

Access and Participation Five Year Plan: 2020-21 onwards

Introduction

The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) is a specialist institution offering Veterinary Medicine, Biosciences and Veterinary Nursing degrees. It also provides postgraduate options in the fields of animal healthcare, education and research. The RVC is currently ranked the number one Vet School in the QS World University Rankings (Spring 2019) and holds a TEF Gold rating for its teaching excellence.

The RVC has a history of leading the way in terms of Widening Participation in the veterinary sector; we were the first veterinary school to offer a social mobility foundation year - the Gateway programme - which has been running successfully since 2005 and accounts for approximately 20% of the Veterinary Medicine intake at the RVC. Several other veterinary schools have emulated this type of initiative.

The size of the RVC has advantages; staff and students have a close working relationship and our Quality Assurance Team formally ensure that student feedback is an integral part of shaping our programmes.

Through analysing our performance using OfS and institutional data, we have identified areas on which to focus at the three stages of the student lifecycle; Access, Success (non-continuation and attainment), and Progression to careers and further study. This document describes the analysis of our data, which link gaps we have identified between groups within the RVC as well as between the RVC and the national HE population, to measures we will take over the next five years and beyond to address the areas of highest priority. Based on guidance from the OfS, we have initiated a Theory of Change process, which has allowed us to reflect on our approach, and identify targets and actions towards RVC's goal of equality of experience for students from all backgrounds.

1 Assessment of Performance

The tables below show analysis by the Widening Participation Team using published data from the OfS data dashboard, augmented with institutional data where possible. This analysis has identified many areas which are data protected owing to the small number of students within each category. Our newly formed Data Working Group will be identifying measures within existing registry and exams data, which can routinely be assessed, to ensure that we are fully aware of trends when monitoring our targets.

All tables below use the following key:

- **positive gap greater than 5 percentage points (pp): a large gap exists between RVC and the national HE population; a priority to address.**
- **positive or negative percentage gap between 5 and -5pp: the gap between RVC and the population is smaller and consequently is less of a priority to address.**
- **negative gap of more than -5pp: RVC's student population exceeds the national HE population.**
- **DP means Data Protected.**

It is important to note that the majority of RVC's undergraduate population does not count in OfS published statistics. This is because attainment is defined as the percentage of students achieving a 2.1 or 1st class degree and our Foundation Veterinary Nursing and Veterinary Medicine courses are not classified in this way. Therefore, only **21%** of our students are represented in OfS published data on attainment. Additionally,

our Veterinary Nursing students are not counted in progression data. The OfS uses Standard Occupational Classification (SOC2010) to determine whether a profession is regarded as highly skilled; veterinary nursing is not in this category. Cohorts included in the different measures are indicated in Table 1.

	Access	Attainment	Progression
Included in OfS data	Veterinary Medicine (BVetMed) BSc Biological and Bioveterinary Science Foundation and BSc Veterinary Nursing	BSc Biological and Bioveterinary Science BSc Veterinary Nursing (21% of student population)	Veterinary Medicine (BVetMed) BSc Biological and Bioveterinary Science (88% of student population)
Excluded from OfS data	None	Veterinary Medicine (BVetMed) Foundation Veterinary Nursing) (79% of student population)	Foundation and BSc Veterinary Nursing (12% of student population)

TABLE 1: Overall summary of representation of RVC students in the subsequent analysis.

1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socio-economic status

The overall summary of comparison with the HE population at all three stages of the student lifecycle is shown in Table 2.

	Access	Success		Progression to employment or further study
		Non- continuation	Attainment	
IMD 1	15 (18yo), 12.82 (all)	DP	DP	DP
IMD 2	6.8 (18yo), 5.96 (all)	DP	DP	-3.9
IMD 1&2	NA	-4.55	DP	-2.24
Polar 4 Q1	10.6 (18yo), 4.04 (all)	DP	DP	DP
Polar 4 Q1234	NA	-4.74	8.56	-2.04
Polar 4 Q1235	NA	-4.16	9.66	-4.96
Polar 4 Q1245	NA	-4.42	9.88	-3.12
Polar 4 Q1345	NA	-3.88	10.06	-3.76
Polar 4 Q2345	NA	-4.16	8.84	-3.9
Polar4 Q2	3.44 18yo, 0.46(all)	DP	DP	-1.3
Polar 4 Q1&2	NA	-2.55	DP	-2.24

TABLE 2: Higher education participation, household income, and socioeconomic status analysis: Percentage point difference between the RVC student population and the national HE population using 5 year averages. DP- Data protected as numbers are too small for analysis. NA – Not analysed in the OfS data set.

With regard to socioeconomic status, we will focus on increasing Access for Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Q1 students and Polar4 Q1 students at the RVC (Tables 2 and 3). Using OfS data, we have identified gaps in attainment between RVC students and the national HE population (Table 2 and 5), However, these data exclude 79% of our students owing to the BVetMed and Fdn Vet Nursing degree award classification system (Table 1). We present additional institutional data to indicate attainment is not an immediate target (Tables 6 and 7). Non-continuation and progression rates are similar to the national HE population (Table 2) for combined groups; data are protected for many individual groups. However, our own analysis has identified a gap in non-continuation for IMD and Polar4 Q1 students (Table 4) and a gap in progression for IMDQ1 and Polar4 Q1&2 students (Table 8) upon which we will focus.

Access

Our priorities for Access are to increase the proportions of IMD Q1 and Polar4 Q1 students at the RVC. Whilst gaps between Q1 and Q5 have begun to reduce over the past five years (Table 3), particularly for IMD, they are still very large and there is a need for further focus to make better progress on closing the gaps and thus these will be specific targets.

Measure	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
IMD Q1 v Q5	30.3	22.9	24.2	25.5	17.4
Polar4 Q1 v Q5	32	34	28.1	25.3	26.4

TABLE3: Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Polar 4 data showing the percentage point gap (pp) in Access between groups at the RVC. Priority target area

Success

Non-continuation

Data on non-continuation for individual groups are protected due to small numbers. However, analysis of the gaps between IMD Q1 and Q5 and Polar 4 Q1 and Q5 at the RVC show a large material gap opening up for both groups in 2016/17 (Table 4); the gaps for previous years were much smaller in comparison. These increasing gaps may be, in part, related to improvements in Access for Q1 students (Table 3). We interpret this data with some caution as the small numbers of students in both Q1 groups means that a change in non-continuation of 2-3 students can lead to relatively large changes in the percentage point gap. However, these gaps are of concern and we will make a commitment to improve non-continuation rates for IMD and Polar 4 Q1 students. Our Data Working Group will closely monitor these gaps and if this trend appears to be establishing over the first two years of the plan, we will amend our plan to make this a specific target.

Measure	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
IMD Q1 v Q5	3.1	4.9	3	1.4	7.1
Polar4 Q1 v Q5	2.1	ND	-0.5	0.8	6.5

TABLE4: Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Polar 4 data showing the percentage point gap (pp) in Non-continuation between groups at the RVC. ND = no data. Priority target area; similarity between populations.

Attainment

As previously indicated, only 21% of RVC undergraduate students are represented in the OfS attainment dataset. Our Data Working Group is now aware of these issues and will be monitoring differences between groups on these programmes going forward and undertaking work to align our results to the national picture.

In terms of the BSc Biological sciences and BSc Vet Nursing, aggregated data are available for IMD and Polar4 quintiles (individual group data are protected owing to small numbers) that shows there are no internal gaps between groups. While attainment improved between 2013/14 and 2016/17, there was a reduced level of attainment in 2017/18 across all groups (Table 5).

RVC Attainment rate	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
POLAR4Q1245	65	71	75	77	54
POLAR4Q1235	65	77	71	72	57
POLAR4Q1234	65	70	74	75	53
POLAR4Q2345	69	74	71	76	59
POLAR4Q1345	70	73	69	77	53

TABLE 5: Attainment rate of students from Polar4 quintiles at the RVC: Aggregated data from polar quintiles has been used, as single quintiles are data protected. This demonstrates the consistent pattern across all quintiles.

Many students graduating in 2017/18 entered via clearing with lower grades; in contrast, none of the 2017 cohort did so. Therefore grades from 2017/18 were further analysed by entry qualification, to determine whether students entering from vocational routes had reduced attainment. In this instance, we are confident that attainment was not determined by entry route. Our Data Working Group will undertake further analysis to identify causal factors for the overall reduced attainment in 2017-18.

Social mobility and attainment - Foundation Veterinary Nursing Course

Foundation Veterinary Nursing degrees are classified as Distinction (70% and above), Merit (65-69%) and Pass (50-64%). These grade boundaries differ to the traditional degree classification, thus do not easily align to the national dataset. Analysis of our data indicates that the performance of students from Polar4 Q1&2 socio-economic groups was higher than those from Polar4 Q3,4&5 in three out of the previous five years (Table 6). While attainment is not an immediate priority, we will work with these data to align to the national dataset to determine if there are gaps that are currently not apparent.

Polar4 Q1&2				Polar4 Q3,4&5			
Year	RVC Award Distinction	RVC Award Merit	RVC Award Pass	Year	RVC Award Distinction	RVC Award Merit	RVC Award Pass
2017/8	38.5%	23%	38.5%	2017/8	22%	25%	53%
2016/7	10%	20%	70%	2016/7	11%	14%	75%
2015/6	17%	0%	83%	2015/6	19%	23%	58%
2014/5	0%	33%	67%	2014/5	11%	33%	56%
2013/4	8%	50%	42%	2013/4	0%	39%	61%

TABLE 6: Attainment rate of students from Polar4 Q1&2 compared to Q3,4&5 in the Foundation Veterinary Nursing course. Percentage of students are shown, as numbers in some groups are low.

Social mobility and attainment - Veterinary Medicine Course

Veterinary Medicine degrees are classified as Pass with Honours or Pass. The category is determined by accumulation of honour points throughout the course and thus does not follow the traditional degree classification boundaries, making it difficult to compare to the national data. Analysis of our data indicates that the performance of students from Polar4 Q1&2 is variable. In three out of the previous five years, the percentage of students passing with honours was within 1-2% of the Polar4 Q3,4 &5 cohorts; in 2 of the years it was 10 to 13% lower (Table 7). It should be noted that with small data sets, movement of 1-2 students per category can result in large changes in the percentages. While attainment is not a current priority, our Data Working Group will monitor it closely to ensure that gaps do not appear in the future.

Polar4 Q1&2			Polar4 Q3,4&5		
Year	RVC Award Pass with Honours	RVC Award Pass	Year	RVC Award Pass with Honours	RVC Award Pass
2017/8	3%	97%	2017/8	5%	95%
2016/7	18%	82%	2016/7	28%	72%
2015/6	11%	89%	2015/6	12%	88%
2014/5	22%	78%	2014/5	20%	80%
2013/4	24%	76%	2013/4	37%	63%

TABLE 7: Attainment rate of students from Polar4 Q1&2 compared to Q3,4&5 in the Veterinary Medicine course. Percentage of students are shown, as numbers in some groups are low.

Progression to employment or further study

Progression to employment or further study rates are limited in the data set and individual groups are largely data protected. Our own analysis indicates that, while the data are incomplete, there are significant gaps in progression between IMD Q1 and Q5, between Polar 4 Q1 and Q5 and between Polar4 Q2 and Q5. However, the gap between IMD Q2 and Q5 has closed in the past 3 years (Table 8). Thus there will be a focus on progression for IMD Q1 and Polar 4 Q1&2 students in order to replicate this success. Similar to non-continuation, the small numbers of students in both Q1 groups can result in large variations in the percentage point gaps, meaning it is currently not prudent to make specific Progression targets. However, these gaps are of concern and may be widening as we improve access for Q1 and Q2 students, thus we will make a commitment to improve progression rates for IMD Q1 and Polar 4 Q1&2 students. Our Data Working Group will closely monitor these gaps and if trends appear to be establishing over the first two years of the plan, we will apply to amend our plan to make them specific targets.

