

THE ROYAL VETERINARY COLLEGE

Access Agreement

2012/2013

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Access Agreement has been prepared in response to the guidance published by the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) in March 2011. It is designed to describe how the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) will meet the requirements placed upon HEIs that intend to charge tuition fees above the £6,000 threshold in 2012/13 and subsequently. It should be read in conjunction with the College's Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (WPSA).
- 1.2 The College is proud of its record in widening participation. Although the RVC is a highly selective HEI academically, in the last decade the proportion of our student body that comes from lower socio-economic groups has more than doubled; retention rates among such students are excellent; and our outreach activities impact upon thousands of young people from our target groups every year. This Agreement sets out how we intend to continue and develop our work to enable prospective students, whatever their background, to achieve their aspirations.

2. Fee Limits and Fee Income above £6,000

- 2.1 We intend to charge two levels of fee to full-time undergraduate entrants in 2012/2013:
- A fee of £9,000 to students entering all courses *except* the Foundation Degree and BSc in Veterinary Nursing;
 - A fee of £7,500 to students entering the FdSc and BSc in Veterinary Nursing.

Students taking a sandwich year as part of the BSc Bioveterinary Sciences will be charged 50% of the standard fee applying to that course for their entry cohort, for the sandwich year.

- 2.2 We intend to implement any real terms increases in the maximum fee of £9,000 that may be permitted in 2013/14 and subsequent years.

3. Expenditure on Access and Retention

3.1 Assessment of the College's Access Record

Between 2002/03 and 2009/10, the percentage of young full-time first degree entrants from NS-SEC classes 4 – 7 increased from 11.3% to 29.1%, compared with the sector-wide marginal increase from 28.4% to 30.0%

Over the same period, the percentage of young full-time first degree entrants who had attended state schools increased from 66.1% to 80.3%, compared with the sector-wide increase from 87.2% to 88.8%

This represents significant progress and, particularly given our subject mix, further significant improvements will present a major challenge.

Recruitment of students from low participation neighbourhoods has shown more limited improvement. We believe this reflects our catchment areas, that continue to be rural, semi-rural and suburban, whilst low participation neighbourhoods are concentrated primarily in inner city areas. We are reviewing our target areas with a view to opening the LPN target to POLAR quintiles 1 and 2, which might reflect our catchment more appropriately, and have set targets for improved performance in this area. The majority of our outreach activity already engages schools from low participation areas, but success in working with such pupils has been largely reflected in progression to higher education in other disciplines.

Much of this outreach activity engages BME groups, but has yet to be reflected fully in BME representation in our student body, something that is replicated in all UK veterinary schools (and in those outside the UK). The proportion of students from BME groups has increased from 5% to 7% since 2002/03, and we are committed to increasing this further. Increased work with BME groups from 2011 onwards may bear fruit and show a relative increase, though absolute figures are likely to remain low. Given that large numbers of BME students from certain London boroughs regularly attend our outreach work we believe that the end result of much of our activity will continue to contribute to increased BME participation in Science and Medical subjects in partner institutions.

We recognise, too, that we have made little impact on the under-representation of males in general in the student body, again, a common phenomenon in veterinary schools in developed countries.

- 3.2 We consider the retention rates of students from the widening participation cohort to be good. The only relevant data available from HESA relate to retention rates among students from low participation neighbourhoods.

According to HESA, retention rates for these students over the period since have been at or near 100%.

- 3.3 The College’s achievements reflect much more than simply our level of expenditure on access and retention. It reflects an institutional commitment, and a degree of priority that has led to engagement of staff at all levels, and curricular developments such as the introduction of the Gateway Programme, the UK’s first veterinary foundation year.
- 3.4 We intend to spend the following sums on access and retention measures in 2012/13:

Bursaries for continuing students under “old” arrangements	£368,650
Bursaries for new entrants under “new” arrangements	£83,890
Matched funding for the National Scholarship Programme (not included above)	£45,000
Expenditure on outreach activities	£197,316
New expenditure on collaborative activity via VETNET LLN and AccessHE	£5,500
Expenditure on learning support	£57,070
Expenditure on Student Support services	£21,600
Expenditure on development of student tracking	£10,000

- 3.5 We note the reservations that have been expressed about the effectiveness of bursaries as a mechanism of widening participation. However, they will remain an important part of our overall access provision. Financial hardship can be a significant factor, not only as a direct cause of student withdrawal, but also as contributor to poor academic performance that itself leads to withdrawal. The courses we run are relatively expensive and offer limited opportunities for part-time work. Lack of money can also reduce a student’s opportunities to engage in the full range of social, sporting and other activities that contribute to a rounded university experience. We are committed to ensuring that none of our students withdraws from study, or suffers significant disadvantage while at College, because they come from a less affluent background.

