-Presidents and Treasurer  
Address from RCVS CEO Lizzie Lockett  
Address from outgoing VN Council Chair Racheal Marshall  
Investiture of new Chair and Vice-Chair of VN Council [TBC]  
New VNC Chair's remarks  
Address from outgoing RCVS President Dr Niall Connell  
Investiture of new President and Vice-Presidents  
New President's remarks  
AGM closes (approximately 12 noon)

In normal circumstances, the AGM and Council meeting are followed by an Awards Ceremony in which guests and Members are given the opportunity to recognise and celebrate veterinary achievement, including via the RCVS programme of Awards & Honours. However, due to the pandemic, this part of the occasion has been separated from the Council business of RCVS Day and postponed until later in the summer.

Niall Connell, RCVS President, said: "This will certainly be a different kind of AGM from previous years and, while it is a shame that we will not be having our usual Awards Ceremony at the same time, I look forward to marking the achievements of our amazing professions in due course.

"I would, however, like to extend an invitation to all members of the RCVS and our veterinary nursing colleagues to 'attend' the event online, as there will still be plenty of interest taking place, including speeches and addresses highlighting the key achievements and milestones of the past year. We will also still be able to answer Members' questions on the Annual Report & Statement of Accounts that have been submitted in advance.

"I am also particularly proud and delighted that I will be handing over my presidency to Mandisa, who will become the College's first black President, making it a truly historic occasion."

Veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses who wish to attend the AGM can do so by registering on our dedicated web-page.

Questions from Members about the RCVS Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019 should be submitted in advance to Deborah Rowlanes at [d.rowlanes@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:d.rowlanes@rcvs.org.uk), no later than 5pm on Monday, 6 July 2020.

Only questions directly related to the Annual Report and its contents can be answered at the AGM. Answers to similar questions may be collated on the day due to time limitations, however, individual answers to all questions will be published on the RCVS website following the AGM.

# Dedicated website launched to showcase the VN Futures project

As a fitting tribute to this year's Veterinary Nursing Awareness Month, a new website dedicated to showcasing the work of the VN Futures project has today (Friday 29 May 2020) been launched.

VN Futures was launched as a joint Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) project in 2016, associated with, but separate from, the Vet Futures project and with a focus on identifying, and finding solutions to, some of the specific issues facing the veterinary nursing profession.

The VN Futures Report and Action Plan, published in July 2016, identified five key streams of activity (Creating a sustainable workforce; Structured and rewarding career paths; Confident, resilient, healthy and well-supported workforce; Proactive role in One Health; and, Maximising Nurses' Potential) and the new website is designed to highlight how the project has, and will, work to meet these aims.

It includes information on activities such as the development of the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing qualification, the School Ambassadors Project (currently in abeyance due to COVID-19) and several case studies that demonstrate the wide variety of careers open to veterinary nurses.

Racheal Marshall, Chair of the VN Futures Board (pictured right), said: "Since its launch in 2016, the VN Futures project has been doing a great deal of work to meet its aims and so enhance and bolster the veterinary nursing profession. It is fantastic that, with the new website, all its work and major projects are featured in the same place, with its own distinct identity.

"While much of the work of the project has been going on behind the scenes, there have been some distinct achievements for us to celebrate, not least the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing, which paves the way for Advanced Veterinary Nurse status, and the work that's been undertaken to clarify Schedule 3 and help veterinary professionals navigate how it works in practice."

Jo Hinde, President of the BVNA, added: "We are very glad that we were able to launch this website just as another wonderful VN Awareness Month comes to a close as it really does highlight the breadth, depth and diversity of options open to veterinary nurses. I hope that those who visit the website can draw their own inspiration from the case studies in terms of their career paths and how they might want to develop and enhance their role as a veterinary nurse.

"We also hope that those reading the website might be inspired to get involved – whether that's through writing a blog with their views on a topical issue, having their career profiled for one of our case studies, or registering an interest in one of the Working Groups that are working to deliver on the VN Futures Action Plan."