Measure	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
IMD Q1 v Q5	ND	11.8	ND	ND	22.4
IMD Q2 v Q5	13.3	14.6	-1.1	2	-4.8
Polar4 Q1 v Q5	ND	1.0	21.9	10.7	ND
IMD Q2 v Q5	8.8	1.2	1.7	5.8	16.1

TABLE 8: Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Polar 4 data showing the percentage point gap (pp) in progression between groups at the RVC. ND = no data. **Priority target area; similarity between populations.**

1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

The overview summary of the gaps between RVC's population and the national HE population are shown in Table 9.

	Access	Success		Progression
		Non-continuation	Attainment	
Asian	3.4	DP	DP	DP
Black	1	DP	DP	DP
Mixed	-0.8	DP	DP	DP
Other	-1	DP	DP	DP
ABMO		-6.5	DP	DP
ABMW		-7.8	7.78	-5.1
AMOW		-5.28	8.84	-4.78
BMOW		-6.04	8.46	-4.88
ABOW		-5.9	8.9	-5.46

TABLE 9: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student access (18 year old), success and progression analysis. Percentage point difference between the RVC student population and the national HE population using 5 year averages. Aggregate data groups - A: Asian, B: Black, M: Mixed, O: Other, W; White. **Priority area, similar to population, exceeds population. DP- Data protected as numbers are too small for analysis.**

Access

Analysis indicates the gap in Access between White and BAME students at the RVC has reduced slightly over the past 5 years, from 77.4 to 74.5 percentage points. Equal representation in the RVC population between White and BAME students is not a realistic goal, given the national HE population is 84% White and 16% BAME. The gap between the RVC BAME and national BAME pp gaps for the previous five years were 4.6, 7.3, 3.4, 2.7, 3.2, and thus the gap has narrowed over this time. Whilst this not a large gap, we are committed to and welcome increasing diversity in the RVC student population and therefore commit to a target for BAME student Access in order to significantly narrow this gap with the national population.

Success

Non-continuation

Aggregated data across all groups show that our non-continuation rate is lower than the national HE population (Table 9). However, data are not available for the majority of the single categories, thus we cannot analyse non-continuation rates between Black, Mixed or Other Students compared to White students at the RVC. Data are available for Asian Students who have a similar non-continuation rate to White Students (-0.7 pp gap; 5 year average). Our Data Working Group will make gathering data from the other groups a priority in the first year of the plan in order to determine if there are gaps to address.

Attainment

Aggregated average data from the previous 5 years indicates that attainment is lower than the national HE population across all ethnic groups (Table 9), however, this is skewed by the results in 2017-18 (see also Table 5). Aggregate data shows the attainment gap, compared to the national HE population, narrowed considerably across all groups in the previous four years (Table 10).

	Measure	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Gap between RVC and the national HE population	ABMW	7.3%	3.6%	4.4%	0.8%
	AMOW	8.6%	3.1%	3.9%	4.3%
	BMOW	9.3%	5.5%	1.3%	0.6%
	ABOW	7.3%	3.6%	4.4%	0.8%

TABLE 10: The percentage gap in attainment between ethnic groups at RVC and the national HE population 2013-2016. Data are aggregated in different combinations. A: Asian, B: Black, M: Mixed, O: Other, W: White. Note the aggregate data category ABMO (without white students) is suppressed and cannot be used in this analysis.

Disaggregation of attainment has been challenging; the number of students in each group except White is low, as only a maximum of 21% of our total student cohort is included as indicated previously (Table 1).

Comparing groups within the RVC, preliminary analysis of five year averages, using internally sourced data, indicates a significant gap in attainment between Black and White students of 31% (individual data not shown due to very low numbers). This figure should be interpreted with much caution as, given the very low numbers of Black students, a change in attainment by 1 or 2 students can result in a large change in the percentage gap. Attainment of Asian and Mixed students in this preliminary analysis was similar to or exceeded that of White students, suggesting our focus should lie in improving Black Student attainment. Our Data Working Group will disaggregate data from our whole student population in future, to create an in-depth analysis of the attainment gaps for specific ethnic groups across all programmes, which will, in turn, inform specific actions to address them.

Progression to employment or further study

Aggregated data across all groups show that our Progression rate is better than the national HE population (Table 9); however, there are no data in the data set for single categories other than White students, preventing any further analysis at this time. Our Data Working Group will be gathering additional data about Progression in future to investigate if there are any unexplained areas to address.

1.3 Mature students

An overview summary of the gaps between our population and the national HE population is shown in Table 11.

	Access	Non-continuation	Attainment	Progression
Mature students	9.44	-10.7	DP	-14.16

TABLE 11: Mature student access, success and progression analysis: Percentage point difference between the RVC student population and the national HE population using 5 year averages. High priority, similar to population, exceeds population. DP – data protected as numbers are too small for analysis.

Access

The Access gap between Young and Mature students at the RVC decreased over the past five years (Table 12). Whilst we will work to continue this improvement and further narrow this gap by increasing the numbers of mature students, this is currently not our highest priority area and thus will not be a target in this plan.

Measure	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Young v Mature Students at the RVC	76.6	69.6	61.5	60.4	63.8

TABLE 12: Mature Students Access. Percentage gap between groups at the RVC.

Success

Non-continuation

Non-continuation rates for Mature Students are lower than the national HE population (Table 11), and slightly lower than those of young students at the RVC (-0.3 pp gap; 5 year average), thus it is not a target.

Attainment

As explained above, Attainment data are only available for a subset of the total student cohort and within this, the number of Mature Students are small, thus the data are suppressed and meaningful comparisons with Young students at the RVC cannot be made. This metric has been highlighted as an area for the Data Working Group to investigate further.

Progression to employment or further study

RVC's Progression rate for Mature Students exceeds the national HE population (Table 11), and was higher than that of young students at the RVC every year for the previous 5 years (-15.58pp gap; 5 year average), therefore this is not a target.

1.4 Disabled students

Analysis of the gaps between the RVC and the national HE population for Disabled Students indicates our performance is similar to, or exceeds, the national HE population, in those areas for which we currently have data (Table 13). However, common to many HEIs, there may be issues of non-disclosure on grounds of disability as, mistakenly, some students and potential applicants may think their circumstances might not be considered sympathetically. This would certainly not be the case and the RVC makes every reasonable effort to support disabled students. The data protected areas will be further researched by our Data Working Group.

Measure	Access	Non-continuation	Attainment	Progression
Cognitive and learning difficulty	-3.74	1.4	NA	-6.52
Mental Health condition	0.625	DP	DP	DP
Other or multiple impairments	0.52	DP	DP	DP
Sensory, medical/physical impairment	0.06	DP	DP	DP
Social or communication impairment	DP	DP	DP	DP
All disabled students	-2.74	-5.45	5.9	-9.4

TABLE 13: Disabled student access, success and progression analysis Percentage point difference between the RVC student population and the national HE population using 5 year averages. High priority, similar to population, exceeds population. DP- Data protected as numbers are too small for analysis.

Access

The gap in Access between Students with a disability and without has increased slightly over the past 5 years from 68.3 to 70.3 percentage points. However, as we have similar percentages of students with different disabilities at RVC to the national HE population (Table 13) this is not a priority area to address. However, we will monitor this data closely to ensure that the gaps do not increase.

Success

Non-continuation

Non-continuation rates between Disabled and Non-Disabled students at the RVC are very similar (1.12pp gap; 5 year average), therefore, this is not a priority area. The Data Working Group will be investigating areas where data is protected.

Attainment

The Attainment rate of Disabled Students is lower than the national HE population (Table 13), however, this is influenced by the lower overall attainment of students in all categories (see also Table 5). In fact, in 2017-18, when the overall Attainment rate dipped, the Disabled Student Attainment rate was 70%, compared to non-disabled student attainment rate of 51%. Therefore, this area is not currently a target, but the gathering of better data to allow for disaggregated analysis will be a priority.

Progression to employment or further study

Progression rates for Disabled Students are slightly better compared to Non-Disabled students at the RVC (-3.38pp gap; 5 year average) therefore, this is not a priority to address. The Data Working Group will be investigating areas where data are protected.

1.5 Care leavers

Access

Analysis of our own data indicates the number of care leavers in the undergraduate student population is small (Table 14) and may be skewed by students not declaring their care leaver status. The national dataset does not contain information on care leavers against which to benchmark.

Measure	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Care Leavers	0.43%	0.33%	0.39%	0.19%

TABLE 14: Percentage of care leavers in the RVC undergraduate student population.

Success

The very small numbers of care leavers in the RVC population means that we cannot analyse data and draw meaningful conclusions about Attainment and Non-continuation. Our Data Working Group will, however, monitor this group further to determine if there are any gaps with the RVC student population.

Progression to employment or further study

Similar to measures of Success, we will monitor this group's progression as we currently have limited data.

1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

Analysis of intersections of disadvantage identify gender and socio-economic disadvantage for Access and Progression (Table 15). Ethnicity and low participation areas, and ethnicity and deprivation are both identified as areas to focus on in the Access stage of the student lifecycle (Table 15). However, we are not

adding ethnicity and deprivation as a separate intersectional target, because earlier analysis already identified Polar4 Q1, IMD Q1&2, and BAME students as focus areas for Access. Therefore, we feel these intersectional targets will be addressed through identifying individual characteristics on which to focus.

	Access	Success		Progression
		Non-continuation	Attainment	
Polar4 Q1&2 and all ethnicities except white	4.56	DP	DP	DP
Polar4 Q1&2 and white	0.2	-2.95	DP	-5.12
Polar4 Q3,4&5 and all ethnicities except white	11.74	DP	DP	DP
IMD Q1&2 and all ethnicities except white	14.02	DP	DP	DP
IMD Q1&2 and white	4.44	-1.5	DP	-2.54
IMD Q3,4&5 and all ethnicities except white	3.44	DP	DP	DP
Polar4 Q1&2 and male	7.44	DP	DP	DP
Polar4 Q1&2 and female	-3.58	1.5	DP	-2.4
Polar4 Q3,4&5 and male	18.2	DP	DP	-9.99
IMD Q1&2 and male	13.48	DP	DP	DP
IMD Q3,4&5 and male	8.18	DP	DP	-9.56
IMD Q1&2 and female	5.12	-0.55	DP	-1.26

TABLE 15: Intersectional analysis of student access, success and progression analysis - Percentage point difference between the RVC student population and the national HE population using 5 year averages. High priority, similar to population, exceeds population. DP- Data protected as numbers are too small for analysis.

However, gender and low participation areas are not addressed through any other targets. Males are under-represented at RVC, including in Polar4 Q1&2 (Table 16). Therefore this will be an area of focus.

Measure	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Polar4 Q1&2 and female	-1.1	-1.7	-4.5	-4.3	-6.3
Polar4 Q1&2 and male	8.7	5.9	6.8	7.8	8

TABLE 15: Gender and Low Participation area Percentage point difference between the RVC student population and the national HE population High priority, similar to population, exceeds population

1.7 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

Similar to other small selective institutions, we have not had the capacity to collect formal data about children of military families. However, we are now working with the Service Children’s Progression Alliance (SCiP) to offer programmes that highlight opportunities for children from military backgrounds, such as our Junior and Teen Vet Club. This objective has been highlighted strategically and the Data Working Group will be devising methods to collect the data required to establish whether our programmes are effective using our Theory of Change, which is described in Section 3. Supporting children from Military families is important to the RVC. We are in the process of interviewing current students with a military background to find out more about their experiences and the barriers they have encountered.

2 Strategic aims and objectives

The strategic aims and objectives of the RVC's Access and Participation Plan (APP) are aligned with the College's current and extended Strategic Plan 2014-2021. Using the OfS datasets and institutional data available so far, we have identified that the priority groups on which we need to focus are the same as those prioritised nationally by OfS, with a specific focus on the Access phase of the lifecycle.