4. Access Measures

- 4.1 The College has engaged in outreach and widening participation activity for over ten years. In the course of that time we have organised masterclasses, mentoring, student ambassador work, taster sessions, mock interviews, Information, Advice and Guidance, and highly successful summer schools, both residential and non-residential. We have worked at both Primary School

and Secondary School and Further Education College level. It is our intention that this type of activity continue at an enhanced level.

- 4.2 We shall, however, be more focused on establishing relationships with particular cohorts of pupils and schools with whom we can build long term relationships and thereby track progress to Higher Education (or otherwise). Research conducted by WECAN, among others, has shown that regular contact with students will have a greater long-term benefit than one-off interventions that could be forgotten by the time they become relevant. Our target groups will include: young people from social classes 4 – 7; state school pupils; BME students, particularly black boys; white males; care leavers; and vocational learners.
- 4.3 As a major contributor to scientific and medical research, the RVC will develop outreach activity which dovetails with STEM subject content. We are already in receipt of a Wellcome Trust Award to work with our target groups in schools on the subject of Biomedical Science and Anatomy and we shall build on this. External funding will be sought to maintain a level of interactive seminars and taster sessions.
- 4.4 Our outreach activity will become based more on blocks of time working with our target groups year on year. This would by and large fit in with the requirement to present milestones over the period 2012 – 2017 and approximate to, for example, Years 8 – 13. We shall seek external funding to support Summer School activity, as we have seen direct positive results from our previous Summer Schools. We shall develop a scientific programme for black African Caribbean boys.
- 4.5 The highly successful Gateway Programme, which forms a foundation year for the professional BVetMed degree, will continue. We shall also continue to develop work aimed at vocational students and to ensure they meet requirements for entry to RVC degree programmes. Much of this will be done in collaboration with the VETNET LLN Association which includes HEIs, FECs and Land-Based colleges. Work will continue to engage the Looked After Children cohort. We shall develop, in co-operation with others, a method of tracking participants.
- 4.6 We shall collaborate with other HEIs, both as a member of the London focused AccessHE initiative, and with the Bloomsbury Group (a consortium of largely specialist institutions). The closure of AimHigher will have a limited impact on the quantity of outreach we undertake, since our core programmes have historically been funded from our HEFCE widening participation allocation. However, maintaining productive links with schools will become significantly more challenging unless new arrangements are put in place to maintain this aspect of AimHigher's work. Building on our

expertise in medical and health areas we will seek to revive the collaborative work on which RVC led 2000 – 2008.

- 4.7 We will take a number of steps to ensure that widening participation is even more fully embedded in the College. We will appoint academic widening participation champions in each academic department, and will make access a major component of the remit of one of the Vice Principals in our re-constituted Senior Management Group.

5. Student Retention and Success

- 5.1 In order to meet the needs of students from under-represented groups the College has developed and enhanced a range of support mechanisms that in practice benefit all students. We will continue to improve and embed these very specific services. Academic support, learning support and student support have developed significantly over the past five years and, alongside the Students Union, we continue to evaluate how students access these services and how we can adapt them for different groups with differing needs.
- 5.2 From 2004, Learning Support sessions ran for the first time with large group classes, workshops and one-to-one support. This service grew, in 2006, with a member of staff for each site. Currently, the service is accessed by about 200 students a year individually. All undergraduate and several postgraduate courses run whole class sessions. The provision is not generic as the courses offered at the RVC, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, are very specific. So these sessions are course specific and Learning Support staff are in close contact with course leaders. The Gateway Programme (Year Zero of the BVetMed) has learning support embedded within the course with lectures and workshops from week one. These tie in with the in-course and end of year assessments and so have enabled the continued success of students on this programme since 2005. We have also committed to investing in BSKB software, to provide additional continuing support in the development of functional skills such as numeracy, for students who require this.
- 5.3 Alongside the introduction of Personal Development Planning in 2005, tutoring at the RVC was adapted to become regular, structured meetings throughout the year. This proved successful and was again adapted to an academic tutorial structure through all taught courses. This has given all students timetabled sessions with their tutor which enables them to build on their skills for learning, academic success and employability. Staff development sessions support the tutors in facilitating their groups, and in learning where to go in the RVC to find extra help for their tutees.

- 5.4 As we build on these foundations, we are planning a new development that will integrate personal development planning, tutorial support, learning support, Day One Skills and feedback on academic progress. This will provide a robust and appropriately resourced framework to support student retention and success.
- 5.5 In 2007, the RVC appointed a dedicated Student Support Services Manager. The team in Support Services has increased year on year as the RVC has invested in specialist services bought in from other universities. We now have a Disability Officer, Finance and Welfare Officer, Careers Advisor, Counsellors and Dyslexia tutors on both campuses. These specialists, though part-time at the RVC, understand the specific needs of the RVC students and now belong to a well-led team solely concerned with the personal and academic success of the students. In the last year the College has made further investment in Student Support staffing and we are very active in testing for learning differences amongst students showing any signs of difficulty. This testing is substantial investment made in each student falling into this category. Thus, a portion of our overall investment in general and learning difference support could be seen as a key aid to retention. £21,600 of Student Support staffing costs can be said to be focussed on retention. The consequent costs of further specialist testing and then supporting those students then identified with a learning difference is not quoted here since it reflects our obligations under equality legislation. However the effect of the work can be seen in the proportions of students with a disability at RVC. In 2002/03, just 0.4% of our full-time undergraduates were in receipt of DSA; in 2009/10 this figure had increased to 10.6%, compared with a national average of 4.7%.
- 5.6 A £15k Grant has been awarded by the CFEB to implement a Transitions project. The aims of the project are as follows:
- To provide prospective students with financial information about their intended programme of study in order that the choices they make are as well informed as possible.
 - To provide current students with the advice and resources to enable them to develop sound financial capability skills to manage both student and graduate finances.
- The project involves the creation of new online content along with a formalisation of existing resources and strategies.

