



ROYAL COLLEGE of
VETERINARY SURGEONS

RECOMMENDATIONS for
FUTURE VETERINARY
LEGISLATION

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The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons has, over the past four years, undertaken a wholesale review of the legislation that governs the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions. It is the most substantial review of the professions' legislative framework since the Veterinary Surgeons Act (VSA) was introduced in 1966.

This review found the existing Act to be archaic and no longer fit-for-purpose. Therefore, we have developed a new set of recommendations that have been considered by the professions, the wider industry, and the public through detailed consultation. At the heart of these recommendations are public protection, animal health and welfare and regulatory best practice.

WHAT ARE WE RECOMMENDING?

Our vision for future veterinary legislation requires new primary legislation to replace the VSA. The current Act has been amended many times over the years, and it has become clear that we have reached the limits of how far we can 'stretch' the legislation and remedy its many deficiencies via amendments alone.



TO EMBRACE THE VET-LED TEAM

The vet-led team can be defined as ‘appropriately-regulated professionals, including veterinary nurses, working under the direction of a veterinary surgeon, to protect animal health and welfare’. Veterinary nurses play an essential part in the vet-led team, and their role should be expanded to allow them to fulfil their potential, further support veterinary surgeons, and encourage professional growth for those in the profession. We envisage improved access to different types of veterinary services, for example, a veterinary nurse could help clients to administer treatment to their pets at home under the direction of a veterinary surgeon.

We believe that additional paraprofessions should be regulated by the RCVS, becoming ‘allied professions’ alongside veterinary nurses. This would underpin and assure their professional standards in the interest of the public and animal health and welfare. The adoption of a model of paraprofessional regulation similar to that of the General Dental Council would allow the RCVS to regulate the whole vet-led team and allow greater evidence-led flexibility over what can be delegated to these allied professionals. Statutory protection must be given to the professional titles of all allied professions regulated by the RCVS, including veterinary nurses.

TO ASSURE PRACTICE STANDARDS

We only regulate individual veterinary surgeons and nurses; we do not regulate veterinary practices except those that take part in the voluntary RCVS Practice Standards Scheme. This contrasts with modern regulatory regimes in human healthcare, such as those of the General Pharmaceutical Council or the Care Quality Commission. We recommend that we should be granted statutory authority to regulate all veterinary practices.



TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO THE PROFESSION FOR THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

We recommend the introduction of provisions for limited or focused licensure, which would allow people with disabilities to join the professions when they might otherwise be unable to meet the criteria to graduate or gain a full licence to practise.

TO INTRODUCE A ‘FITNESS TO PRACTISE’ REGIME

Our existing disciplinary processes no longer reflect modern regulatory best practice. We recommend that a forward-looking ‘fitness to practise’ regime should be introduced, with less focus on past misconduct, and instead introducing the concept of ‘current impairment’. This model would include the following:

- introducing a wider range of sanctions, including conditions of practice orders that would restrict an individual’s ability to practise short of suspension;
- introducing interim orders to allow vets and veterinary nurses to be restricted from practising whilst cases are investigated where there is a significant risk of harm; and,
- introducing and underpinning the Health and Performance protocols within legislation.



MODERNISING RCVS REGISTRATION

Our recommendations include a number of reforms to improve the RCVS' registration processes, which are not possible under the VSA. This includes the separation of registration and licence to practise, in line with other regulators; to underpin mandatory continuing professional development (CPD); and to enable us to introduce a revalidation regime (as run by other health profession regulators, such as the General Medical Council), if this was judged to be appropriate in future.

TO RETAIN A ROYAL COLLEGE THAT REGULATES

We recommend that the RCVS continues to be a 'Royal College that regulates'. This unique arrangement allows us to take a holistic approach to public assurance. It also ensures that our Royal College functions are properly funded and allows us to carry out some Charter-based activities as part of the proactive and supportive approach to upstream regulation, such as initiatives in the areas of mental health and leadership.

We believe that these recommendations would create a more robust and flexible veterinary workforce, while potentially increasing efficiency within clinical practice. In turn, they will ensure that the RCVS is a modern, fair and efficient regulator, fostering a professional environment that is inclusive and attractive to those wishing to pursue a veterinary or veterinary nursing career.



OUR VISION

Our vision will ensure the welfare of animals and enable the public to:

- be assured that practitioners are working to the professional standards they should be through regulation of practices and a renewed, more forward-looking disciplinary process.
- find practitioners who are suited to their animals' needs and who undertake continued professional development to maintain high standards of care.
- be confident that professionals on the RCVS registers are trusted and competent to provide their animals with the care they expect to receive.

Our vision will ensure that the veterinary professions in the UK offer inclusive and flexible careers regulated with compassion and fairness by:

- increasing opportunities for veterinary nurses and other allied professionals to equip the workforce to adapt to future challenges. Our recommendations will encourage professional growth and development, in turn helping to address veterinary workforce shortages by offering careers with more versatility and diversity for the professions.
- widening access to the veterinary professions, including to people with disabilities who may not currently be eligible to undertake a veterinary degree, this will ensure that the professions foster a supportive and inclusive culture.
- enhancing paraprofessional roles and responsibilities and using them to their full potential.



SUMMARY

Any new legislation would be modern, and principles-based, without the need for regular amendment to make small changes, for example, to set fees or adapt minor regulatory processes. Such future-proofing would mean that changes are a matter for the regulator, in turn less burdensome on parliamentary time, creating a speedier more efficient legislative framework that should serve at least as long as the 1966 Act.

**IF YOU WISH TO DISCUSS THESE
RECOMMENDATIONS OR HAVE ANY FURTHER
QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:**

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