Enhancing and co-ordinating our work and priorities across the student lifecycle will result in significant changes and developments in the College's recruitment, teaching and support processes. It will entail strategic developments beyond the initial five-year cycle of the Access Plan if the College's ambitions are to bear fruit. We shall, however, seek to achieve ambitious targets within the allotted time frame though much of the 2020 – 2024 cycle may be a period of gestation; the changes will take longer to effect than in institutions which offer primarily 3 year courses.

The RVC's current Strategic Plan seeks, among other aims:

- to achieve target numbers of high-quality students;
- to review and refresh undergraduate and postgraduate student provision in the light of changing needs of society and the veterinary profession;
- to provide a suite of high quality programmes which result in the increasing employability of RVC graduates;
- to achieve acceptance-to-offer and acceptance of places ratios that are amongst the best in comparable institutions;
- to develop robust measures that will provide data to justify our claims of innovation, relevance and effectiveness in all our educational programmes and student support services;
- to formulate policies related to content, delivery and assessment and their implementation in existing and new programmes.

Furthermore, and in partnership with the RVC Students' Union, the College will:

- continue to build a diverse culture and environment where our students' experience is paramount in terms of recruitment, educational activities and support services.

<https://www.rvc.ac.uk/Media/Default/publications/rvc-strategic-plan-2014-2019.pdf>

The Access and Participation Plan is parallel to the Institutional Strategy and has the following high-level strategic aims:

- To significantly increase numbers of high-quality students from the Access and Participation Priority Groups identified as lacking in the current student cohort.
- To particularly focus on achieving a significant increase in the number of high quality students from LPN, IMD and BAME environments.
- To ensure that students from Participation Priority Groups entering the RVC achieve levels of success equal to those of other student groups
- To ensure that students from Participation Priority Groups entering the RVC proceed to employability or continued study on a par with other student groups.

In order to meet these APP aims, which will extend beyond the timescale of the 2020-2024 Plan, the RVC has particular objectives which will build on each other over time. These are listed below and are also fully described in section 2.2. They very much form Stage 1 of our overall strategic Access Ambitions which, as stated, extend over many years. Further objectives relating to Access and also Success and Progression will

be central to future Access and Participation Plans 2024-2028 and subsequently. The Data Working Group will be setting timescales and deciding future targets within the lifecycle structure.

We have used OfS priority groups across the lifecycle to analyse our performance and have established institutional priorities based on our interpretation in Section 1. These priorities have been used to construct a new Theory of Change (described in section 3 of this plan), to reflect critically on our existing practice and to set a new system of on-going monitoring by our Data Working Group, which will ensure that our goals continue to be informed by evidence across the five-year plan.

It should be noted that the number of students in most priority groups is low, thus much of our data are protected. We hope that, as a result of the APP work, our analysis and focus will be enhanced as our minority cohorts grow in number. Although targeted numbers may be small, this will not hinder us from moving towards ambitious change in the institution that will ultimately benefit the entire student body and the staff. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 outline how we will continue and extend our work with cohorts from the priority groups and use the information and evaluation from our actions and activities to enrich and improve sustained targeted work.

As demonstrated in section 1, the main stage of the student lifecycle we need to focus on is Access, where we see large gaps between IMD and Polar 4 Q1 and Q5 students at the RVC. In our initial assessment we had thought that the need to prioritise Success and Progression for IMD and Polar 4 Q1 students was relatively low. Having further interrogated our internal data we have concluded that there is a gap to be addressed and while currently we feel that more data are required to determine if these become specific targets, we make a firm commitment to monitor closely and to undertake activities to reduce this gap during the lifecycle of this plan.

2.1 Target groups

The RVC is an institution with a mission to foreground Veterinary Medicine and build on its strength in Science. It is both specialist and diverse in its professional and academic expertise.

Our international reputation is evidenced by our position as the pre-eminent Veterinary School in the world. Thus applicants realise the education and skills training they will receive will provide them with qualifications that not only act as a gateway to a particular profession, but also equip them for high calibre employment at international level in scientific and non-scientific spheres. This places an even greater onus on us to ensure that young and mature students from diverse backgrounds apply to and are accepted by our institution. To achieve this ambition we shall continue to formulate and develop policies relating to admissions, course content, delivery, implementation and assessment in existing and future learning programmes.

Our target groups are students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods, students from areas of social deprivation and BAME students.

Students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods and areas of Deprivation

When examining both Polar4 Q1 and IMD Q1 Access data, we have identified large material gaps in Access compared to Q5 students in each group (Table 3). Whilst we have made some progress in closing the gaps over the previous 5 years, increases in Polar 4 Q1 student numbers have been slow. Using our Theory of Change, we have reflected on successful aspects of previous widening participation programmes and identified areas for increased targeting, which will be outlined below. We will be working collaboratively with

links made via the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) programme to reach students from IMD and Polar4 Q1.

Veterinary Medicine is the largest of our courses, but there are a number of factors that act as potential barriers to its' study by young people and mature adults, particularly those from deprived areas and low quintile areas. For example, successful applicants to veterinary degrees generally cite early years pet ownership as a factor in their interest in veterinary medicine. Children from IMD Q1 and Polar 4 Q1 are less likely to own pets or have regular contact with other animals. This is particularly the case with school students from urban or metropolitan areas and are consequently less likely to pursue careers with animals. In turn they find it difficult to obtain the relevant work experience which all vet schools and medical schools insist upon and which most applicants from higher quintiles are able to undertake possibly due to their higher level of social capital. Some young people who come from differing religious backgrounds may have issues with working with certain species and are, therefore, unable to comply with standards laid down by the veterinary profession's overseeing body. In some communities or families, veterinary work is seen as mainly agricultural and not as the high level medical and scientific subject that it actually is. To remedy this situation the College will seek to work closely with the Professional Body, the RCVS to raise and improve the profile of veterinary medicine and the value of veterinary study. An additional barrier for IMD and Polar4 Q1 students is that the Veterinary Medicine course is financially challenging owing to it being five years minimum, requiring specialist equipment, and compulsory rural placements, which involve extensive travel and accommodation costs and thus limited time to undertake paid work to in order for students to support themselves financially. We have developed a new scholarship and bursaries strategy in order to make extra financial support available for these purposes. In addition to the effect of socioeconomic factors listed above, RVC has more Polar4 Q5 students owing to Veterinary Medicine being a competitive course, and students from areas with an established culture of attending university are less likely to be put off by the perceived high entry requirement barrier. To specifically address this, from 2019-20 RVC will be offering contextual admissions for the BVetMed and Biological sciences courses, which allows students who meet specific widening participation criteria (WP criteria) to have reduced grade offers. We have also been working with our partners in NCOPs in London and Hertfordshire to further reduce perceived barriers by introducing them to the scientific and medical nature of our degree programmes and encouraging them to realise their abilities. As the multicultural and socio-economic structure of the UK inevitably changes in future years, so we shall be looking to diversity our student profile and the personnel in our profession. The RVC's Theory of Chang will be driving this.

The national picture for social mobility and the Veterinary Profession was gathered in the [RCVS survey of the Veterinary Profession, 2014](#), which examined the demographics of qualified vets. Over half of respondents stated that their parents/guardians had been degree-educated. Only 26% of respondents attended a non-selective state school whilst 24% were educated at an independent school. Very small numbers had grown up in households in receipt of income support and/or had received free school meals (7.8% and 9.6% respectively). Therefore, the national picture reflects the considerable challenges we face in attracting students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to Veterinary Medicine. For RVC, these are compounded by the increased costs of living and commuting in London.

Black students and Asian students

We have chosen to target to increase Access for BAME students at RVC. We are fully committed to increasing diversity at the RVC and we welcome this both in terms of our own community and that of the profession in years to come. Whilst our gaps in Access for BAME students compared to the national population are not high, we have committed to reducing this gap significantly over the lifecycle of this plan. The issue of a lack of diversity in veterinary education is well documented. In the Survey of the Veterinary

Profession cited above, the representation of ethnic minorities among respondents increased marginally; from 2% to 3% between 2006 and 2010. Asian/Asian British ethnicities make up 1% of this cohort, as do those of mixed ethnicity. Chinese ethnicities constituted 0.5% and Black/Black British 0.3%, with other ethnicities 0.3%. Lack of diversity is not just an issue in the UK; it is worldwide - see for example Greenhill et al, (2013) 'Navigating Diversity and Inclusion in Veterinary Medicine'. The cultural status of working with animals and the issue of working with sacred animals are barriers that prevent students from some religions applying to Veterinary Medicine and allied degrees. This view is informed by our own research from student focus groups undertaken during the Access HE diversity initiative 'Prepare to Succeed' (2015). This is not to say that RVC lacks diversity. We have, for our size, a large and diverse international student population and within the Students' Union there are a range of societies catering for the various and diverse cohorts. A new student-led initiative, *Animal Aspirations*, is specifically targeted at BAME youth and is run by RVC BAME students who present themselves as role models.

Mature students

There is a gap of 9.44pp in RVC's mature student population compared to the national HE population although we have narrowed the gap between Young and Mature students at the RVC over the previous 5 years. There are no part time options for Veterinary Medicine (due to legislative restrictions), Biosciences or Veterinary Nursing, which reduces opportunity for mature students who may require more flexibility due to other responsibilities and commitments coupled with the financial aspects listed above which are also a barrier. Sprayson (2005) discusses the issues in '[Journey to MRCVS – the mature student's view](#)'. We will strive to overcome barriers for mature students, which will include research with our Mature Student society.

Care Leavers

The RVC demonstrated its commitment to supporting Care Leavers by obtaining the Buttle Trust Mark for its provision some years ago. Although the Trust has demised, we continue to honour our original commitments regarding bursaries and accommodation support (365 days guaranteed) for this cohort. We engage with care leavers collaboratively through work with London region virtual schools and AimHigher London South, and every year we have 2-4% care leavers on our Sutton Trust summer school (all care leavers who apply to the summer school are accepted). However, as the number of actual enrolled students from this group are small, this means data are protected, making it difficult to track attainment and progression. Being a care leaver is one criterion towards students receiving reduced contextual grade offers. Likewise, being a care leaver is a [criterion for application](#) to the Gateway foundation course. We ensure that the learning support systems and processes we have in place for other priority groups are available to Care Leavers at all times in the lifecycle.

Students with disabilities

Our data on students with disabilities shows gaps are not as large as in other areas on which we will focus, and while we seek improvement, we do not see this as a priority in immediate terms.

We have been able to adjust for students with profound hearing loss, and we have relatively high numbers of students who have learning issues, some of which are related to non-physical impairment, and our progression rates are higher than the national picture for this latter group.

However, the nature of the BVetMed degree requires some physical robustness and there are limitations on allowable adjustments imposed upon us by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) via the [Fitness to Practice guidance](#), and the fact that all students have a requirement to work with large animals if

they are to qualify. Until such time as the veterinary professional body addresses these issues, RVC must abide by current professional regulations and course accreditation requirements.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

LPN / Socio-Economic Groups

Similar to many London HEIs, students from IMD and Polar4 Q1 are in the minority across all degree courses. We are encouraged that, in relation to females in Polar4 Q1&2, we have successfully increased numbers (see Table 15).

The RVC Gateway Programme was established 14 years ago to specifically target young people from lower socio-economic groups and continues to recruit 18-20% of our initial BVetMed year intake. Not all this cohort are, however, from IMD and Polar4 Q1, thus we intend to focus more specifically on recruiting students from these groups. The challenges here include increasing aspirations at a much younger age and so may involve a reallocation of some resource to further develop work with primary age school students. The development of an all-encompassing recruitment strategy will assist and strengthen more targeted work with eligible Gateway applicants.