6. Financial Support for Students

- 6.1 All students on the Gateway Programme will be offered a fee waiver of £3,000. Our target intake for this programme is 31 students. In 2012/2013 the RVC's NSP allocation will be used to fund 15 of the fee waivers and RVC will fund the remaining 16 waivers as its matched funding. In subsequent years,

any additional NSP allocation will be targeted at students on those courses where financial needs are greatest.

- 6.2 No financial support will be offered to students joining the Graduate Entry Programme.
- 6.3 With these exceptions, in 2012/2013 students entering all other programmes will be eligible for bursaries means tested and tapered according to the household income level as follows:

Household income	Bursary
Less than £25,000	£1,000
Between £25,000 and £42,000	Tapered with £100 minimum
Greater than £42,000	No Bursary

We will review the impact of the new fee and bursary levels, and will consider adjusting bursary rates in later years on the basis of experience.

7. Targets and Milestones

- 7.1 Our targets for 2012/13 are:

82% State School entrants to RVC
 31% NS-SEC Classes 4 – 7 entry to RVC

- 7.2 The changing landscape post-2012 may affect these two categories, but the foundation that the College has laid over recent years provides a strong basis for confidence that these figures can be maintained subsequently. Our targets for the following five years are therefore as follows:

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/17
State school entrants	82%	83%	85%	86%	88%
NS-SEC 4 - 7	31%	32%	33%	34%	35%

8. Management and Delivery

- 8.1 The College’s overall strategy for widening participation is set by the College Council and the Academic Board. More detailed consideration of activities and targets is undertaken by a broad-based Widening Participation Working Party, comprising both academic and professional staff, on which the College’s Senior Management Group (SMG) is represented. Policy in relation to bursaries is recommended to the Senior Management Group by the Scholarships and Bursaries Board, a group comprising a range of staff with

relevant professional expertise and chaired by the Assistant Principal (Academic Support and Development).

- 8.2 Delivery is the responsibility of the SMG, through the Assistant Principal; delivery is managed and led by the Head of Widening Participation and Community Engagement, and the Widening Participation Development Officer.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

- 9.1 The primary measures against which we will evaluate our progress are the proportions of students from lower socio-economic groups and state schools. These measure things that are important to us as an institution striving to achieve a more socially representative student body; further, they are reliable measures based on statistically significant numbers of students, for which we have data over a number of years. We will also introduce a target for recruitment from low participation neighbourhoods.
- 9.2 We will also, as set out in our WPSA, monitor the numbers of students we recruit from other under-represented groups (males, BME groups, care leavers, vocational learners).
- 9.3 Progress in achieving our objectives is monitored by the SMG, to which the Head of Widening Participation and Community Engagement reports biannually, and by the Academic Board, to which he submits an annual report.
- 9.4 Widening participation activities are monitored via feedback from the participants themselves, and from those overseeing their participation (e.g. teachers). We are committed to developing more proactive tracking of participants, to evaluate the success of our strategy in supporting progression to HE. We will also collaborate with AccessHE in any comprehensive, structured research and evaluation that it may undertake, building on the similar work carried out by the WECAN AimHigher partnership.

10. Provision of Information to Prospective Students

- 10.1 The RVC is committed to providing prospective students, their parents and teachers, with clear, accessible and timely information on the fees that we will charge from 2012 and any financial support that we offer. We will broadcast fees and finance information via the following means:

- RVC Website;

- leaflets / flyers to send out to prospective students, also given out on open-days and at recruitment events;
- prospectuses;
- providing links to UCAS, SLC and Got-a-teenager, to be used on their websites;
- providing information, advice and guidance on any email and telephone queries we receive, possibly creating a new email address e.g. studentfinance@rvc.ac.uk;
- using the social media i.e. Facebook etc;
- providing information during Open Days and Campus Tours, and at recruitment events;
- through e-newsletters circulated to prospective students, careers advisers and teachers;
- through briefings to outreach groups.

10.2 Review

We will survey prospective students (e.g. at Open Days etc.) to ask if they were able to access information; and understood it. We will engage with student representatives (e.g. Students Union) to seek opinions and feedback.