To get involved in the VN Futures project or to contribute to the website contact Jill Macdonald, VN Futures Project Manager, on [jill@vnfutures.org.uk](mailto:jill@vnfutures.org.uk)

# 'Practice Wellbeing Star' nominations open

The RCVS Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) and the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) has opened the 2020 Practice Wellbeing Star nominations to recognise those individuals who are helping to create a positive workplace environment even under the present difficult circumstances.

The nominations allow practices to recognise someone at their workplace who has helped to hold up morale during a time when practices are facing unprecedented staffing and financial issues, and have taken it upon themselves to foster a positive work environment even despite the current challenging climate.

The Practice Wellbeing Star nominations were launched in 2019 to accompany the Practice Wellbeing Awards. The Awards, which recognise practices with management systems and initiatives that promote wellbeing, will not be run in 2020 because of the current pressures on practices and because many practice staff have been furloughed.

Liz Barton, SPVS representative on the Mind Matters Taskforce, said: "With great regret we have had to postpone the Practice Wellbeing Awards as we recognise that practices may neither have the time nor resources right now to go through our comprehensive application process. However, there is still definitely a place for recognising those individuals who are going above-and-beyond to help their colleagues navigate their way through these difficult times.

"Nominating a team member is a great opportunity to discuss with your team and reflect on the positive things that are happening, and to nominate one person who has been particularly invested in contributing to creating positive team culture.

"The Practice Wellbeing Star nominations are open to all veterinary practices, and teams, including those working in universities, industry and business.

"We look forward to receiving your nominations and celebrating exceptional individuals who are committed to improving the mental health and wellbeing of their colleagues."

Members of the veterinary team who are nominated for as a Practice Wellbeing Star will receive a certificate in recognition of their colleagues' appreciation of their achievements.

Alongside this, all recipients will be entered into the prize draw for a pair of tickets to attend the joint SPVS and Veterinary Management Group Congress in January 2021. Further information on how to nominate is on the Vet Wellbeing Award website.

The closing date for Practice Wellbeing Star nominations is Friday 20 November 2020.



# Working through uncertainty and change with RCVS Leadership webinar series

As a part of the RCVS Leadership initiative, we will be running a series of free webinars for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses to address the challenges of leading and working with colleagues and clients through the coronavirus pandemic.

The hour-long sessions are a collaboration with the Tavistock Institute, a not-for-profit organisation that applies social science methodologies to contemporary issues and problems, and will be led by experts in the field of organisational development and change.

Each session will provide members with an opportunity to think about the wide-ranging effects the pandemic has had on our lives and our workplaces.

In particular, the sessions will address themes such as the impact of being furloughed; returning to work and living one's life in conditions of ongoing uncertainty; and working through change.

The four webinars, which will be hosted weekly, should be of interest to everyone in the veterinary team as they adapt to the changed circumstances and needs of clients, colleagues and staff. Tackling a specific theme each week, each of which builds upon the last, listeners will be provided with advice, guidance and coaching to enable them to grow their understanding and confidence so that they feel better placed to negotiate, lead, or support others, during these uncertain times.

Oliver Glackin, RCVS Leadership Initiatives Manager, commented: "What was just a few weeks ago unprecedented has now become our new normal. We have entered a period of uncertainty and turbulence which will bring significant changes – if it has not already done so to our personal and professional lives. To help make sense of this at an individual, group and organisational level, I'm really pleased to have been able to join forces with the Tavistock Institute which has a long track-record of helping guide people and businesses through periods of upheaval.

"Veterinary professionals are known for their adaptability, resourcefulness and creativity and these sessions should complement this by putting the complex and all enveloping nature of our shared circumstances into context before giving practical advice and coaching so that all members of the veterinary team can help themselves and support colleagues, teams and animal owners, through these uncharted waters."

The free lunchtime sessions will take place weekly, starting on Thursday 2 July, at 1pm. The themes covered by the webinars are described below. Whilst valuable as standalone sessions, each webinar in the series is designed as a counterpart to the others so that members can achieve a deeper and richer appreciation and understanding of the issues. The sessions will also be recorded and made available later.

Exploring and building resilience with Anne Benson – Thursday, 2 July

Working with change with Dr Leslie Brissett – Thursday, 9 July

The emotional impact of leading with Dr Sadie King – Thursday, 16 July

Working and leading through times of uncertainty in work and the world around you with Dr Dione Hills – Thursday, 23 July

To register, or to be kept up-to-date with further information on the seminars and presenters as they are posted, visit our dedicated Leadership webinars webpage.