We will be working collaboratively to achieve these goals with links forged through the London and Hertfordshire NCOP programmes in which we work with schools and wards across the region. In order to increase the opportunities for students from IMD and Polar4 Q1, we have introduced contextual admissions for the 2019-20 application cycle. RVC has a list of [contextual schools](#) which is informed by social mobility factors and we use this document to develop and refine our targeting of schools and geographical areas

Significant teaching and pastoral resource is being put towards ensuring that students from contextual admissions routes succeed. Academic progress is monitored and modifications to assessment regulations have been made, without diluting standards, to provide support and achieve comparable progression into the veterinary profession and related scientific and bio-medical areas of employment. Here we are looking to enhancing collaborative work with our Career Service colleagues and with our Alumni, particularly those who as undergraduates worked as student ambassadors so that we can develop an Ambassador to Alumnus/a programme.

Targets

The Access gap for IMD Q1 vs Q5 students at the RVC is 17.1 percentage points. We will reduce this gap by 10 percentage points over the 5 year period of the plan with smaller reductions in the first two years followed by larger reductions in the final three years as our strategies and activities begin to have greater impact.

This is an ambitious target for the RVC for the socio-economic reasons described in p.12 and because the undergraduate market for Veterinary Medicine in particular is niche. While we have some flexibility to develop new medical/scientific/professional programmes which may attract other relevant cohorts, our resource base is lower than larger institutions with veterinary faculties. It is the status of our major degree and our position (in 2019) as the leading veterinary school in the world that attracts students to us, but not every young person wants to be a vet.

The Access gap for Polar4 Q1 vs Q5 students at the RVC is 26.4 percentage points. We will reduce this gap by 10 percentage points over the 5 year period of the plan with smaller reductions in the first two years and larger reductions in the final three years as our strategies and activities begin to have greater impact.

This is a highly ambitious target – in the previous 5 years, we made a 5.6pp reduction in this gap and therefore we aim to almost double that previous achievement. For reasons already recited above (pp.12-14) we shall be looking to reverse negative attitudes, lack of career and parental guidance and low opportunity for success. We see this as challenging but we would not have developed and adopted our Theory of Change if we were not committed to achieving the target. We see it as important to move as far forward as is possible in the first period (2020-2024) as this is clearly the period of immediate importance. But we also believe that the impetus provided by the APP and the ToC will drive RVC to the success it always seeks. However, the imponderables of financial uncertainty, socio-economic conditions and a fragile labour market remain valid.

Given the size of our Access gaps between IMD and Polar 4 Q1 and Q5 (Table 3) and the variety of perceived barriers for our target groups (highlighted on pg 12), which are often stronger than reality, we anticipate that it will take the 20 year lifecycle of the OfS's strategy to fully close these gaps. We aim to close the IMD Q1 vs Q5 gap within 15 years (before the end of APP 2030-2034) and we anticipate the more challenging goal of fully closing the Polar 4 Q1 vs Q5 gap will take up to 20 years (APP 2035-2039).

Measures of Success

- To increase in the number of students applying to, and being accepted at RVC from IMD and Polar 4 Q1
- To increase the number of IMD and Polar 4 Q1 students attending longitudinal clubs, summer and easter schools and other outreach activities
- To monitor our own and NCOP evaluations of these groups attending RVC WP Access activities

Ethnicity- BAME Students

Over the five-year lifecycle we aim to ensure that the high quality of our degree programmes is known, understood and sought after by the particular cohorts we are prioritising. We will ensure that the RVC is nationally and internationally regarded as an institution that places equality at the forefront of all its procedures, particularly those relating to Admissions. We will disseminate such policies and practices to all individual applicants, feeder schools, colleges and community groups so that applicants can feel assured and confident that the learning experience and teaching they receive is supportive of their specific needs both individually and collectively.

Our students have independently carried on the work during our 'Prepare to Succeed' project, and have now devised a new workshop 'Animal Aspirations' which involves diverse role models presenting career inspiration and guidance to school pupils whilst they are on outreach visits. We will work to facilitate these students' motivation and passion and to ensure that they reach their target audiences. Their initiative mirrors a student led organisation in the US: <https://vetvoicenational.org/>. As part of this focus, we will be continuing our work with [the Reach society](#), in which RVC academic [Donald Palmer](#) plays a key role in. A student in receipt of an [Amos Bursary](#) received an offer in the 2018-19 application cycle, and we aim to increase our work with this Trust. We have been working with Advance HE on our Access gap for Black and Asian students, and will continue to do so during this five-year plan.

Targets

To reduce the gap between the BAME student population at the RVC and the national population from 3.2 percentage points to 0.5 percentage points at a rate of 0.5 percentage points per year for the first two year and then accelerated decreases as our activities have impact. The low percentage of BAME students / applicants to RVC is not unique. The dearth of such students is a subject much debated in veterinary schools and faculties worldwide. We have already rehearsed some of the main factors in causing this situation (pp12-14) including lack of IAG, religious issues in working with animals, low perception of veterinary qualifications and subsequent employment opportunities and status. Even though we engage with school students in the largest metropolitan area in the UK and with schools that have large BAME cohorts, increasing our intake from such cohorts remains problematic. There is no doubt that we shall see an increase but for the purposes of transparency we must stress that this target is ambitious for us and may be difficult to attain. However, we would hope that as our strategic measures have impact, that momentum will increase and that we would be able to fully close this gap within the early period of the 2025-29 APP.

Measures of Success

- Increase in the number of BAME students applying to and being accepted to all degree courses at RVC over the five-year period.
- To increase the number of BAME students attending longitudinal clubs, summer and easter schools and other outreach activities

Mature Students

Although more than 10% of undergraduate students at the RVC are mature students, the vast majority already possess degree qualifications and come to the College to change their career trajectory. Few, if any, gain entry via Access courses, though one or two may have undertaken a pre-degree university qualification recognised and accepted as being sufficiently robust. As part of our approach to inclusivity, we shall remain open to adult learners seeking higher education, particularly in biological sciences. Where possible, we would be looking to collaborate with other institutions/veterinary faculties in beginning the basis of an Access Programme to Veterinary Medicine / Science which would be fit for purpose. Given our very low base, we cannot commit significant further resources to this but we shall continue to develop and expand our acceptable entry qualifications suite in relation to prior learning and to “feed” other enquirers and applicants to more suitable institutions which can, in turn, feed back on relevant student progress.

To achieve these aims and targets with regard to all of our target groups we shall:

At all stages of the student life cycle

- Embed our new Theory of change, ensuring that our practice is evidence led and reflected upon
- Ensure our Data Working Group tackle areas where no data are available owing to data protection, and use insights to inform our next steps in support of access and participation
- Research reasons for any gaps between groups at the RVC, and between RVC and the national HE population
- Utilise best practice based on North American vet schools’ experience to enhance opportunities and achievements for students from under-represented ethnic minority groups
- Actively consult and involve the RVC Students’ Union in all aspects of this work.
- Consult with Sutton Trust students and alumni, as part of a student voice panel.

Access

- Improve targeting of schools to focus on those with students from Polar4 Q1, IMD Q1 and BAME students. We will be mindful of these priorities when selecting for our longitudinal programmes; Junior Vet Club (ages 7-12), Teen Vet Club (ages 13-18), Year 10 Easter school, Year 11 and Sutton Trust Summer Schools.
- We will communicate our targets to agencies we work collaboratively with including NCOP and Sutton Trust. We shall link specific schools to “Academic Champions” in our staff and to student ambassadors. Not only will this provide valuable support to a school, it will also provide RVC staff and students with a recognisable institutional link with which they can develop a positive relationship and achieve a fulfilling goal.
- Modify our outreach programmes and summer schools based on feedback from our target groups and their supporting adults; for example our existing Biology Masterclasses, and our new Gateway to Chemistry Masterclass and Equine Outreach.
- Continue to work longitudinally on raising attainment and awareness in local communities with diverse populations including our weekly Bengali Workers Homework Club.
- Continue to liaise with teachers and careers staff via our new Teacher Outreach network. This is a key route through which to disseminate information about our contextual offer opportunities.
- Increase the information we offer to parents, to give them a better understanding of the financial barriers involved in studying veterinary medicine in London.
- Seek collaboration with the veterinary professional body, the RCVS, and with the Veterinary Schools Council, to enhance the targeting of priority groups.

Success and Progression

The RVC is very conscious that its main priority in the early stages of its Access and Participation Plan must relate to Access and Admissions. The number of Priority Group Students is a low base-line and whilst we are conscious of gaps in non-continuation and progression, closing these gaps is an ambition that will extend to future Plans and for which we are already preparing. Nevertheless, as our baseline data improve from 2020-2021 we shall:

- Begin to establish further inset training to ensure academic and technical teaching staff are clear about the qualities and qualifications larger cohorts of students will be bringing.
- Through the Data Working Group, monitor student performance in terms of Priority Participation Group background.
- In collaboration with the RCVS and the BVA, seek to develop career advice processes that will give due diligence to social capital and cultural diversity.
- Develop formal, supportive channels of communication through which Priority Group students can raise issues on styles of learning.
- Increasingly monitor, through the Data Working Group, the relevant data on exam/degree performance and on subsequent employability.
- Work with the RVC Alumni to develop supportive networks and to remain clear on the changing needs of the professions in terms of knowledge and personal skills.

As our Access targets develop, the focus of future plans will more fully concentrate on Success and Progression. Nevertheless, even with a low baseline, it is still essential to put structures in place to pilot this work at an early stage in the 2020 – 2024 plan and thus give opportunity to the small relevant cohorts who are already in the College. In future the Data Working Group will establish if there is sufficient baseline information to develop further ambitious targets for Success and Progression within the first two years of the

plan. We shall then make Success and Progression priorities in terms of setting targets and outcomes in subsequent Access and Participation Plans.

3 Strategic measures

3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

To reiterate, the strategic measures we shall adopt to achieve the aims and objectives of the Access and Participation Plan are guided by the RVC’s current and extended Strategic Plan to 2021. The APP has been shared and discussed at the most senior levels of the College, including the Council. It will be disseminated to all major college committees and form the basis for staff development and inset days. The RVC sees the Plan as being a document of which all staff must take cognisance and, as we describe below, the activity and policies that it generates will be monitored and discussed in all spheres of college life. The management and governance structure of the RVC (Figure 1) will continue to play a significant role in the annual assessment of progress throughout the lifetime of the plan.

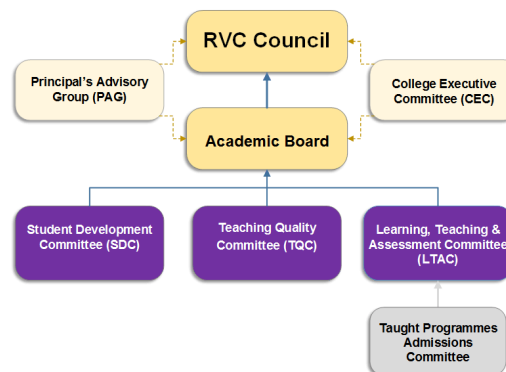


Figure1: Management and Governance Structure:
Strategic Committees in purple, Governance in orange.

The proposed strategy aims to provide all our priority groups with higher education and is pivotal. Given that our major degree is one of a highly specialist nature, our undergraduate student numbers are relatively small. On the positive side, however, this enables us to focus across the whole institution in terms of student related policies and procedures and make use of a great deal of overlapping responsibility in terms of senior staff and holistic approaches. We have made reference to strategic measures in Section 2 of this Plan and the following objectives and their time-line commitment are integral to those measures:

- To increase the number of successful applications and acceptances from Polar 4 Q1 and IMD Q1 students and to narrow the gap between Q1 and Q5 between 2020-2024.
- To significantly the gap between the proportion of BAME students and the national population between 2020-2024.
- To increase the numbers of IMD Q1, Polar 4 Q1 and BAME young students applying and being accepted for the RVC Easter / Summer Schools by 12 percentage points 2020-2022.
- To continue to support Care Leavers by providing 365 accommodation and allocated bursary and further develop our collaborative outreach work with care leaver organisations and other HEIs.2020-2024.
- To support Priority Groups in improving educational and social attainment by means of our academic outreach programme over the period 2020/24 and specifically;
 - Work with targeted schools in London and rural areas of deprivation. (2020 – 2024)
 - Ensure our Contextual Schools Policy is fit for purpose and current. (Ongoing)
 - Explore the use of HEAT as a system which provides evidence of the access value of our full outreach programme. (2020-2021).
- To ensure that our Teaching Strategies and Academic Support services fully embrace and support the needs of students, and particularly engage in projects that will improve student continuation and progression. (2020-2023).

