

Veterinary Schools Council Strategic Plan

2016–2020



FOREWORD

Since the launch of the Veterinary Schools Council (VSC), our members have worked towards a strategic focus to promote innovative education, research and collaboration, facilitate the science underpinning veterinary medicine, increasing political engagement and the spread of best practice. Key to this has been championing diversity while maintaining collaboration and constructive advocacy in order to drive new and exciting developments in veterinary medicine and education.

This strategic plan builds on these efforts and aims to strengthen the collaboration across all areas of veterinary education and research, and to further develop our links with stakeholders and other disciplines. A central part of this will be advancing the One Health agenda.

Professor Ewan Cameron
Chair, Veterinary Schools Council

WHO WE ARE

The Veterinary Schools Council was launched on 5th November 2014 to represent the seven UK schools of veterinary education. It has since evolved and now includes two associate members – the School of Veterinary Medicine at University College Dublin and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Utrecht.



Through its membership, comprising the heads of these veterinary schools, the Council is an authoritative voice on matters relating to veterinary education, from the selection, education and training of those who will be the future of the veterinary clinical profession, to the academic researchers who are critically important to the health of both the UK's animal and human populations.

The Veterinary Schools Council has worked closely with key organisations and institutions across veterinary education and research, as well as regulatory bodies, animal health charities and organisations that represent the wider veterinary profession.

Our vision

The international recognition of the UK veterinary schools and our associate members for their excellence in education, research and clinical service.

Our mission

To advocate, challenge and develop excellence in veterinary education, research and clinical service for the benefit of animal health and society.

Our strategic focus

VSC has three key areas of focus:

- Promoting innovative veterinary education and collaboration
- Facilitating underpinning science and political engagement
- Monitoring data and best practice

Our core values

VSC members commit to demonstrating the following values:

- Collegiate, democratic and collaborative working to ensure that the VSC's resources are used in the most effective and efficient way possible.
- Working together with mutual respect, trust and understanding.
- Working to ensure evidence-based outcomes for veterinary education.
- Valuing and championing diversity in veterinary education.
- Upholding and promoting the importance of providing veterinary education in a research rich environment

Committees

There are six committees of the Veterinary Schools Council, made up of the leads in each specialist area within each school.

- Research Committee (VSCRC)
- Education Committee (VSCEC)
- Operations Committee (VSCOC)
- Admissions Committee (VSCAC)
- Clinical Committee (VSCCC)
- Antimicrobial Resistance Group (VSCAMR)

STRATEGY

The future of veterinary research and education

Discussing the future of veterinary research and education with stakeholders has been an important aspect in the development of this strategic plan and will continue to feed into the aims set out in this document as they develop.

The Research Committee has established itself as a group which seeks to establish a sustainable framework for veterinary research. For example, in November 2015 it hosted a research conference, which was successful in bringing together a range of stakeholders to explore research priorities from One Health and clinical research, to realising the potential of Big Data science in veterinary medicine.

The Education Committee has made significant advances in collaboration across veterinary education in areas such as assessment, and organises an annual Veterinary Education Symposium – VetEd, the International symposium of the Veterinary Schools Council. This allows veterinary educators from around the UK and the world to share ideas and innovations for teaching undergraduate and postgraduate vets. The Education Committee endeavours to strengthen collaboration and the sharing of best practice in order to continually advance the education of the vets of the future. VSC is a strong supporter of the Vet Futures project which looks at the future of the profession, led by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and the British Veterinary Association (BVA). Schools have fed into this project and will continue to be centrally involved in the implementation of actions that have emerged from the final report.



