

THE ROYAL VETERINARY COLLEGE

Access Agreement

2008/2009

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Access Agreement has been prepared in response to the Higher Education Act 2004, and takes full account of the guidance (2004/01) published by the Office of Fair Access (OFFA). It has been up-dated to take account of the College's success in meeting its milestones for Widening Participation, and of the Government's announcement of revised student support arrangements for 2008/09.
- 1.2 As noted in the Strategy submitted to the Council in 2001, widening participation continues to pose special challenges for a small, single-discipline institution with a catchment that is international, rather than national or local. However, the continued development of national initiatives under the auspices of both HEFCE and central government has created opportunities for the College to become fully engaged with the widening participation agenda. The College is lead institution in the London-wide AimHigher Thematic partnership in the Health Professions, and has created strong links with schools, colleges and local authorities throughout the capital.
- 1.3 This Agreement describes how the College intends to continue the activities that it has developed over the last five years with the goal of widening access, and sets out plans to extend the breadth and depth of these activities utilising funds made available through the introduction of variable tuition fees (see section 5). It also sets out our proposals for a bursary scheme to support students from less affluent backgrounds (section 6), and for the provision of enhanced financial advice to students (para. 6.8).

2. Aims

- 2.1 The aims of the College's Access Agreement are:
 - i. to ensure that its commitment to equality of opportunity is reflected fully in the recruitment, admission, and subsequent support, both academic and non-academic, of students from all backgrounds;
 - ii. to make information about the veterinary and related professions, and about the requirements of entry to these professions, more widely available;
 - iii. to continue to facilitate the development of the profile of the veterinary and related professions so that they more closely reflect the communities that they serve;
 - iv. to make a positive contribution to the quality of education and student aspirations in the districts in which its campuses are located;
 - v. to provide a national lead and focus in widening participation in the veterinary and related disciplines.

3. The Student Profile of The Royal Veterinary College

- 3.1 There has been some change in the College's student profile since 2001. Female students still represent the great majority of undergraduates and in other respects the student profile remains representative of the veterinary profession as a whole, and is comparable with that of the other English veterinary schools.
- 3.2 The College's participation performance indicators, published by HEFCE, indicate that the majority of students still originate from affluent rural and suburban areas, and have their origins in the managerial and professional classes. Students from private schools are disproportionately represented. However, this has begun to change as a result of the introduction of the Foundation Degree in Veterinary Nursing, and the first intake to the Gateway Programme in September 2005. The College now achieves above its benchmark with regards to numbers from state schools, and percentages from lower socio-economic groups. The published PIs do not take account of students registered for the joint BSc in Veterinary Nursing, who are returned in Middlesex University's student numbers.
- 3.3 Despite progress, students from lower socio-economic groups; ethnic minority students; people with disabilities; and men as a whole, all continue to be under-represented in the College's student body.

4. Achieving our Aims

- 4.1 In order to achieve the aims set out above, the College will continue to focus its widening participation activities in the following areas:
 - i. admissions policies and procedures, and entry routes;
 - ii. working with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and other professional organisations;
 - iii. Summer Schools;
 - iv. links with schools, FE Colleges and LEAs;
 - v. developing the use of the College's facilities to benefit targeted groups;
 - vi. retention strategies;
 - vii. collaboration with other institutions.
- 4.2 Admissions Policies and Procedures, and Entry Routes
 - 4.2.1 The College recognises that it must take positive action in the area of student admissions if it is to increase the number of students which it recruits from lower socio-economic groups, particularly those from the inner cities. Although our current admissions requirements in respect of academic attainment, prior animal experience, and extra-curricular activity, do not directly discriminate against such applicants, they put them at a disadvantage in three main ways:
 - i. applicants who attend schools which are geared to graduating pupils with high A-level scores, and who come from a background with a tradition of engagement with higher education, are more likely to attain the grades which we require (typically three grade A passes at A-level for the largest undergraduate course, the BVetMed), and to have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities;

- ii. applicants who are pursuing vocational qualifications rather than academic A-levels are effectively excluded from the BVetMed, except through entry via the Gateway Programme;
- iii. applicants from middle class families are more likely to know veterinary surgeons and other sources of animal-related experience.