- To enhance the existing Careers provision beyond Veterinary Medicine and Biological and Bio-Veterinary Sciences and to ensure that the service gives full weight to the need to improve the gaps in Progression within the student lifecycle. (2020-2022).

These objectives are focussed on enabling the RVC to achieve the high-level strategic aims it has set for Access and Participation. They are set within the time scale of the 2020-24 APP cycle but will form part of on-going longer term measures to reduce internal gaps in IMD, Polar 4 Q1 and BAME through the lifecycles of future Access and Participation Plans through to 2039, though one would hope that the momentum of success might shorten this period. The aims themselves are to be seen within a longer time frame as the achievement of objectives forms the basis for the establishing of equality of opportunity for all the Priority Participation Groups that RVC seeks to attract, sustain and coach to success and progression

We shall further embed Widening Participation, Access and Social Mobility within all the structures of the RVC. We shall continue to develop our programme of activities at both pre-16 and post-16 level for targeted schools and colleges. We have an established large programme of activity which focuses on the local London region and much further afield and we will continue to work with those schools with whom we have established relationships, located outside of and isolated from urban areas. Based on our contextual information we shall look to expand this provision within the parameters of our five-year resource plan and beyond.

With specific schools we shall continue to support attainment activity. The vast majority of the schools we work with in London have large cohorts of BAME students and those further afield have high levels of Polar4 and IMD Q1. In all our previous Access Agreements and in the more recent Access Plans we have emphasised that our main goal is to improve applications and acceptances from these groups and this remains the priority over the lifetime of this 2020-24 Plan and future Plans. The outputs from our strategic activities programme are geared towards educational improvement. Related to this, as we describe in Section 2, is our work for the RVC Gateway Programme which has, over 14 years, provided a pathway to the veterinary profession to over 600 students from LPNs and other priority groups. This has been a pioneering curriculum development and exemplifies the RVC's willingness to embrace whole change rather than tinker at the margins. Additionally, RVC Access, the department responsible for Widening Participation and Recruitment strategy, is structured to ensure that potential students from whatever cohort or background can be confident that they will be given guidance and support appropriate to their HE pathway.

Over the five year period of the Access and Participation Plan 2020-2024, we shall link activities to our work in educational development, thereby providing a study skills element to the scientific and usually practical classes that we offer schools. Using our expertise in veterinary education we shall seek to create flexible and personalised types of teaching and learning opportunities which can be applied generally to different cohorts of prospective students and which can be continued through undergraduates' courses offering students opportunities to learn in way which suit their preferred learning style. .

Having achieved TEF Gold at the provider level, RVC aims to retain this award by looking at how academic enhancement and continuous programme improvement can be further developed and monitored through relevant committees. Academic enhancement and continuous improvement plans for programmes will take into account student feedback and aim to provide flexible learning opportunities to meet the needs of all students. Study skills and Careers support will be expanded in order to provide a more varied offering to all students as they progress through their programme in order to develop the necessary skills to be successful, both during their studies and when moving to employment. Our tutorial policies and practices will be developed to allow for enhanced monitoring of students' performance, needs and concerns. We will continue

to develop student support services to provide appropriate interventions and diversified types of proactive support. The Students' Union, the Directorate of Learning and Wellbeing (LWB) and the Student Development Committee (SDC, a standing strategic committee, Figure 1) will have key roles to play in these activities. Progress, or otherwise, on the APP, is to be reported at each meeting of the SDC and the SU and LWB will be asked for termly input on development of support systems. There will also be opportunity for opinions and concerns to be voiced at other times if issues come to the fore. There is often a feeling amongst the general student body that enhanced tutorial and study skills support should be available to all and not to "minority" groups and similarly, some "minorities" are reluctant to seek special or individual attention. By embedding a proactive approach to student support within our teaching and student support provisions, we encourage students to take an active role in ensuring their own success and be able to access appropriate support and guidance as needed throughout their programme of study.

As well as monitoring of the action plans to ensure the success of these schemes, we shall also undertake equality impact assessments of the work. The APP is aligned with RVC's vision of equality and inclusion. The Equality and Diversity Committee (EDC) is an executive committee of the College and it will also monitor progress on the APP. Most of the EDC's work has thus far related to staff and staffing issues therefore including the APP will be a major step forward as the committee takes greater responsibility for issues relating to all members of the College. Our employment of ethnic groups is relatively low and there are few staff to act as role models for potential students, and those that are role models do a large amount of work in this respect. All student year cohorts are represented on the EDC. Working with the Students' Union we shall also seek to include representation from priority group cohorts.

In other sections of this plan we have emphasised our aim to ensure that no potential or existing student should be deterred from undertaking an RVC degree programme because of lack of funds. Financial support is integral to Admissions, Success and Progression. The focus groups and guided discussion sessions we have held with students clearly identify financial support as being significant, if not essential to, students' academic and non-academic decisions. It remains the case that the RVC's priority groups, whether from LPNs, BAME or any other, are more likely to require financial assistance through bursaries, scholarships and hardship funds than other cohorts. This is particularly so given the "extra" costs, for example, of lengthy placements and some essential accessories. The relatively low salary ranges of parents, coupled with the increasingly high levels of expenditure on rent and accommodation, make possible degree study problematic. This is particularly so where the degree in question is five or, as in the case of the Gateway Programme, six years in duration. Even if there were to be fee reductions in future years, lower socio-economic groups would still be disadvantaged in terms of financial issues when compared to higher groups and quintiles.

So, within the very limited resources that RVC has as a specialist institution, we shall continue to ensure that all our priority groups are aware of the available support packages; for example, the bursary specifically designated for Care Leavers and the newly enhanced scholarships and bursaries provision, as mentioned in section 2.1, that will be available during the timeframe of this plan.

Our investment in Access and Participation, through financial support, has been significant for an institution of our size and we have set in motion means to evaluate the importance and impact of our types of financial support. Our approach to bursary evaluation has been developed alongside another small specialist institution, St George's. In 2016 we carried out focus groups, together with the Finance Support Team. In 2017, we progressed and conducted a large scale evaluation using a survey protocol adapted to the RVC Veterinary context from St George's methodology. Our most recent evaluation (Dec 2017), includes our key findings that RVC veterinary and veterinary nurse students require significant additional support compared to

other students owing to the compulsory costs associated with veterinary placements in rural locations, requiring remote transport, accommodation, and specialist equipment. Based on our most recent survey and focus group, we have identified estranged students as a group on which to focus. RVC Access are working together with the Advice Centre on researching the challenges faced by this group, and how best to support them financially. This is alongside continuing to develop our widespread bursary evaluation in consultation with similar small specialist institutions regarding effective and valid methods.

We have detailed in the Resource Plan and described in the text of the Access and Participation Plan the elements and amounts of our financial support for students and our proposed expenditure in terms of Access delivery and development, which will be focused on supporting Access for our target groups (IMD and Polar 4 Q1 and BAME students) This is a significant outlay for a small institution trying to keep pace with increasing external requirements, national costs, research and clinical investment and ambitious development plans, all of which are to the benefit of prospective students. Nevertheless, we have increased our staffing in Access and Widening Participation to support our programme of enhancement and evaluation work; provided further funding for activities, particularly in the Student Ambassador Programme; and maintained our bursary provision. Over and above this, academic, technical, academic-related and support staff contribute time within their contractual obligations to participate in, and further develop, educational and support activities for prospective students for our target groups.

The level and extent of our financial investment in Access, therefore, matches our physical size and approaches our educational ambitions. We look upon our access expenditure as complementing all our strategic developments. We are an inner city HEI with a commitment to young people in London *and* a rurally located institution engaged in world class research and clinical treatment. Our reputation goes before us but we want that reputation to reach all walks of society. So, our investment in Access goes hand in hand with the expenditure and investment at all other levels as this enables us to maintain fee income and support our institution in providing world class education and training to students with talent from all parts of society.

3.2 Student consultation

One of the advantages of being a specialist institution is the ability to establish a very collegiate relationship between Staff and Students. Without our large and committed team of Student Ambassadors we would be unable to provide many of our widening participation activities, including the Easter and summer residential and non-residential schools. Students have also begun to develop their own widening participation and Access activity particularly in relation to work with BAME youth. As noted above, much of the work in this area has been pioneered in non-UK vet schools and we are drawing on projects from the USA to increase existing awareness of diversity issues amongst our student body.

The RVC Students' Union were active participants in the creation of this plan. We have ensured that SU officers are familiar with the Guidance for the APP and had full opportunity to comment on and amend drafts. In addition, we consulted the cohort of students who had attended Sutton Trust Summer Schools at the RVC. These consultations have informed our evaluation strategy, in particular to gain feedback from alumni. Through this dialogue, we have also become focused on the need work with the SU to help them deliver their new Strategic Plan, which has been devised to focus on key 'pillars' that underpin the whole-college community; in particular WP activity.

The student body will also be fully involved in the oversight and monitoring of the Plan both via their representation on RVC committees and working groups established to process the Plan and associated projects.

3.3 Evaluation strategy

Strategic context

Evaluation underpins all widening participation activities at the RVC and is placed at the centre of any discussion around planning new and developing pre-existing programmes. In May 2018, a Widening Participation Project Officer was appointed to lead on the evaluation of all widening participation activities; expanding the reach and depth of evaluation at the RVC and ensuring that we have, in reference to the OfS Self-Assessment, the necessary skills base among professional service staff for undertaking evaluation of access and participation plan programmes.

The Widening Participation team works in partnership with Academic staff, Student Registry, Student Admissions and the Directorate of Learning and Wellbeing to provide a strategic approach to access and participation across the student lifecycle. The collection and analysis of student data will be managed by the Data Working Group, which will meet regularly to ensure the institution is making progress towards ambitious widening participation goals and reports to strategic committees (Figure 1). The Data Working Group is comprised of senior staff members from across Widening Participation, Student Recruitment, Admissions and Academic staff who take responsibility for ensuring programme officers and partners across the institution are aware of the importance of evaluation and are committed to facilitating robust data collection.

The RVC is a member of the AccessHE, Aimhigher London and NEON widening participation focused collaborative networks. The widening participation evaluation strategy at the RVC is informed by regular participation in the AccessHE 'Evidence and Evaluation' Forum and the NEON 'Establishing Evidence and Measuring Impact' Working Group. Participation in these networks ensures that the RVC can draw from a vast knowledge base across the sector for undertaking evaluation of access and participation plan programmes.

When designing and developing widening participation activities, we engage with current students to ensure we adequately capture the student voice. For example, Animal Aspirations, a project designed to introduce veterinary role models from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups to young people from widening participation backgrounds, was entirely designed and led by current RVC students with administrative support of the Widening Participation team. Consultation with Student Ambassadors is integrated into all of our programmes and is actively used to shape the way we work with young people. We are increasingly engaging with domestic and international alumni in a range of processes including involvement in admissions selection, acting as role models, supporting work experience and acting as mentors. Following self-assessment via the OfS Self-Assessment tool, we have identified that we currently meet all the 'expected' practices. However, we have also identified that there are practices which need to be developed and others which are not currently in place:

1. Historically, there has been no formalised strategic overview of evaluation of access and participation programmes. In response to this, all future evaluation plans and outcomes will be discussed at regular strategy meetings.
2. We do not currently have an identified skills base among academic staff for undertaking or commissioning evaluation of widening participation activities. In response to this, the Widening Participation team will reach out to academic staff to ensure their participation and collaboration in evaluation practices.
3. There have only been limited opportunities for access and participation staff members to engage in reflective practices. More time will be allocated across the academic year for access and participation staff members to meet and reflect on the experiential knowledge. This knowledge will

be used to enhance both the evaluation strategy taken at the RVC and the practice through programme design and implementation.