# CORONAVIRUS UPDATES

## Indemnity insurance for clinical contact caseworkers

Following the NHS launch of a test and trace service to help speed up testing for anyone with coronavirus symptoms and track that person's recent contacts, we understand that NHS Professionals has been recruiting Clinical Contact Caseworkers to help run this service.

We have contacted the relevant authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland about what insurance implications there may be for veterinary professionals undertaking this role, and published the relevant advice in our Covid-19 FAQs.

Where no specific advice is currently available, it is important that you check the insurance situation yourself if you are seeking to undertake this role.

[https://www.rcvs.org.uk/faqs/how-can-i-help-in-the-national-effort-to-fight-the-pandemic/?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Referral&utm\\_campaign=RCVS](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/faqs/how-can-i-help-in-the-national-effort-to-fight-the-pandemic/?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Referral&utm_campaign=RCVS)

## Travel quarantine rules

The new UK border rules introduced due to coronavirus state that any person returning to the UK from overseas (excluding Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) must provide their journey and contact details, and self-isolate for 14 days after arrival.

There are exemptions in place for certain veterinary surgeons, ie those working in the food supply chain and Official Veterinarians working on official controls at the border, but no other veterinary professionals are currently exempt.

[https://www.rcvs.org.uk/faqs/23-are-veterinary-professionals-returning-from-overseas-travel/?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Referral&utm\\_campaign=RCVS](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/faqs/23-are-veterinary-professionals-returning-from-overseas-travel/?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Referral&utm_campaign=RCVS)

## No further change to CPD requirements

The RCVS Covid-19 Taskforce has reviewed its decision, taken in March, to reduce the CPD hourly requirements for vets and VNs by 25% and agreed there will be no further reduction in CPD requirements this year.

To inform their review, the taskforce looked at the data in the RCVS CPD recording platform, 1CPD, which almost 60% of vets and 80% of VNs are using. This shows that around two-thirds of vets and VNs using the portal have so far completed more than 90% of the required hours for the year. A small minority of vets and VNs using the 1CPD portal have completed less than 20% of hours required.

We recognise that many veterinary professionals may be struggling with competing priorities during this time. If you think you may not achieve your required CPD this year, please contact the Education team as soon as possible, so we can discuss this with you.

## Third practice survey coming soon

We will soon be issuing our third survey to gauge the ongoing economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on veterinary businesses, and would urge as many practices as possible to respond.

We use the data provided to build up a stronger evidence-base on how veterinary practices are being affected in the longer term, and to help with our own policy and decision-making and our ongoing discussions with Government and other public bodies.

[https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19/resources/?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Referral&utm\\_campaign=RCVS](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19/resources/?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Referral&utm_campaign=RCVS)

# A step change in veterinary regulation?

**Stephen May - RCVS Council member and Chair of the Legislation Working Party**

## Recommendations from the RCVS Legislation Working Party

At all times, the LWP has sought to examine what other regulators do, both at home and abroad. This is not because others always have it right and the RCVS does not. Each recommendation has been made on its own merits. However, there is a reason why 'best practice' is regarded as such. While there may be a case for the regulation of the veterinary profession to differ from other professions, even those in the healthcare sector, the LWP considers that such exceptions need to be carefully justified.

On the whole, the LWP has recommended a set of reforms that brings the RCVS more into line with current regulatory standards, ensures that this is done in a way that allows regulation to be more responsive to future changes, and remains relevant to the distinctive nature of the veterinary profession. In this way, we hope to modernise what is in many ways an old-fashioned piece of legislation that academics and others inside and outside the profession have argued is no longer fit for purpose.

Looking back, one of the more significant pieces of earlier reform to the VSA was the 1991 amendment to Schedule 3 of the Act, which allowed veterinary nurses to be named as members of the 'vet-led team' and to undertake minor acts of veterinary surgery. Then, in 2015, the new supplemental Royal Charter recognised veterinary nursing as a profession in its own right.

While our 2016 petition to the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), which had the support of over 10,000 individuals calling for protection of the VN title, was not accepted, Defra encouraged the College to review Schedule 3 to explore whether and how the VN role could be expanded.