So although applicants from lower socio-economic groups have the opportunity to apply to and enter the College, it is not an equal opportunity - the playing field is not level.

- 4.2.2 A large proportion of students belonging to the socio-economic groups which we are targeting do not pursue A Level qualifications after completing their GCSEs, but instead seek to gain vocational animal-related qualifications at land-based colleges and similar institutions. As the College currently only recognises A Level qualifications for all entrants onto the BVetMed, except those entering via the Gateway Programme, a large proportion of the target group is excluded automatically.
- 4.2.3 The College has run a national or regional veterinary medicine Summer School every year since 2001 (see 4.3 below). BVetMed applicants who have attended the Summer School have been tracked through the entry process and been given flexible consideration, with some admitted on grades of BBB. The possibility of entering with lower grades has helped to maintain applicants' motivation, despite sometimes negative attitudes on the part of schools. However, the introduction of the Gateway Programme (see 4.2.4 below) means that this is no longer necessary, as students who do not meet the standard entry requirements now have this as an option.
- 4.2.4 The Veterinary Gateway Programme is an initiative by the College, supported by the Faculty of Veterinary Science of the University of Liverpool, and the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Bristol, to give students from the Widening Participation cohort a better chance of entering the BVetMed degree course. The successful completion of the Gateway year guarantees a place on the BVetMed. A-level entry requirements for the Gateway programme are lower than those required for direct entry onto the BVetMed; this is to reflect the lesser degree of opportunity that our target students are provided with at school as opposed to most of our other entrants, as outlined in 4.2.1.i. The first cohort was admitted in September 2005, and the College has built up the intake to the target of 30. We envisage the Gateway Programme becoming a cornerstone of our Widening Participation Strategy over the next decade. Following a programme of Information Sessions in 16 English cities and towns in 2004, we now stage a smaller number of regional information events, building upon links established with local schools.
- 4.2.5 The College successfully approached HEFCE for funding to create a Lifelong Learning Network in the veterinary-related professions, the VETNET LLN. As indicated above (4.2.2), at present there is no encouragement for students pursuing vocational qualifications to progress into veterinary-related higher education. This network of FECs and HEIs is committed to creating a framework of pathways and bridges that will enable vocational learners to realise their full potential in HE.

4.3 Summer School

- 4.3.1 The College ran its first HEFCE-funded Summer School in August 2001 and since then it has been an annual event. The Summer Schools are and continue to be

successful in that they serve as an excellent introduction to higher education for attendees, specifically the study of veterinary medicine. The Summer Schools have also been an excellent vehicle to bring a wide range of RVC students and staff (academic and administrative) into contact with the College's Widening Participation strategy. Many of the staff and students involved in the original Summer School continue to collaborate on other Widening Participation projects and activities.

- 4.3.2 The College has actively worked to maximise the number of Summer School attendees who ultimately enrol here on full-time degree programmes. Careers advice interviews with Summer School participants indicated that simply attending the School and learning that the College had a positive commitment to facilitating their progress into a veterinary degree had, in itself, served to enhance the students' motivation considerably, particularly in cases where school teachers and other advisers had counselled that they were wasting their time in even considering an application to veterinary school. The College continues to track Summer School students, but as of 2004 is advising all ex Summer School attendees from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply to the Gateway Programme if they are not confident of achieving the grades necessary for direct entry to the BVetMed, as the policy of flexible consideration towards direct applicants from the Summer School is no longer in force.