Programme design

Widening Participation programmes at the RVC are designed in response to clearly defined aims and objectives which, in turn, feed into ambitious goals. This system has recently been challenged and improved, through the process of constructing a Theory of Change around access, participation and success, in addition to self-assessment via the OfS Self-Assessment Tool. The Theory of Change was constructed by the entire Widening Participation team at the institution and was a useful opportunity to draw upon the skills and knowledge of colleagues across the College and outside of it.

Constructing the Theory of Change, which included logically tracing each of our activities and their outputs towards our ultimate goals and outcomes, gave the WP team the opportunity to reflect on the ambitious goals we are working towards, the outcomes that will facilitate success, the activities that will produce those outcomes and the information needed to plan and deliver those activities. It also enabled us to identify weaknesses, missing areas of work and activity that did not work towards our greater goals. In the light of these, 'Theory of Change' as a meeting point will be included in termly strategy meetings attended by the entire Widening Participation team. The document will be used to assess and reassess our patterns of work to ensure that we are working coherently and consistently towards our widening participation targets. This work will increasingly involve the academic staff to ensure that there is greater awareness of the work being done prior to entry to the courses.

The scope of the Theory of Change began with a focus on access and has now been expanded to incorporate success and progression. The Widening Participation team is reaching out to other teams within the institution who are responsible for these areas in order to further populate the document. There are currently gaps in the Theory of Change as this is a working document which is being refined and added to during strategic meetings with the entire Widening Participation team and other partners across the institution. The document will be used to encourage collaboration across the institution and ensure changes are made across the college. The Theory of Change is [available here](#).

For our sustained and high investment programmes, evaluation data collected from the young people, parents/carers, teachers, Student Ambassadors and RVC staff is presented within a programme report. Each programme report captures the pre/post intervention change (type 2 evaluation) relative to the programme's aims and objectives, in addition to qualitative feedback. Key successes are highlighted and detailed recommendations for future programmes are made. The report is then presented and discussed at strategy meetings in order to ensure the findings shape programme design. The evaluation report will also be shared with the Teacher Outreach Network and current students at the RVC and we will consult with these groups to ensure positive changes can be made to address any weaknesses.

Following self-assessment via the OfS Self-Assessment tool, we have also identified that there are practices which need to be developed and others which are not currently in place:

1. We do not currently have in place a clear and detailed specification of the programmes we deliver, why we are delivering them and the best way to meet our objectives. While this has been understood informally, the construction of the Theory of Change has begun to address this. We will further formalise this system by creating a report which provides exact detail on the programmes we deliver, the aims and objectives, and makes the case for each programme in the light of the targets outlined

in this document. Where we are unable to make the case or we find gaps in our practice we will make significant adjustments.

2. We cannot currently point to evidence which underpins our choice of outcome measures for our access and participation programmes. We have identified a need for training to better understand this area before making any changes to our programmes or evaluation strategy. Training will be identified in this area and informed changes will be made.

Evaluation design

In previous years, the Widening Participation team has undertaken formative and summative evaluation to shape the programmes delivered by the RVC. The standard of evidence collated in this way was narrative (type 1) and served to show the effectiveness of the work undertaken relative to the core aims and objectives of a given programme. Over the previous 12 months, we have collected both quantitative and qualitative evidence of a pre/post intervention change (type 2) which analyses both the success of the programme relative to its aims and objectives and the effect of the programme on the participants themselves. The crucial benefit of this development is that we are now able to evidence that our interventions are associated with beneficial results and, where they are not, we can make targeted adjustments to the programme.

While we may consider collecting causal (type 3) evidence in the future, this is not something we are looking to do presently. Instead, over the next five years, we will embed and expand the role of type 2 evaluation across our programmes. For example, while we currently undertake a baseline and endline survey in our Year 10 Easter School and our Year 11 and 12 Summer Schools, we will also collect information via a peer to peer evaluation where participants share their experiences with each other through open and honest conversation. We will also contact participants six months after a programme has finished to see whether changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviour have remained or diminished. These additional measures will be put in place to improve the rigour of, and add further nuance to, our findings.

The baseline and endline surveys are designed to evidence a pre/post intervention change based around the aims and objectives of the respective programme. In order to add rigour to this process, we will undertake an evaluability assessment to clearly establish the activities that can be evaluated credibly and reliably. The outcome of the assessment will be used to provide guidance around future changes and will provide further assurance that our findings are valid.

Since 2017, we have created four substantial programmes; Junior Vet Club, Teen Vet Club, Year 10 Easter School and Year 11 Summer School. These programmes construct a pipeline for young people from primary through to our Year 12 Summer School which is delivered in partnership with the Sutton Trust. Young people who participate in the Year 12 Summer School are then encouraged and supported to apply for the Veterinary Gateway programme at the RVC. This pipeline approach allows us to encourage and maintain sustained engagement with young people longitudinally. Over the next five years, we will build a longitudinal evidence base through individualised data collection over multiple programmes.

We have recently expanded our programmes to work strategically with parents and carers by integrating targeted workshops within our Junior and Teen Vet Clubs and our Easter and Summer programmes. We are also working closely with teachers via our Teacher Outreach Network. We will use these platforms to expand the current reach of our evaluation by triangulating the self-report data with data gathered from parents and teachers. The data we collect from parents, carers and teachers will allow us to capture different dimensions in the progress made by the young people and enable us to highlight any inconsistencies.

As financial support is an area of significant investment at the RVC, we utilise the OfS financial support evaluation toolkit to ensure our approach is evidence led. In late 2018, the RVC contacted all recipients of financial support in the previous completed academic year at the institution and asked them to complete a survey constructed by the Office for Students. The survey was circulated in order to better understand how financial support recipients used the financial support offered to them by the institution, and the perceived value to recipients of that support. The survey was open from 23 November to 13 December 2018 and received 237 responses. The report has been submitted to the OfS and has been used internally to make student-led adjustments to current practice.

Following self-assessment via the OfS Self-Assessment tool, we have also identified that there are practices which need to be developed:

1. We do not currently design our research to establish causality. We do not currently collect 'type 3' evidence which would demonstrate the causal effect of an intervention. As stated above, we do not have plans to collect this type of evidence in the future, choosing instead to embed and expand the role of 'type 2' evidence.

Evaluation implementation

The application forms and surveys used to administer and evaluate the widening participation activities at the RVC have been designed in collaboration with a Data Protection Officer at the institution to ensure we are fully GDPR compliant. Data are stored on secure servers operated by JISC Online Surveys before being downloaded as password protected files on RVC operated secure surveys. All data collected are subject to the RVC Data Protection Policy, which is publicly available online.

Evaluation of pre/post intervention change is collected through individual responses, which enables the RVC to analyse data at an individual participant level capable of capturing changes in the outcomes of individuals. The data can then be analysed in the context of an individual's protected characteristics to identify sub-group trends.

As mentioned above, we are adopting multiple strategies to overcome the weaknesses of self-reported data. These include requesting additional information six months after the programme is completed, incorporating peer-to-peer evaluation strategies, and the implementation of an evaluability assessment to clearly establish the activities that can be evaluated credibly and reliably.

Following self-assessment via the OfS Self-Assessment tool, we have also identified that there are practices which need to be developed:

1. We do not currently have an established methodology to track the outcomes of our participants over time. In order to address this, we are currently exploring our options regarding the tracking of students.
2. We have not systematically undertaken risk analysis for our evaluations. We will work collaboratively with our partner networks, including AccessHE and Aimhigher, to enhance our knowledge of this area and implement a risk analysis for our most substantial and long term programmes.

Learning to shape improvements

The findings from our previous Widening Participation programmes are directly used as evidence and insight to shape improvements. Where evaluation shows that we are not making strides towards the programme's

aims and objectives, these points are raised and discussed in strategy meetings and qualitative and quantitative evidence is presented. Once an area of improvement is identified, we consult with appropriate groups to find solutions. These groups include the Teacher Outreach Network and local and national action forums led by widening participation collaborative networks. Additionally, we reach out to past participants of widening participation programmes and current students at the RVC. The information gathered from this mixed methods approach directly informs changes to future programmes.

3.4 Monitoring Progress against delivery of the plan

The RVC is quite clear that what is laid out in the APP is institutionally challenging and may lead to a variety of changes in the College over time. Therefore, the strategies and targets described in it will need regular monitoring, informed by data and qualitative reporting.

The College's Data Working Group, which has been set up specifically to meet the high demands of OfS Access planning, will meet at regular intervals throughout the calendar year to interrogate lifecycle data. This will report findings to the main College strategic Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and Teaching Quality Committee. In parallel, reports on progress or otherwise and on strategy will continue to be made to the Equality and Diversity and Student Development Committees as referred to above (Figure 1). These two strands of reporting will go to the College Executive Committee and Academic Board which report to the Governing Body of the RVC and cover both performance and provision.

The APP will also be utilised as a training source for Governor Training and Induction with both new and incumbent governors expected to be cognisant of the priorities and priority groups detailed, the positive institutional change that such pro-activity can advance and the resource implications entailed.

Similarly, we shall work with the Students' Union which, apart from having full membership of the aforementioned groups and committees, will be encouraged to establish their own independent monitoring, surveys and focus groups. This may be led by an SU officer and supported by Student Ambassadors who are actively involved in all aspects of Access work.

The monitoring will be overseen by a member of the Principal's Advisory Group, thereby providing access to all management and senior management levels within the institution.

If, in the course of monitoring, it is found that insufficient progress is being made in certain areas, action plans will be expected to be drawn up to address such issues over a set timescale but not so short as to be merely quick reactions to issues beyond RVC control. Not every cohort of students every year is the same in terms of ability, ambition, background and commitment, which is why support processes and teaching practices need to be flexible.

Evaluation reports are circulated both internally and externally (with partner institutions and networks) ensuring that the results are able to influence practice across the institution and across the sector.

Following self-assessment via the OfS Self-Assessment tool, we have also identified that there are practices which need to be developed:

1. Reporting does not currently demonstrate engagement with the scholarly literature on effectiveness where it exists. We will engage with the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO), ensuring the use of scholarly literature is implemented in future reporting.

2. We are not able to demonstrate how we have used evaluation findings to inform improvements to our access and participation interventions cycle-on-cycle. While improvements are made the effects of these changes have not been reported clearly. The effects will now be reported clearly in programme evaluations ensuring that we can closely monitor the effectiveness of the changes.

4 Provision of Information to Students

Information for prospective students is placed on the RVC website and is prominent and clearly signposted. This is in addition to the information provided to students' supporting adults via the Teacher Outreach Network, and Outreach activities.

Information includes details on fees and other costs including accommodation charges made by the College and an indication of charges made by other landlords. There is also information on bursaries and other funds to alleviate hardship. Details will also appear in college prospectuses but given the lapse in publication timetables the website will be regularly updated with the correct detail. The Students Union will also disseminate relevant information and we shall consult with them on the various accessible means of communication that we might adopt.

The bursary support available from the RVC is listed below:

Household Income	Award per year
Below £35,000	£1,000

This will be reassessed each year dependent on annual household income. A sum of £5,000 has been allocated to provide an initial £1,000 bursary for up to five students from a Care background. All students will be eligible to apply for hardship funds which are assessed on an individual and case by case basis. No students should be deterred from study at RVC on purely financial reasons. In the appended Resource Plan we have tabulated our financial commitments for the Year 2020 – 2021.

Financial Information and Employability Advice

We are conscious of the financial burdens that can be placed on students. RVC students face significant costs when undertaking compulsory external placements across the UK and the longer terms in clinical years also hinder the availability of paid vacation work. No potential student of RVC should feel ineligible because of financial issues and to ensure that this vital non-academic issue is given full weight we shall embed financial advice and practical support sessions within all our outreach activity. This will be dovetailed with sessions on careers and employability throughout all degree programmes so that students can feel confident that the investment they have made in training for a career have been worthwhile. Recent statistics show that 96% of RVC students have employment within six months of graduation but in an era of austerity and economic uncertainty, we cannot be complacent about our students' outcomes. As a small HE institution we do not operate an in-house Careers Service, utilising instead the University of London Careers Service which provides students with both individual and group advice and training, develops application skills and work experience opportunities. Liaison with the RCVS and the London Bioscience Centre also provides opportunities for students to meet employers.