This review then fed into the work of the LWP, along with the large amount of work done between 2017 and 2019 on reviewing the Exemption Orders to the VSA and the regulation of paraprofessionals.

These were two mammoth tasks in themselves, and resulted in some really robust, and in some cases, historic, recommendations. I am reassured that statutory protection of the VN title remains a standing recommendation in the LWP report.

The report also builds on earlier recent historic recommendations to add the work of other paraprofessionals to Schedule 3, while bringing those paraprofessionals under the regulatory umbrella of the RCVS.

I was delighted to Chair this Working Party, which has a broad membership drawn from across RCVS Council, Officers and staff, and included veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and lay members, as well as representation from both the British Veterinary Association and British Veterinary Nursing Association.

It has been a long process to reach this point, taking the last three years, over the course of 12 meetings, to explore over 50 proposals for reform. These range from the relatively minor to the really significant, of which the fitness to practise and vet-led team proposals are among the most important.

I am very proud of this report, which you can read in full at [www.rcvs.org.uk/etc](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/etc). It represents the LWP's recommendations for a set of reforms that would bring the RCVS more into line with current best practice in regulatory standards, whilst enabling that regulation to be more responsive to future changes.

Most importantly, I firmly believe that this new regulatory framework will provide greater assurances to the public of the high quality and safety of veterinary services, as well as providing individual veterinary surgeons with the empowerment and support they deserve.

I am very grateful to my colleagues on the LWP, and to the staff at the RCVS, for all the hard work which has gone into both the Working Party and this report.

I am also very grateful to my colleagues on Council for the detailed attention they paid to this report at their meeting yesterday, for their informed and considered discussion, and for their subsequent decision to proceed to a full public consultation on the LWP's proposals.

# Clarity, compassion, courage and confidence: the future of the RCVS into 2024

When our Strategic Plan for 2020-24 was approved in late January, I don't think anyone could have predicted the turn of events that would hit us just a few months later. While the coronavirus pandemic has had a massive impact on us as an organisation, as it has the whole of the profession, and has somewhat shaken up our priorities, much of what was in the Strategic Plan was about how the RCVS as an organisation works.

It is in times of crisis that an organisation's values shine through, and we have never been prouder of how we do things, as evidenced by the incredible quality and quantity of work our staff, Council and VN Council members have put in to mitigate the impact of the virus on animal health and welfare and the veterinary team.

While our Strategic Plan does have specific targets to meet and projects to undertake, a great deal of it is about the culture of the organisation summed up neatly by our four Cs: clarity, compassion, courage and confidence, and all of these have been in evidence in terms of our approach to the pandemic.

In the extraordinary times we've been living through, our staff and our Council members have been living up to these behaviours brilliantly. We have recognised with compassion the issues that are affecting the veterinary professions and animal owners; we have had the courage to take agile decisions in response to the circumstances in which we find ourselves; we have confidence that we will be able to adapt our working practices to support these choices, and we have striven to provide clarity to the professions in the midst of rapidly changing circumstances.

So that's the situation we are currently in, but now to the aspirations of the Plan itself. In January, the plan received RCVS Council's seal of approval and, notwithstanding the aforementioned disruption, we are starting to map out our key initiatives for the next five years in order to achieve our vision:

"That the RCVS will be recognised as a trusted, compassionate and proactive regulator, and a supportive and ambitious Royal College, underpinning confident veterinary professionals of which the UK can be proud."

The Strategic Plan addresses what kind of regulator and Royal College we want to be, our place in the world, and how we can continue to remain relevant and ambitious. It looks at the future of the RCVS as an organisation working on behalf of all its stakeholders - taking into account the future direction and needs of the professions, of the public, and of animal owners, whilst simultaneously focusing on animal and public health and welfare.

Covering five years, the plan covers a longer time-span than previous iterations. This is to give us increased scope for broader objectives that can be supported by more agile operating plans and allows for flexible phasing of activities. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic and its long-term impacts, this was also a rather fortuitous decision!

As previously stated, this Strategic Plan is based around four overarching ambitions: Clarity, Compassion, Courage and Confidence. In the rest of this blog I will be unpacking what these four ambitions means to us and the future of the veterinary professions.