4.4 Links

- 4.4.1 Through the project *Widening Participation in Health Professions Education in London*, the College developed links with a range of secondary schools, FE Colleges and Local Education Authorities in Inner London and neighbouring boroughs. Since 2002 the RVC has also been a member of the Focus student ambassador scheme. The Focus scheme encompasses most of the HEIs within the Central London Partnership and centrally trains students to visit targeted schools and colleges. The RVC has become heavily involved in the student ambassador scheme, and recruits approximately 20 new ambassadors a year. Student ambassadors are 'shared' within the partnership and regular meetings are held where best practice is shared and decisions made on new targets and directions. RVC students have visited many schools in the Central London boroughs to deliver aspirational presentations and also more detailed veterinary related talks. Some RVC students have also acted as 'mentors' to students in these schools. Working with the Central London Partnership, the RVC has surpassed the targets set for it each year and expects to repeat this achievement in 2008/09 after the targets have been increased.
- 4.4.2 The College has also increased links with schools and colleges independently of the Central London Partnership and through contacts with AimHigher representatives in other London boroughs. School visits have been made by RVC academic staff to deliver talks and practicals to groups of science students in several schools in local boroughs. The RVC has also developed a programme of local school visits to the Camden campus, for live and internal anatomy demonstrations as well as histology practicals and museum workshops. Students from Y6 to Y12 regularly visit the College during term time. In addition to these school visits, the RVC has also run Saturday Schools for Gifted and Talented pupils from the Widening Participation cohort, and Science masterclasses. The RVC has become involved with local careers and parent/pupil advice events, facilitated by collaboration with AimHigher personnel and other local government staff.

4.4.3 Efforts are now being made to coordinate a more structured programme of school visits. The College is continuing to build up a network of contacts in schools, LEAs and other institutions to facilitate activities and to increase them in number. A major priority for the College as part of its Widening Participation strategy is to increase the number of specialised visits from Y12 upward to the facilities at Hawkshead, such as the College Farm, the Equine Centre and the Clinical Skills Centre.

4.5 Retention

4.5.1 The College will pay particular attention to the progress, both academic and non-academic, of students from non-traditional backgrounds. Such students do not want to be picked out for special treatment, and the College will therefore seek to achieve this through existing measures, such as study skills support, training of personal tutors, the Access to Learning Fund, and the Academic Progress Review Committee.

4.5.2 We expect that students entering from backgrounds with limited experience or knowledge of higher education will need more comprehensive study skills support than the College is used to providing. A key part of the role of the Learning Support Manager is to provide study skills support, both to groups of students and to individuals.

4.6 Working with Partners

4.6.1 During the period 2000-2002, the College was lead institution in the HEFCE-funded seven-institution partnership *Widening Participation in Health Professions Education in London*. Since 2003, this has developed into the genuinely London-wide Health Professions thematic partnership, encompassing all 18 London HEIs that provide courses leading to health-related qualifications. In 2004, the partnership was given an additional £200,000 per annum for four years, by HEFCE and the Department of Health, to extend its work. The Project now employs two members of staff, who support the RVC's widening participation efforts, in addition to leading and co-ordinating London-wide activity. Likewise, the College's Widening Participation Officer, appointed in 2004, actively supports London-wide activities as a member of the broader team.

4.6.2 In addition to the work described above, the College will participate in the work of the London-wide partnership through providing:

- Year 10 workshops at the London health fairs.
- Year 12 Masterclasses
- Work Shadowing led by RVC students
- A programme of academic staff visits to schools
- A series of Saturday Schools based in Camden

4.6.3 The RVC continues to be involved in the strands of activity developed by the Health Professions Project. These include:

- Working with African Caribbean students
- Activities targeting students pursuing vocational courses
- Parent education
- Teacher development
- A staff development programme on admissions and interview procedures

5. Additional Outreach Activity Funded from Variable Tuition Fees

- 5.1 The College recognises that it has a special responsibility as a national provider of veterinary education. We will therefore use part of the additional money generated by variable tuition fees to develop e-learning materials for Gifted and Talented pupils within the Widening Participation cohort. We will also selectively expand our national outreach activities, exemplified by our links with Highfields School in Wolverhampton. On a national basis we will also continue to advertise the College's offer via careers fairs and publications which target specific audiences, e.g., Hotcourses, Ethnic Britain.