The measures described above aim to meet the overarching goal of our Theory of Change, which is to ensure under-represented groups have equal opportunity to access high quality programmes in veterinary education and associated subjects, succeed in higher education and progress onto graduate employment.

We intend to make considerable progress towards this goal in the next five years, through detailed data analysis, sustained outreach activity, student consultation, and monitoring progress at the Access, Success and Progression stages of the student lifecycle.

5 Appendix

Access & Participation Plan 2020 - 2024

Variation Request 2023 - 2024

Introduction

In line with other HEIs in England, the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) seeks to submit a Variation Request for the Access and Participation Plan for the year 2023-2024, as required by the Office for Students (OfS).

The RVC does not wish to vary the targets or financial resources contained within the existing Plan.

This Variation Request relates to the four priority areas described in the OfS Access & Participation Plan Guidance. Our request explains how we will achieve these priorities and why it may not be possible to comply with all four priorities in the year 2023-2024, but that we are committed to achieving them over the longer term of the next Access and Participation Plan (2025 onwards).

Priority A

Make access and participation plans more accessible in a way that prospective and current students, their parents and other stakeholders can easily understand

The RVC understands that our Access & Participation Plan 2020-2024 contains a large amount of detail and data narrative that may not be clear and accessible to all targeted readers, including future students and their families or supporters.

From 2023-2024, we will ensure that all our publications and statements relating to Access and Participation are more easily accessible and presented in a clear fashion; this will apply to all communications channels including face-to-face, print, broadcast, and digital. We aim to better support applicants as they gather information on the universities they might apply to and the course or degree they might study. Using the template provided by the OfS, we clearly address questions relating to fees, cost and types of accommodation, student support, financial support, and other ways in which the RVC supports its students.

This information will all be clearly described in future Access & Participation Plans which will continue to be easily accessible on the RVC website and in other literature.

To improve communication of the Plan, we will make better use of data information visualisation and other communication strategies and methods: for example, the use of a specific section of our website, interactive dashboards, animations or videos. We aim to communicate our strategy more clearly, including our priorities and the progress towards our targets. We will develop this content in line with the requirements of our various audiences including specifically, our prospective and current students, their parents/supporters and other stakeholders.

Priority B

Develop, enhance and expand partnerships with schools and other local and national organisations, to help raise the pre-16 attainment of young people from underrepresented groups across England.

Our Access & Participation Plan 2020-2024 set out our continued commitment to the whole concept of Widening Participation. In our published analysis of data, we showed that there were gaps in access levels between IMD/POLAR 4 quintile 1 (Q1) and BAME cohorts. These cohorts formed our priority groups, and we acknowledged that closing these gaps would be a long-term goal stretching beyond the life of the 2020-2024 Plan. Helping to raise attainment in these cohorts is clearly crucial to this goal.

For a small, specialist institution the level of access work in our widening participation activities has been significant. This has not always been straightforward given the specialist nature of our undergraduate degree programmes and our high tariff entry requirements.

Although we make constructive and fair use of contextual data and other measures to support applicants in their efforts to meet our entry requirements, we are conscious that there is no real substitute for academic success even at an early stage of education. Therefore, in order to give school students every opportunity to succeed in their assessments and examinations, we will need to co-operate with schools to jointly develop pre-16 learning resources and opportunities to increase the likelihood of raised attainment at both an individual and group level.

These resources may be both functional or experiential including, for example, subject-specific support linked to the curriculum rather than tangential 'extras', study skills in core subjects (run by student ambassadors and staff) and alternative environments for learning. We will continue to target IMD and POLAR4 Q1 and young people from diverse ethnicities and seek to achieve greater intersectionality amongst the three groups.

New Activities for 2023-24

1) Teachers Network

For any or all of these activities to succeed in their aim, the RVC must work in close co-operation with teachers. In the period leading up to 2023-2024 we shall strengthen and expand our existing teachers network in the London region. The teachers network acts as a focus group and critical friend that can be consulted on the effectiveness of specific programmes and activities as well as proposals for modifications or development. The expansion of the network beyond the London region particularly into Hertfordshire, where our other campus is located and to those FECs outside of this region with whom we have progression accords, is a target for 2023-2024.

2) Pre-16 (KS3 and KS4) attainment programme

In the Access & Participation Plan 2020-2024 (pages 14-18) we set out our strategies and priorities for closing the gaps between quintiles 1 and 5 of our priority groups and have already made substantial steps forward, achieving or exceeding our targets (page 32). This has been largely, though not entirely, through working with Years 12/13 at Key Stage 5. We aim to increase the amount of attainment work we do with KS3 and KS4 during 2023-2024 and we will establish the foundations for this work in the approaching academic year of 2022-2023. We will continue to target our priority groups particularly concentrating on the core subject Science. We shall make partnered, targeted interventions in collaboration with our existing networks in London and beyond. These include Access HE, Aim Higher London South and Uni Connect.

We will work with the schools already enrolled on our projects relating to Biology and Chemistry A-levels, expanding our activities into GCSE attainment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our work in these A-level subjects was largely delivered online enabling us to reach a larger geographical audience, distant from our London and Hertfordshire locations. This work has proven to be successful and therefore, in 2023-2024 we will deliver a specific pre-16 hybrid attainment programme providing a set of blended learning opportunities. Our geographical locations make a concentration on the metropolitan area an obvious decision. However, we are conscious of the wide range of expertise available to students in the London region particularly with many universities in the locale and so, in order to reach a meaningful number of schools, we will extend the reach of our work around our Hertfordshire campus where we already enjoy good community relations, as well as delivering online opportunities to other regions where Higher Education provision is not so intense.

In developing our attainment activities, we will be conscious of our different target groups and will design interventions carefully considering the social and economic composition of the cohorts with whom we work. Recent work by TASO has investigated the link between different interventions and degrees of success and has drawn attention to the socio-economic factors that link to educational

attainment. Raising attainment levels at GCSE, particularly in the core subjects of English, Maths and Science is important and as such, we accept the TASO formulation that the most effective interventions are those that support attainment in the context of the national curriculum.

The typology of our activities is likely to remain constant. We shall, where resource allows, provide pre-GCSE programmes with relevant 'master-class' boosters designed to meet the particular needs of partner schools. Other work will include the refocusing of our Year 10 and Year 11 vacation schools to move away from aspirations raising to attainment, built around curriculum requirements.

3) Investment in and auditing evidence, monitoring and evaluation

The RVC is committed to expand access and participation of underrepresented groups and appreciates that evidence, monitoring and evaluation can help achieve targets, inform prioritisation, and promote the impact of outreach activities. The focus on new pre-16 attainment activities requires us to refine and develop our evaluation processes and while we refer to this in our current Access & Participation Plan, only recently have we been able to make available the resources to look at this afresh. We realised that we needed to boost our capacity and expertise to access, understand and use evidence to inform our strategy and activities. To be better equipped to 'evaluate to understand impact, share and learn from evidence'¹, we have recruited to increase our expertise in providing evidence and evaluation, research methods and evaluation types (including Type 3 Evaluation). This investment, which demonstrates our commitment to evidence-informed decision-making, will ensure that our data, systems, and activities are set up for monitoring, capturing learning and generating insights and evaluation. This will lead to a change in culture as well as allowing us to generate and share evidence that could help other HE institutions that have similar access challenges.

We intend to develop a specific school attainment strategy as part of the next Access & Participation Plan (2025 onwards). The strategy will be evidence informed (using for example the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) teaching and learning toolkit and TASO's rapid review on attainment-raising activities) and developed in consultation with teachers together with student ambassadors and staff members who deliver outreach and attainment raising activities.

In 2023-24, we will review and assess how well the RVC targets and delivers outreach activities which have a school attainment raising component. We shall build on the work done so far to:

- Learn what has been well received so far and what could work better, in terms of type and content of interventions for different schools and different groups of students, in particular our target cohorts.
- Learn from schools and teachers what their needs, gaps and preferences are in terms of modalities and priorities for attainment raising activities.
- Review and improve the use of hybrid / online resources and innovative ways to expand the provision, coverage, interactivity and ultimately impact of attainment raising interventions.
- Develop an evaluation plan to ensure feedback and impact from different interventions are captured and used to continuously refine and improve the strategy.
- Use this information to continually improve our work.

A move towards supporting attainment at pre-GCSE level carries much responsibility. We need to be assured that our activities meet the needs of young students at a very important stage of their lives. We are confident that our enhanced resources and commitment to more evidence-informed activities and strategies will bring about tangible changes in our access and participation performance that we firmly commit to deliver in the next 3-5 years.

Summary of key objectives

¹ [What needs to change - Office for Students](#)

- Expand our teachers network to support our attainment programme
- Develop a hybrid programme to promote increased attainment beyond our regional boundaries
- Track and support pre-16 students in progressing to Level 4/5
- Audit and expand our evidence and evaluation to ensure that our activities and interventions are increasing attainment in our target groups.

Priority C:

Set out how access to higher education for students from underrepresented groups leads to successful participation on high quality courses and good graduate outcomes.

Having been ranked the number one veterinary school in the world (QS World Rankings) for three of the last four years, and as a high entry tariff HEI for many years previously, we are proud of the high quality of all our academic programmes, at every level. This includes postgraduate, undergraduate, foundation degrees and diploma and certificate courses. Students who join programmes at the RVC can be confident that they will receive high quality education.

When framing the current Access & Participation Plan 2020-2024 we were conscious that the gaps between different socio-economic and ethnic groups in terms of successful applications to the institution were too wide (see pages 2-6 of current Access & Participation Plan for analysis of access data by socio-economic background and ethnicity). Significant reduction of these gaps is the main target in our 2020-2024 Access & Participation Plan and our current data show that we are succeeding in this endeavour, though there is still much to do.

Our ability to evidence gaps in success and progression measures was hampered because the numbers in relevant cohorts were too low or because of the type of degree classification used by the RVC did not align (see page 2 of current Access & Participation Plan for an analysis of student cohorts included and excluded). We agreed that we would establish a data working group to derive the missing data from internal sources and evidence the gaps in order to have a more meaningful basis on which to develop activities and strategies that would enhance our work in Success and Progression. We have already taken steps towards this, derived internal continuation and attainment data and while we do not have any gaps for continuation, we have identified gaps in attainment for IMD and POLAR Q1 students at level 6 (17pp and 15pp respectively).

A high proportion of our IMD Q1 and Polar 4 Q1 students are on our Gateway to Veterinary Medicine course, which takes widening participation students through to the degree in veterinary medicine. We are aware that the initial transition from school to university and then the Gateway Programme to the full degree in veterinary medicine can be problematic for some students who find the type and intensity of teaching and assessment challenging. In 2020-2021 we resourced staff time to provide additional tutorial and specific study skills support for students on the Gateway Programme. This pilot scheme was particularly timely as this was the first of two cohorts that were admitted during the COVID-19 pandemic and had been more than normally impacted by disruption to their secondary education. The impact of this pilot project is now being reviewed in order to be able to make recommendations on implementation in the future and also to embed this work beyond its pilot status, as appropriate.

New Activities for 2023-24

1) Expansion of specific transition support for target students

Central to our plans for enhancement is the need to ensure that support is not restricted to the BVetMed degree which is the RVC's main degree programme. As well as that degree, the RVC offers a range of undergraduate degree programmes in Biological Sciences and two professional degree programmes in Veterinary Nursing. Over the forthcoming academic year and throughout 2023-2024 as part of our variation request, we shall be using the learnings from our Gateway pilot to consider how best to extend the programme of support to students in these subject areas.