Strategy development

This strategy stems from discussion between the committees and heads of veterinary schools at VSC away days in 2015 and 2016. Four key overall objectives for the work of VSC emerged:

Understand

To gather and analyse information in order to form the basis of VSC actions to continually improve veterinary medical education and research, and how this supports society

Synthesise

To form collective plans of action that will facilitate innovation, efficiencies and the sustainability of veterinary education and research

Promote

To promote VSC values and to advocate the VSC as a leading voice in relation to veterinary education, research and the future of the profession

Success

Setting out the expected results of the actions in the strategic plan that will ensure that UK veterinary medical education and research reaches its potential to meet future societal needs and to lead on a global scale

Themes

Within these broad goals, VSC will focus on five themes, having identified key measures of success for each.

1. Leadership

Take a leading role in all aspects relating to the advancement of veterinary medical education and research. To encourage an academic approach to veterinary medicine across the profession as a whole.

A key indicator of success will be the positioning of VSC as a leading voice in the veterinary profession, both nationally, in Europe, and globally. VSC to be established as the principal voice on all aspects relating to veterinary higher education and research in the UK.

2. Curriculum and assessment

Continually advance excellence in veterinary medicine.

A broad measure of success will be clear and sustained school collaboration on assessments. Secondly, within the next few years VSC aims to strengthen school guidance on EMS, enabling increased efficiency and an enhanced student experience. Schools will work together to ensure and maintain the high quality of the UK veterinary medicine curriculum as a whole. VSC will work with the RCVS to improve the utility of EMS within overall course structures.

3. Sustainability and efficiency

Facilitate and encourage the sharing of best practices, innovations and knowledge between schools in order to ensure the future viability of veterinary education and research.

A mark of success will be evidence that collaboration through VSC is an effective central point for the sharing of data, information and best practices, contributing to the efficiency and sustainability of UK vet schools and associate members.

4. Recruitment

Ensure the best applicants are selected to enter the profession in order to produce a sufficient number of highly qualified vets to meet societal needs. Promote and share best practice in relation to widening participation.

VSC will share best practice in recruitment and widening participation activities between veterinary schools. The aim of this will be to work towards the demographics of veterinary students being more closely aligned to those of the UK as a whole. Success will also see a clear increase in the number of applications to study veterinary medicine.

5. Research

Advocate and drive the growth of UK veterinary research. Ensure that UK veterinary research is at the forefront of national and global agendas.

Success will mean that VSC is established as the leading voice for veterinary research, with UK vet schools and associate members helping to drive the national and global agenda for veterinary research in its broadest context. There should also be increased engagement with funders and industry, and a raised profile for One Health, Global Food Security, Evidence Based Veterinary Medicine and translational research.

6. Positions in Europe

Expand VSC's network and influence in Europe, maintaining strong links with European partners, particularly in light of political developments surrounding Brexit.

Function at European level in regards to research in particular and have an influence on funding calls.

VSC intends to continue to provide a coherent voice for Region One schools within the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) in relation to matters involving the future of veterinary education.

IMPLEMENTATION

VSC intends to work closely with stakeholders to ensure that veterinary education and research are the key focus of plans for the future of veterinary medicine, and that the entire spectrum of schools' views are represented as the wider profession evolves. The Committees will take forward a series of actions to these aims.