6. Bursaries and Financial Advice

- 6.1 We recognise that the financial burdens of Higher Education can serve as a disincentive for prospective students from less affluent backgrounds. This is particularly the case for students coming to London, and those incurring the additional expense of pursuing a course in the veterinary and related professions. The College has therefore opted to go beyond the minimum requirements for a bursary scheme, in offering an enhanced bursary scheme targeted specifically at students from less affluent backgrounds. In 2008/09 we will offer the following bursaries to UK students:

BVetMed Years 1-5, Combined BVetMed/BSc

A bursary offering of £1650 to those receiving a full Higher Education Maintenance Grant, with a pro-rata portion of the bursary for those with a family income of between £25,000 and £39,305.

BVetMed Year 0 ('The Gateway Programme')

A bursary of £5700 to those receiving a full Higher Education Maintenance Grant, which is expected to be the whole cohort. This bursary level is set to be an equivalent cost to the student of continuing to study at home for a further year to improve A level grades. After year 0 students will be offered bursary arrangements set out above for years 1 to 5 of the BVetMed.

BSc Bioveterinary Sciences

A bursary offering of £1750 to those receiving a full Higher Education Maintenance Grant, with a pro-rata portion of the bursary for those with a family income of between £25,000 and £39,305.

Foundation Degree in Veterinary Nursing

A bursary offering of £2000 to those receiving a full Higher Education Maintenance Grant, with a pro-rata portion of the bursary for those with a family income of between £25,000 and £39,305.

- 6.2 Where we state that students who receive less than a full Grant will be awarded a pro rata portion of the bursary, we mean that a student who receives e.g. 50% of the full Grant would receive 50% of the maximum bursary for that course, subject to a minimum of £50 (i.e. where the bursary would, pro rata, be worth less than £50, it would be rounded up). For example, a student on Year 1 of the BVetMed who receives 50% of the full Grant would receive a bursary of £825.
- 6.3 The College offers Merit Scholarships to the value of £3000 for every year of the course. For the BVetMed and BSc Bioveterinary Sciences courses Scholarships will

be awarded on the basis of the BMAT score. Merit scholarships will be awarded to Foundation Degree Vet Nursing students demonstrating very high achievement at the end of their first year assessments. There are three scholarships available each year to BVetMed entrants, and one per year each for BSc Bioveterinary Sciences entrants and Foundation Degree Vet Nursing first year students.

- 6.4 We expect that all students on the Gateway Programme, and 30% of students on other programmes, will be eligible for the maximum bursary. In addition, approximately a further 25% of students will be eligible for a partial bursary. We guarantee that, in subsequent years, bursary rates will, if necessary, be increased to ensure that any inflationary rises in the fee limit do not create a gap between the fee we charge and the total package of support available.
- 6.5 The College participates in the model bursary scheme devised by UUK and SCOP.
- 6.6 Student hardship funds in the form of the College's existing allocation from the Access for Learning Fund (ALF) will also be available to the tune of about £40,000 for all undergraduates each year. This funding is provided direct to the College by HEFCE, and is therefore not formally part of this Access Agreement.
- 6.7 We will provide prospective students with information about the level of fees and bursaries in our prospectuses. Clear information about the costs of studying, including the aggregate cost of tuition, will be provided to prospective students when they are offered a place at the College. Continuing students will be informed of the financial support and advice available to them via the Student Handbook.
- 6.8 The College will expand the availability of financial advice for students, which is particularly important on a high cost course such as the BVetMed. At present, our part-time Finance and Welfare Officer attends for one day a week at each campus. In 2007 the College employed a full-time Student Services and Support Manager to coordinate provision for student support.

7. Milestones

7.1 In its Strategy for the period 2001 – 2004 the College stated that its plan was to achieve an increase in the number of entrants from under-represented groups within three years, and to meet its targets within five years. Inevitably, our progress towards these targets, in strictly numerical terms, has been hastened by the rapid increase in overall student numbers, but within this we have made steady progress, in particular in recruiting more students from state schools and from minority ethnic groups.