## Clarity

As we work within a complex legislative and regulatory framework, we will continue to strive to simplify, unpick and modernise what we do in order to remain relevant.

In this ambition we commit to continuing to review the legislative and regulatory landscape to ensure the College keeps pace with, and stays ahead of, other sectors – and also aim to anticipate the needs of both society and the vet-led team.

Some specific actions under this ambition include:

Continuing to review the regulatory landscape to ensure we develop world-leading, robust standards and approaches that are grounded in evidence.

Reviewing whether the College can take a more proactive role around breaches of the Veterinary Surgeons Act, particularly involving unqualified individuals.

Working with our partners overseas to ensure that the UK remains relevant in the veterinary world post-EU exit, ensuring there is a global element to all that we do, and working to support our international members to feel engaged and included.

## Compassion

Under this ambition the RCVS recognises that, while our complaints process can lead to stress and anxiety for members of the professions, we can take a more compassionate approach to regulation by treating everyone as individuals, communicating promptly, explaining appropriately, and being fair. This compassionate approach also looks at how we can support members of the veterinary team to work to the best of their abilities.

Some specific actions under this ambition include:

Enabling our teams to deliver compassionate regulation by providing structures, training and support to ensure they can help vets and nurses meet standards.

Reviewing our concerns process through the eyes of each of our stakeholder and service-user groups to ensure that it is fair, forward-thinking and compassionate.

Helping our regulated professionals meet the standards expected of them by their peers, the public and society at large by launching the RCVS Academy - housing a range of online educational tools.

Continuing to support the mental wellbeing of veterinary team members through the Mind Matters Initiative.

## Courage

In the face of changes in society, veterinary science and technology, it's important for the RCVS to have the courage to help take the veterinary professions forward. Under this ambition, the RCVS will continue to take a leadership role within the professions and consider how it can ensure the professional culture is healthy, sustainable, inclusive, innovative and respectful.

Some specific actions under this ambition include:

Continuing to seek culture change within the wider professions around help-seeking behaviour to support both mental and physical health, learning culture, leadership, innovation, sustainability and diversity.

Ensuring a pathway for career progression for vets and nurses via postgraduate/post-qualification accreditations.

Working with other stakeholders to retain skills and talent within the professions by developing return-to-work options that build confidence in those who have had a career break.

Developing extra-mural studies (EMS) and work experience opportunities at the College.

Continuing to develop the Fellowship into a learned society that reflects the varied achievements of the veterinary profession.

## Confidence

This ambition recognises that the RCVS can only deliver on its plans if it has the right systems, skills and capacity in terms of its staffing, finance, IT and communications. Ambition is all well and good, but without these vital underpinnings, we will not have the confidence to succeed.

Some specific actions under this ambition include:

Collating and reviewing our member and service-user feedback on an ongoing basis – working with RCVS Knowledge to employ a quality improvement and innovation methodology.

Putting in place a people strategy that develops our talent, diversity, leadership and culture.

Ensuring our financial systems are customer-focused, fraud-resistant and efficient.

Developing and implementing a technology strategy that puts digital first, is collaborative, and focuses on simplification and convergence.

Putting in place a communications strategy that will focus on clarifying what we are, being clear about where and how we will work to improve, and being bolder about celebrating our unique contribution to animal health and welfare, and public health.

Our values underpinning our vision, mission and strategic ambitions

Whilst what we do is critical, as I've previously said, it is how we do it that makes a real difference. To support and underpin our Strategic Plan we will strive to put our values at the heart of what we do. These values are:

## Diverse and inclusive

Compassionate

Forward-looking

Straight-talking

These values, coupled with our ambitions and key initiatives, will help us to structure a roadmap to become the RCVS we want to be by 2024. This will require a team effort and I would ask veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses to join us in making this strategy and our ambitions possible by checking out the full plan and continuing the dialogue with us.