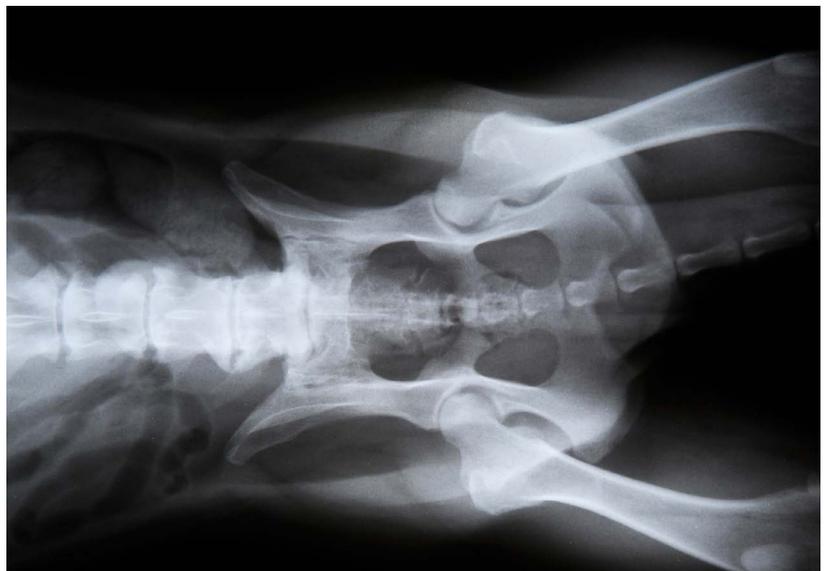
Research Committee

The vision of the Research Committee is to develop the UK veterinary research capability to improve animal and human health and welfare whilst ensuring sustainability of the environment and security of the food chain.

The Research Committee will promote excellence in veterinary research at all levels, in the UK and globally. Central to its mission will be developing ways to increase funding and training opportunities in veterinary research. The Committee will work to maintain and develop strong research links with Europe, particularly in relation to developments surrounding Brexit.

Actions

- A Task and Finish group will be established under the Research Committee with a remit to look at how evidence-based veterinary medicine is funded and prosecuted.
 - The group has been asked to consider the potential of using computerised patient records from veterinary practices and hospitals to contribute to a nationwide system of data collection and analysis to provide an open access resource for evidence-based veterinary medicine. They have also been asked to make recommendations to the VSC for the scope, structure, administration and funding of such a national system, for the VSC to propose to the RCVS, BVA and other organisations within the UK veterinary profession.



- A sub-committee of the Research Committee will be established to address research training and career pathway development.
 - The group will play a key role in driving the agenda for veterinary research training, and work to increase PhD and postdoctoral training opportunities. This will involve representing the VSC at relevant meetings and influencing funding opportunities. For example, Academy of Medical Sciences starter grants are now open to vets, which is a positive step in the right direction.
 - The group will review the structures of residency programmes across schools to see if there is an ideal model that works best to promote research training for clinician scientists.
 - The group will apply for the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council Strategic Training Awards for Research Skills to fund summer studentships across UK vet schools. They will develop guidance on research career pathways for veterinary school graduates.
 - The group will establish a National Veterinary Research Mentoring Programme. This initiative will link veterinarians interested in developing a career in research with mentors who have the time and inclination to help foster the next generation of veterinary researchers.
 - They will seek to change language around alternative career pathways for vets outside of clinical practice, for those students who do not feel that clinical practice is right for them. Work with the RCVS Mind Matters initiative to this aim.
- The Research Committee will continue to engage with the Animal Health Strategy Group.
- Continue to exploit opportunities to obtain funding for veterinary research from the Department for International Development.
- The Research Committee will also oversee a project (jointly funded by the Wellcome Trust) which will collect evidence relating to the numbers of veterinarians working in veterinary research, and the factors that influence career choices. This project will help to inform the development of sustainable career pathways for veterinary researchers.
- Continue to encourage national student engagement with One Health. Help to facilitate the annual Student One Health Conference, supported by the Comparative Clinical Science Foundation legacy funds.

Education Committee

The Education Committee will develop the understanding of how veterinary education and research can respond to the needs of the profession and the public it serves. It will promote veterinary education, faculty development and scholarship of learning and teaching nationally and internationally.

Actions

- Establish a Senior Tutors Network between schools as an academic special interest group.
- Advance assessment sharing between schools; develop multiple-choice question sharing through Huddle.

- Continue to develop and promote VetEd, an international symposium of the Veterinary Schools Council.
- Education Committee to write a short report on how schools are addressing the challenges in the Vet Futures project within the curriculum, such as moral and ethical decision-making; reflective practice; enhancing business and finance skills; careers awareness and advice; leadership skills.
- An extra-mural studies sub-committee to be established, which will report to the Education Committee and the heads of veterinary schools. The sub-committee should also work closely with the RCVS and look at a review of the purpose and requirements for extra-mural studies.
- All seven member veterinary schools in the UK are required to survey the employers of their graduates by the accreditation boards (AVMA and RCVS). Schools will explore a coordinated approach to surveying employers, for economy of scale. This will help employers, as they will not have to complete multiple surveys, as well as improving the dialogue and engagement between employers and schools.