7.2 State school pupils.

Target, 2001 – 2004: to enrol 10 - 20 more state school pupils per annum within five years.

Achievement: the percentage of home undergraduate students who had attended state schools increased as follows:

2002/3:	50%
2003/4:	51%
2004/5:	53%
2005/6:	57%
2006/7:	60%

Target by 2010: given the introduction of the Gateway Programme and the Foundation Degree in Veterinary Nursing, we expect the number of students entering from state schools to continue this steady increase, and to reach 64% by the end of the decade.

7.3 Lower socio-economic groups

Target, 2001 – 2004: to enrol 10 - 20 more pupils from low participation neighbourhoods and/or social classes III, IV and V within five years.

Achievement: the percentage of home undergraduate students whose parental occupations ranked 4 – 9 on the SOC2000 classification, increased as follows:

2002/3:	18%
2003/4:	21%
2004/5:	22%
2005/6:	24%
2006/7:	28%

Target, by 2010: progress towards this target has been difficult, but we should continue to make headway more quickly as we continue to admit students who have attended the Summer School, and students entering the Gateway Programme and the Foundation Degree in Veterinary Nursing start to have an impact on the overall figures. We would be disappointed if the number of students from lower socio-economic groups did not reach 33% by the end of the decade.

7.4 Ethnic minority pupils.

Target, 2001 – 2004: to enrol 5 - 10 more ethnic minority students per annum within five years.

Achievement: the total number of home undergraduate students from ethnic minority groups increased as follows:

2002/3:	33 (5%)
2003/4:	45 (6%)
2004/5:	65 (7%)
2005/6:	71 (6%)
2006/7:	83 (7%)

Target by 2010: despite this gradual increase, the number of ethnic minority students still fails to reflect their numbers in the wider community. Although cultural

considerations militate against members of some ethnic groups choosing the veterinary professions, this is less relevant to the second and third generations, and it would be reasonable to project the number of ethnic minority students reaching 10% by the end of the decade.

7.5 We are not proposing any intermediate milestones. Given the small numbers of students involved, it only requires a few students to change their mind about coming to the College, or not, for it to appear that we are significantly off course. However, we will monitor trends very carefully, and review our strategies if it is clear that we are not on course to achieve our milestones.

8. Tuition Fees

8.1 The College intends to charge a tuition fee of £3,145 per annum for full-time home undergraduate students on all RVC-based courses commencing their courses in September 2008. We anticipate that we will continue to charge fees equivalent to the fee cap set by the Government, as this rises in line with inflation.

9. Costs

9.1 The College's expenditure on bursaries, additional outreach and enhanced financial advice is expected to be of the order of 34% of additional fee income in 2008/9 and in subsequent years.

9.2 As indicated above, we are committed to making further investments to safeguard access, particularly through additional outreach activity (see section 5) and the provision of financial information (see para. 6.8).

10. Monitoring Performance

10.1 The College's Academic Board, and through it the College Council, receives the annual monitoring report detailing progress towards meeting its aims in respect of widening participation.

Widening Participation Action Plan, 2004-05 to 2010

Intended activities	Targets
1. Veterinary Medicine Summer School	<u>2004-05</u> 63 attendees <u>2005-06 onwards</u> 40 attendees
2. Visits to schools and colleges	<u>2004-05</u>

	<p>Visits to 12-15 institutions in London</p> <p><u>2005-06 onwards</u> Visits to 20 institutions in London</p>
3. Visits to the College	<p><u>2004-05</u> Visits from 10 institutions</p> <p><u>2005-06 onwards</u> Visits from 20 institutions</p>
4. National Outreach Activities	<p><u>2005-06</u> Up to 30 more pupils from state schools, non-traditional and low income backgrounds (Gateway Programme)</p> <p>10 regional information sessions in order to raise awareness of Gateway Programme</p> <p>Visits to 4-6 institutions outside London</p> <p><u>2006-07 onwards</u> Visits to 20 institutions outside London</p>