



# Strategic Plan '25

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## ***Introduction***

### **Our community is unique.**

This gives us some special advantages, but also our own challenges.

There are limits to what we can learn and adapt from other students' unions.

So we look beyond, to leading charities, social enterprises and campaigning organisations around the world for our inspiration, and to create best practice for others to follow.

We aim to redefine what a modern student's union is for, and refocus our own energy on meeting the real needs of our members and our evolving community.

In ways only we can.



## ***Our Vision***

***To be recognised as a national leader in effective peer support and community development for students at small and specialist institutions.***

**Our Vision is a commitment to focusing and developing our expertise in the areas that matter to our members, and to create a drive for excellence.**

To achieve this Vision will require behavioural and cultural changes that will also have significant benefit for all our stakeholders:

- ▶ We will not only need to measure our impact, but to talk about, promote and share it.
- ▶ We will need to look within but also beyond the mainstream Student Union movement in the UK to find opportunities to learn and develop our expertise.
- ▶ We will need to increase our capacity for organisational memory in order to build our expertise year-on-year, even as our elected representatives change.
- ▶ We will need to ruthlessly re-focus all our activities around this Vision to ensure that our limited resources deliver maximum impact for our students, in ways that are distinctive and unique to us.





## ***Our Mission***

In addition to our Vision Statement which defines our direction as an organisation, we have also defined a Mission Statement which describes how we will focus our energy and resources every day to achieve this.

***We work to ensure that every student feels a valued part of our community, that their diverse needs are recognised and supported, that they have opportunities to explore their interests and passions, and that their academic experience is shaped by our powerful collective voice.***

# Our Values

Like the Royal Veterinary College itself, our Students' Union has a unique heritage and culture that set it apart from most students' unions.

To be successful in delivering for our students we must live and breathe values that re-enforce and amplify our unique strengths as a student body.

## Teamwork

We always seek to bring together talents, passions and perspectives from across our team in every endeavour – teamwork helps us learn faster, share knowledge and experience, look out for each other and deliver greater impact for our students.

## Trust

We actively look for opportunities to demonstrate our trust in each other and do what it takes to repay the trust placed in us. This helps us keep our organisation lean and efficient, helps build strong relationships and creates greater work satisfaction.

## Agility

Our ability to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of our students is one of our greatest advantages as a small organisation. Within the framework of our long-term strategic objectives, we actively encourage responsiveness and creativity in problem solving.

## Openness

We are not only committed to transparency in all we do, but actively seek and encourage engagement with colleagues, stakeholders, students and peer organisations to scrutinise our work, challenge us with new ideas and perspectives, and ultimately encourage us to be the best we can be.

## Sustainability

We recognise our responsibilities to the needs of future generations, as well as the needs of our members now. We commit to ensuring our actions, and those of the College, contribute to the United Nations Sustainability Goals, and we will support our students' own efforts to stop and reverse environmental damage.

# Strategic Pillars

Driving an organisation towards a new Vision requires priorities to be defined. This often means stopping, starting or changing the activity. In our case, the principal challenge is to refocus existing activity to drive more directly toward the Vision we have set out.

We identify three pillars which underpin our Vision. While we could have defined many others, we believe that a strong and co-ordinated focus on these three will deliver the best possible outcomes for our students, and that many other benefits will be achieved through this focus.

## ***Belonging***

Students will feel a strong sense of belonging – that they are each individually welcomed and valued as contributors to, and supporters of, the whole-college community that is explicitly identified and associated with the SU.

## ***Empowerment***

Students will feel a sense of empowerment and self-belief. They will have confidence in their individual and collective ability, through the SU, to make positive and lasting changes to all aspects of their own college experience.

## ***Wellbeing***

Students will feel supported and encouraged by the SU to achieve the sense of mental and physical wellbeing needed for their own effective learning. The SU and College will deliver a world-class level of accessibility to a full and rewarding experience.

Defining these pillars will create a clarity of purpose in target setting and the allocation of financial and human resources that will deliver significant benefits to students over the life of this plan.





# ***Priority Investments***

As well as re-focussing existing activity, there are a number of strategic investments that will be needed to underpin the plan, and to create the conditions for success.

## ***1. Communications***

Effective communications will be essential to success. More than ever before, the students' union requires a communications strategy and corresponding expertise to

- ▶ establish a more distinct and powerful brand proposition;
- ▶ overcome the inherent challenges of a multi-campus operation; and
- ▶ to compete for attention in an increasingly noisy communications environment.

The strategy must be a bi-directional one, not centralised but supporting a more organic distributed model that reflects the SUs culture and resources, and maximises the value of the officer team, volunteers, and particularly the course rep infrastructure.

## ***2. Course Rep Structure***

Our course reps are student champions, delivering excellent academic representation for their peers. However, there are some nuances to RVC course structures that are not fully catered for within the existing structures. We believe that, with some structural changes, course reps could be even more central to the SU's communications and community support objectives, as well as academic representation. The course experience is central to our members, and the course rep system should be central to the SU. We must review the existing structures, responsibilities and lines of reporting to identify ways in which our outstanding volunteers can have an even bigger impact on the lives of all students at RVC.

### **3. Information Architecture**

The SU must establish a set of mechanisms for maintaining, evolving and transferring knowledge and expertise across generations of elected representatives. These mechanisms must be resilient enough to survive a 'weak link' year. With very few permanent staff, this is currently a significant risk factor for the SU. Unless this issue is resolved it will be impossible to put the SU on a path of consistent improvement. The benefits of an investment in these systems and processes would be realised within a few short years and would continue to pay dividends long into the future.

### **4. Community Events**

There is a concern amongst some stakeholders that an inappropriate and inherited culture of drinking and lewd behaviour exists within student sub-communities at RVC, that this may leave some students feeling alienated, and that it may also carry some reputational risk for the SU and the College. To challenge and eliminate this culture without actively replacing it could, even if it were possible, actually negatively impact the sense of belonging and community cohesion felt by those for whom it is currently a part of their cultural identity.

If the undesirable behaviour is to be successfully reduced, it will need to be replaced, ideally with a stronger college-wide culture, set of activities and shared experiences. This will only be achieved with a significant investment in actively designing, implementing and culturally embedding new college-wide activities and events which meet the needs of students (and staff) to celebrate their shared identity.

### **5. Constitutional Review**

The existing constitution which underpins the SUs structures, oversight and accountability, no longer reflects either the existing reality, or our newly defined Vision. To ensure a firm foundation for our strategic plan, we must review and redefine a constitution fit for the next decade.

## **Recommended approach to these investments**

The funding and appointment of one additional permanent Students' Union staff member, specifically to be based at Camden, would support the need for a professionalisation of SU communications, increase the depth of knowledge-sharing within the SU (managing some key risks), and could be part of the solution to support a stronger Information Architecture.

The General Manager role should be explicitly linked to the establishment and maintenance of organisational memory through relevant systems, processes and staff resource.

The cultural challenges at RVC should be addressed within a whole-institution programme that includes key aspects of negative cultural norms that exist within the college and its staff, as well as within the student body. A joint College/SU working group should be established to

- ▶ formally identify and label the problematic aspects of culture that exist;
- ▶ define a desired positive cultural framework that is as powerful or more powerful than that which currently exists, and
- ▶ design interventions, activities and events to drive the desired cultural change over a minimum 5 year period