# Through adversity, comes a new future

**Niall Connell - RCVS President (2019 - 2020)**

**The Covid-19 global pandemic is an event which has struck deep into all aspects of our society, but how might it impact our future?**

Echoing through the long history of our profession are many big challenges that have been thrown into our path. Our colleagues before us have faced animal disease epidemics, from the Cattle Plague disaster of 1865 to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001; many terrible events affecting the population at large, such as the two World Wars and the flu pandemics of 1889 and 1918-19. Now, we face this grim Covid-19 menace.

The veterinary profession has always weathered these storms, risen magnificently to challenges and made such incredible contributions to animal health and welfare and public health, while supporting each other closely

**Rapidity and responsiveness**

Like everyone, the RCVS had to respond to a rapidly-developing situation, and so we've had to make decisions, change policies (temporarily) and be aware of and responsive to the needs of the professions. We have had to continue effective regulation whilst making changes to mitigate some of the adverse effects which were taking place.

The College quickly postponed or cancelled a multitude of events and meetings along with everyone else. The events that were in my diary disappeared like tears in rain and, on a personal level, I deeply regret missing the opportunities to meet so many members of our fantastic professions.

Our initial interpretation was to strictly adhere to the 'stay at home' advice from government in order to maximise the potential impact of the lock down on flattening the peak of the outbreak. Hence the guidance was produced to focus on maintaining the food supply chain and providing emergency or urgent treatment only. The RCVS has always been clear in supporting veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses to use their professional judgement in each situation, and do what is best for each animal under their care, while being very aware of personal safety.

On 24 March, Council agreed to temporarily permit the remote prescribing of veterinary medicines where appropriate and where complying with government advice leaves no options. We also changed the payment process for registration fees by spreading them out to assist people's finances.

**Agile decision-making**

It became clear that events were unfolding rapidly and an RCVS Covid-19 Taskforce was formed on a temporary basis on 26 March to speed up decision making. If you'd told me at the start of this year we'd be issuing updates to guidance and policies, albeit on a temporary basis, about remote prescribing and supply of veterinary medicines, I'd have thought you were day-dreaming, but here we are. It's what we've done to ensure that the professions can work in the new context of the pandemic.

I chair the Taskforce, which comprises the Senior and Junior Vice-Presidents, Treasurer, VNC Chair, all Standing Committee Chairs, and a further vet member and a lay member of Council. Non-voting members include our CEO Lizzie Lockett, Registrar Eleanor Ferguson and our Director of Operations, Corrie McCann. The aim was to support more agile decision-making on temporary policy changes pertaining to the pandemic, whilst continuing to maintain a robust process.

We changed the EMS requirements on a temporary basis for veterinary students, recognising that the lockdown restrictions make it impossible for students to achieve the full requirement. We reduced the number of weeks of EMS final-year students required to complete their veterinary degree to 30 weeks.

We reviewed the EMS requirements further with respect to students in fourth year and below. We agreed with the Veterinary Schools Council (VSC) that current fourth-year students should not be prevented from graduating, providing they have completed their 12 weeks preclinical EMS and at least 50% (13 weeks) of clinical EMS, in addition to demonstrating they have achieved all the RCVS Day-One Competencies. And we continue to actively work with VSC to explore ways to support students in their earlier years, who will also be impacted.

We reduced by 25% the amount of annual CPD vets and nurses will need to undertake this year.

We published guidance on how the professions could help in the national effort against coronavirus by returning to OV roles in red and white meat, by contributing ventilators, PPE and other materials, and in undertaking certain other roles.

We temporarily suspended Practice Standards Scheme assessments.

VN Council made decisions on VN training by asking all VN educators to defer all forms of practical training for at least three months. Under the strict lockdown conditions, the SVN OSCEs required for SVNs would not be immediately possible, although this has continued to be reviewed and examined further. VN Council also formed a special solution-focused Taskforce on 17 April to look at possible alternative routes for student veterinary nurses to complete their veterinary nursing qualifications and join the register.

It became clear that the current lockdown would not end at Easter and so we produced updated guidance which included a flowchart on a rolling two-month period that would allow practices to do more, only if they can do it safely. This is in order to mitigate longer-term animal health and welfare risks (and also additional public health risks, where zoonotic disease may occur), while still working hard to ensure social distance measures with regard to the public and veterinary teams.