Operations Committee

The Operations Committee will build upon the sharing of best practices between schools to avoid duplication, and will strengthen links between schools and stakeholders.

Actions

- Share information between schools on value added, non-competitive activity, including governance, organisation and systems, shared risks, opportunities for students, and so on.
- Develop and share lists of key stakeholders and contacts between all schools.
- Collaborate on Athena Swan aims; meetings to be arranged between schools to facilitate the sharing of best practice
- Explore opportunities to share and develop best practice for supporting students, with particular focus on student wellbeing and key issues such as student debt and student fitness to practise

Admissions Committee

The Admissions Committee will continually develop the admissions process and look at emerging trends in selection to share best practice between veterinary schools.

Actions

- Collect information on veterinary schools' selection processes in order to create a guide for potential applicants to veterinary school. This work will also focus on how to inform potential applicants about the values and attributes needed to be a vet and the reality of being a veterinary surgeon.

- Share best practice on widening participation activities and look for opportunities to collaborate on the development of resources designed to attract non-traditional applicants to the profession.
- Work with the RCVS and BVA to develop, new innovative ways to promote careers in veterinary science, and the range of career possibilities available to those with a veterinary degree.

Clinical Committee

The Clinical Committee will increase engagement between veterinary schools and the BVA, RCVS and other relevant stakeholders. The Clinical Committee will work with the other VSC committees to develop support and insights for veterinary clinical education and to avoid duplication across members.

Actions

- Open dialogue with employers of UK veterinary school graduates to investigate workplace expectations and to evaluate the feasibility of training students outside veterinary teaching hospitals. This should explore the role that employers could play in the student transition into the workplace. As part of this, the Committee will review expectations for Day One Skills. These actions will be initially taken forward by meeting with relevant stakeholders.
- Work with the Admissions Committee to review and develop guidance for applicants on the key skills, aptitudes and behaviours that are required for a career in veterinary medicine.
- Develop a common framework for career progression in veterinary teaching hospitals.
- Promote the role of the veterinary teaching hospital to the profession and more widely, as part of the VSC platform.

Antimicrobial Resistance Group

This group will promote antimicrobial research (AMR) and raise veterinary student awareness of the importance of the appropriate prescribing of antibiotics. The group will look at ways to utilise data currently held by veterinary schools to build the evidence base on the impact of AMR, and develop engagement with antimicrobial research being carried out in other disciplines.

Actions for VSCAMR

- Contribute to research events on behalf of VSC, where issues relate to AMR.
- Collect and collate information on current AMR practices within veterinary schools, and how this is incorporated into the curriculum. Promote the schemes that are already in place to tackle AMR.
- Create competency guidance on AMR for the start of an undergraduate course; the group will not set curriculum outcomes or prescribe how each school should teach this, but the group will encourage the promotion of best practice from day one as a veterinary student, and look at how this links to teaching later in the course.