Veterinary professionals and their teams must continue to consider closely what they can do, while paying close attention to risk assessment, biosecurity and HSE guidelines. The Flowchart is designed to be reasonably future-proofed and it still being used just now, with some very minor potential revisions in light of more recent government guidance.

#### Reassurance and engagement

I have reassured our veterinary professionals on several occasions that making their best judgments in such difficult situations would be supported and looked upon favourably. Our guidance is clear in that it prioritises human health – practice teams, their families and animal owners – over that of animal health. That's not an easy message for professionals who are driven to look after animals but of course that's how it must be.

The Senior Team, Officer Team and also the Taskforce meets in frequent, weekly (or more) conversations by Zoom or Microsoft Teams. With the CEO and other senior officers, I have been in frequent meetings with BVA and BVA president Daniella Dos Santos and all the BVA associations, the UK Chief Vet and CVOs of Scotland, Wales and NI; with Defra, APHA, FSA and FSS. We meet regularly with Vet Schools Council and are in contact with FVE and other European veterinary organisations. Collaboration with all stakeholders is incredibly important and we strive to maintain a united message for the benefit of animal welfare.

The RCVS staff at Belgravia House have been working remotely since 20 March and are doing a fantastic job keeping the ship afloat while dealing with these huge numbers of changes. The communications team do great work updating our professions with emails, press releases, social media updates and guidance. They often work late into the night to get this done. Much excellent material has been produced to support the profession and guide the public, and our Advice Team has been working very hard to respond to the huge increase in enquiries that have been coming in over the past couple of months. RCVS Knowledge, our charity partner produces excellent support with lots of online information and resources about coronavirus.

As President, I have taken part in various different events around the country, from my office at home. The BVA webinar with Daniella and me on 12 April following our joint statement to the professions attracted over 3,000 listeners and over 500 questions. I've done radio interviews and podcasts, and update my social media channels and frequently as I can, as well as answering loads of other communications. I've been contacted by many folk, including communication at the highest level.

The RCVS has also surveyed practices, with two surveys so far to look at the impact of the pandemic on veterinary businesses, and a third imminent. This will inform and guide our work in the coming months, so do please ensure your practice responds.

#### Outstanding

Where will all this lead? We will continue to regulate appropriately in the circumstances, with understanding, reassurance and compassion, whilst knowing there will be light at the end of the tunnel for all of us. The most important aspect of all this work is that, although a lot has been changed on a temporary basis, our focus is ensuring standards remain high, particularly on the education front. This is embedded in every decision that has been made. I'm confident that the new veterinary surgeons and registered veterinary nurses entering our world this year are amongst the best we've ever had.

Our veterinary and nursing professions are doing an outstanding job looking after animal welfare, protecting their teams and the public. They have a superb relationship with the public and their reputation is excellent. Currently we are watching, adjusting and horizon scanning. The UK government guidance has continue to change regularly, and will no doubt change again. The devolved governments have issued their own versions. We must negotiate our way safely forward.

Veterinary surgeons are working hard in a vast spectrum of activities such as general practice, specialist practice, government work, laboratories, fish farms, education and everything you might imagine. Our new graduates will be closely supported and should expect that support. Out of this extreme adversity, I believe we can learn lessons, innovate and consider new ways of working for the future.

It is a privilege for me as RCVS President to be a small part of this. As others have noted, we're entering a 'new normal' now and we don't know yet how long this will last, so we're mindful that we will need to review our guidance and how the professions are working to make sure we carry on supporting them as best we can.

For the time being, though, there is never a dull day!



# Publications

**RCVS Strategic Plan (2020 - 2024)**

[https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/rcvs-strategic-plan-2020-2024/?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Referral&utm\\_campaign=RCVS](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/rcvs-strategic-plan-2020-2024/?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Referral&utm_campaign=RCVS)

**Annual Report & Financial Statements 2019**

[https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/annual-report-and-financial-statements-2019/?utm\\_source=Informz&utm\\_medium=Referral&utm\\_campaign=RCVS](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/annual-report-and-financial-statements-2019/?utm_source=Informz&utm_medium=Referral&utm_campaign=RCVS)

# Events

## **Virtual AGM & Council meeting**

Friday, 10 July 2020 – online meeting

# Publications

**'Remote' Disciplinary Committee hearings to be held in June**