	Understand	Synthesise	Promote	Success
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data on students, academics and the profession in order to inform policy development Develop an understanding of how veterinary education and research can respond to the needs of the profession and the public it serves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take an active role in implementing the recommendations made in the Vet Futures report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the leading role vets play in the One Health initiative Promote veterinary education, faculty development and the scholarship of learning and teaching nationally and internationally Promote the schemes that are already in place within schools to tackle AMR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VSC aims to be a leading voice in the veterinary profession, both nationally and globally, and to be established as the principal voice on all aspects relating to veterinary higher education and research in the UK
Curriculum and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop dialogue between schools and employers of UK veterinary school graduates, to better understand the workplaces they will enter Explore a coordinated approach to surveying employers of veterinary graduates Collect and collate information on current AMR practices within schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance assessment sharing between schools Establish a Senior Tutors Network Develop a competency guidance on AMR for the start of an undergraduate course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate and develop reforms to extra-mural studies Create joint school guidance on AMR for the start of an undergraduate course Continue to develop and promote VetEd, an international symposium of the Veterinary Schools Council Promote and share best practice on the schemes already in place in schools to tackle AMR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained school collaboration on assessments Schools to have a greater involvement in decisions on extra-mural studies, enabling increased efficiency and an enhanced student experience Schools will work together to ensure and maintain the high quality of the UK veterinary medicine curriculum as a whole Schools will have stronger links and more engaged dialogue with employers of their graduates
Sustainability and efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information between schools on value added, non-competitive activity, including governance, organisation and systems, shared risks, and opportunities for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share data and best practices between schools to avoid duplication Collaborate on Athena SWAN aims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase engagement and strengthen links with relevant stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VSC will act as a central point for the sharing of data, information and best practice in order to ensure the efficiency and sustainability of UK vet schools
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect information on veterinary school selection processes in order to create a guide for potential applicants to veterinary school Share best practice on widening participation activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update current guidance on supporting and encouraging students with disabilities Collect information on veterinary school's selection processes in order to create a guide for potential applicants to veterinary school Develop guidance on career pathways for veterinary school graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the RCVS and BVA to develop new innovative ways to promote careers in veterinary science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The development of a clear and in-depth set of VSC best practices in recruitment, shared between all schools A clear increase in the number of applications to study veterinary medicine across the UK
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of a Task and Finish group with a remit to look at how evidence-based veterinary medicine is funded and undertaken Establishment of a sub-committee to address research training and career pathway development, including a review of the structures of residency programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work to increase PhD and postdoctoral opportunities Establish a National Veterinary Research Mentoring Programme Seek to change language around career pathways for vets outside of clinical practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote excellence in veterinary research at all levels, in the UK and globally Play a key role in driving the agenda for veterinary research investment Maintain a VSC presence at external research events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be established as the leading voice for veterinary research, with UK schools helping to drive the global agenda Increased traction with industry and a raised profile for translational research

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for veterinary education and research. It will be essential that veterinary schools have a major input in informing these decisions. Improving the student experience and increasing widening participation will require a significant review of current programme structures such as work experience requirements; VSC recognises that it has a fundamental role here. There are also exciting opportunities in further developing the links between schools, working together to improve education for



students by sharing knowledge and best practice in all areas, from selection, to assessment, through to ensuring our graduates meet employer expectations as they evolve.

A major challenge for VSC and the wider profession will be to ensure that research in veterinary medicine is sustainable and receives the increased support it needs as it evolves. Schools will strive to increase funding for research and research training, and help to ensure that it is distributed in the most effective way to safeguard the future of the profession.

This strategic plan identifies a range of opportunities that lie ahead for veterinary education and research as the profession as a whole makes advances in exciting directions. Vet Futures is a timely and important project on which vet schools will work closely together and with the wider profession, to take forward the ideas that have emerged from this.

VSC recognises that it is part of a global network. We intend to strengthen our links with international partners, and to have a greater impact by improving the understanding of UK veterinary education and research, and by helping to disseminate the best practice from our continually developing knowledge within UK veterinary schools and our associate members, and also to see what the UK can learn from around the world. A key aim of VSC is to maintain our highly valued research and educational links with European partners, despite the outcome of the referendum for the UK to leave the European Union.

The actions and progress of this plan will be reviewed annually in July each year, with the first review taking place in July 2017 by each of the committees. The strategic plan will then be reviewed and redeveloped as a whole in 2020.

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- Two previous heads of vet schools also contributed significantly to this strategic plan, Professor Joanna Price and Professor Grace Mulcahy
- Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
- Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
- Vet Futures

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