We have made considerable investment in our wider transitions support. Students need to be able to get off to a good start at the RVC and recognition of the importance of this early period in a student's period of study to later progression and attainment, is a key reason the RVC has integrated its welcome and induction process for new students in 2022-23. This longitudinal, skills-based approach to the induction process starts with the online pre-arrival induction introducing digital, study and wellbeing skills and the support that is available to students that will be key to their success, followed by 6 weeks of induction activities, including support sessions, both staff and peer-led.

In 2023-24 we will develop digital badging for all the online induction activities to help to promote engagement and uptake, so that students can develop a sense of belonging to the RVC community and be more aware of the support on offer as they begin their studies. In 2023-24 we are also planning to continue to develop and expand our Student Success Coaching programme to more of our courses. This coaching programme, which employs our PhD students, provides targeted, goal-focused academic support on a one-to-one basis, which will be of particular benefit to our target groups as they begin their studies.

2) Develop training to ensure academic and technical teaching staff are clear about the qualities and qualifications larger cohorts of students will be bringing.

The Educational Development team in the Directorate of Learning and Wellbeing is developing a range of resources and hybrid workshops for teaching staff to support them to continue to evolve and develop their teaching practice to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. A Staff Teaching Quality working group has been formed to look at how we set expectations of teaching and learning; how we capture the student voice as part of curricula enhancement and ongoing improvements; how we align course design and pedagogic practices to externally benchmarked standards for teaching and learning that supports an inclusive approach; and how we support and celebrate a culture of continuous improvement in teaching practice.

Our Blended Learning Strategy lays out a vision for how flexible learning opportunities could be incorporated effectively as part of our place-based and class-paced curricula at the RVC and provides ways for staff to consider how to design interactivity and social learning into their teaching in order to engage students in different ways.

In 2023-24 we will further develop and deliver our training in Universal Design, an approach to teaching that gives all students an equal opportunity to succeed. Universal Design principles ensure that the learning is accessible, fair, and supportive for all and we will embed this approach in our course design and development processes, supporting the success of our increasingly diverse community.

3) Develop career advice processes that will give due diligence to social capital and cultural diversity.

The Careers Service in the Learning and Wellbeing Directorate is developing a number of initiatives to provide careers support that is tailored to the needs of different cohorts of students. The implementation of Careers Registration for September 2022 is a key development; this is a targeted and data-informed approach to careers support and is a collection of simple self-reported data items on career readiness. Annual data collection allows us to track the development of student employability as they progress through stages of career readiness. The data will inform employability strategies, identify specific interventions, and evaluate the effectiveness of these. It is also a measure of a form of learning gain recognised by the OfS. Acting on it over time will contribute to the RVC's strategic imperatives around student employability.

In 2022 we will pilot the use of this data in Careers Information Sheets for specific cohorts of students. These allow course teams to access all relevant careers data for these cohorts, as well as evaluation of effectiveness of embedded employability activities and identification of further appropriate interventions.

In 2023-24 following evaluation of the pilot of Careers Information Sheets we will further develop this data-driven targeted approach to supporting employability skills for all cohorts. By monitoring the uptake of interventions against the demonstrated learning gain for careers readiness for specific groups of students, we will continue to refine and develop targeted support mechanisms including embedding development and awareness of employability skills within the curriculum and providing guidance for discussions with tutors. This will allow us to identify specific students in our target groups who may need extra support to develop careers readiness and design appropriate interventions to develop these skills for success.

4) Introducing Digital Skills Journeys to support digital competency

Our student support services provide a skills-based diversified offer that runs in parallel to students' needs throughout their programme of study. From the beginning of their time at the RVC through to graduation, students will need to develop a variety of study, digital, wellbeing and employability skills to progress through their course of study and achieve their goals. The RVC's approach to this is developmental by encouraging and supporting students to develop an awareness of the need for skills to evolve as they encounter new situations that are challenging such as studying in different ways, undertaking work placements, and living away from familiar environments. An example of this developmental approach to skills development is the new Digital Skills Journeys being introduced in 2022. These visual journeys for each programme cohort map out which technologies students will need to use at specific points in their programme. This allows them to plan for success by engaging with specific skills support at each point of the journey so they feel confident with each new requirement and can focus on the challenge of the content they are learning. To address issues of digital poverty, the Digital Support Fund is there to ensure that all students have the tools they need to be successful.

In 2023-24 we will continue to tailor our student support offer to meet the needs of a diverse student body in terms of modality (online on-campus) types of support sessions (group, individual); and types of experts (peers, specialists), based on monitoring of uptake of all services and a variety of feedback mechanisms. We will monitor the uptake of the Digital Skills Journey pilot as part of the overall support offer as well as seek student feedback, focusing on any gaps in engagement or competency that we identify in our target cohorts and developing interventions to address them.

5) Enhance monitoring and evaluation of Success and Progression activities

As we continue to evolve our flexible approach to both our student support services and to our curricula it is essential that we monitor and evaluate student attainment and progression as well as the effectiveness of the interventions we are developing.

In 2023-24 we will continue to evolve our Student Engagement Report which monitors students' interactions with the support services as well as further developments of the Tutor Dashboard to identify patterns of engagement and their relation to assessment performance. This will allow us to identify how and when students from target groups interact with the support that is available and how it can be further developed to meet any emerging needs.

In 2023-24, we will also diversify how we collect and use the student voice to input into the development of our curriculum and student support services, so we are able to access key areas of concern for students and react in an agile manner. In particular, we would like to strengthen use of focus groups and interviews, led by professional facilitators, not directly linked to the service provider, to allow a safe and anonymous space for students, teachers, and other stakeholders to share their experiences, perceptions and feedback about the activities and support received. We will also establish internal 'learning' workshops to ensure the insights from data and evaluations are understood and actioned by RVC staff and service providers involved in their delivery and design. This will create a 'learning loop' where evidence is generated, accessed, and used to inform future programming. We are confident that our newly established internal evaluation capacity will allow the RVC to design and implementation effective, informative, systematic, and regular research and evaluation activities and contribute to body

of evidence on what works in access and support for students, in particular for students from underrepresented groups.

This will be a significant extension of our widening participation work. It demonstrates the RVC's wish to not rest on its academic laurels. We wish to be seen as a professional and educational centre which seeks to enrich society by training veterinary and scientific graduates to a high level so that they can achieve personal benefit from rewarding employment and social satisfaction through their contribution to a liberal, caring and highly qualified society.

Summary of key objectives

- Expand our transition support to ensure students make a successful transition to HE.
- Develop our staff training programmes to embed the concepts of Universal Design to ensure that our provision is accessible to all.
- Implement a data-driven approach to support development of employability skills.
- Introduce training to support students' digital competency to enhance success.
- Audit and expand our evidence and evaluation activities to ensure that our activities and interventions are increasing success and progression in our target groups.

Priority D

Seek to develop more diverse pathways into and through higher education through expansion of flexible Level 4 and 5 courses and degree apprenticeships.

The RVC is a small specialist institute with three main undergraduate degree pathways, Veterinary Medicine, Veterinary Nursing and Biosciences. The majority of our students study Veterinary Medicine, and it is currently not possible to qualify as a veterinarian at level 4 or 5, nor is it possible to qualify through a degree apprenticeship route due to the requirements of our professional bodies. This limits our opportunities to develop diverse pathways.

Our Foundation degree in Veterinary Nursing, delivered in partnership with the College of Animal Welfare, is a level 5 course although is not offered as a flexible course. Our Bioscience pathways are level 6 and are also not delivered flexibly.

Due to our significant other commitments in our Access and Participation Plan 2020-24 and those we are making in this variation request; we are unable to commit to developing and introducing new flexible pathways or apprenticeships in the year 2023-24 as the development time for new courses is not compatible with this timeframe. We will, however, commit to undertaking market research and discussions with our industrial partners to investigate their requirements and desires for specific courses and/or apprenticeships that we can develop in the timeframe of the next Access and Participation plan in 2025 onwards.

Summary of 2020-21 entrant course fees

*course type not listed

Inflationary statement:

Subject to the maximum fee limits set out in Regulations we intend to increase fees each year using the RPI-X

Table 4a - Full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	Students who started in 2017-18 and onwards; all courses except FDSc Vet Nursing and Gateway programme	£9,250
Foundation degree	Foundation degree Vet Nursing	£9,250
Foundation year/Year 0	Gateway programme	£9,250
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year		£1,850
Erasmus and overseas study years	Outbound study abroad	£1,385
Other	*	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4c - Part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	Graduate Diploma in Equine Locomotor Research	£3,830
Other	Graduate Diploma in Veterinary Nursing	£4,650

Table 4d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Targets and investment plan

2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: The Royal Veterinary College

Provider UKPRN: 10007779

Investment summary

The OfS requires providers to report on their planned investment in access, financial support and research and evaluation in their access and participation plan. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in student success and progression in the access and participation plans and therefore investment in these areas is not recorded here.

Note about the data:

The investment forecasts below in access, financial support and research and evaluation does not represent not the total amount spent by providers in these areas. It is the additional amount that providers have committed following the introduction of variable fees in 2006-07. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total access activity investment (£)	£415,435.19	£419,341.19	£418,193.57	£416,472.14	£416,472.14
Access (pre-16)	£186,945.83	£188,703.53	£188,187.10	£187,412.46	£187,412.46
Access (post-16)	£166,174.07	£167,736.47	£167,277.43	£166,588.85	£166,588.85
Access (adults and the community)	£41,543.52	£41,934.12	£41,819.36	£41,647.21	£41,647.21
Access (other)	£20,771.76	£20,967.06	£20,909.68	£20,823.61	£20,823.61
Financial support (£)	£622,000.00	£621,000.00	£619,000.00	£617,000.00	£618,000.00
Research and evaluation (£)	£10,185.39	£10,389.10	£10,596.88	£10,808.82	£11,025.00

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Higher fee income (£HFI)	£4,466,890.00	£4,508,890.00	£4,496,550.00	£4,478,040.00	£4,478,040.00
Access investment	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%
Financial support	13.5%	13.3%	13.3%	13.3%	13.4%
Research and evaluation	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Total investment (as %HFI)	23.0%	22.9%	22.9%	22.9%	22.9%

Targets and investment plan 2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: The Royal Veterinary College

Provider UKPRN: 10007779

Targets

Table 2a - Access

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
								2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
To reduce the gap in percentage points between the RVC's IMD 1 and IMD 5 cohorts	PTA_1	Socio-economic	Our target is to reduce the pp gap between IMD Q1 and Q5 students at the RVC	Yes	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	17.4pp	16.4pp	15pp	13pp	10pp	7pp	Students from IMD Q1 are less likely to aspire to undertake a veterinary based course due to lack of early life exposure to animals, poor guidance at the school level and perceived financial barriers. It is, therefore, very ambitious for us to reduce this gap. We anticipate that as we refine our activities based upon evidence, the changes will gain momentum and thus predict narrowing the gap more in the final 3 years of the plan compared to the first two.
To reduce the gap between the RVC's Polar 4 Quintile 1 and Polar 4 Quintile 5 cohorts	PTA_2	Low Participation Neighbourhood (LPN)	Our target is to reduce the pp gap between Polar 4 Q1 and Q5 students at the RVC	Yes	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	26.4pp	25pp	23pp	21pp	19pp	16pp	Students from Polar 4 Q1 are less likely to aspire to undertake a veterinary based course due to lack of early life exposure to animals, poor guidance at the school level and perceived financial barriers. It is, therefore, very ambitious for us to reduce this gap. We anticipate that as we refine our activities based upon evidence, the changes will gain momentum and thus predict narrowing the gap more in the final 3 years of the plan compared to the first two.
To reduce the gap between RVC and national population in terms of BAME groups	PTA_3	Ethnicity	Our target is to reduce the pp gap between BAME students and White students at the RVC and bring the proportion of BAME students in line with in the national population.	Yes	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	3.2pp	2.7pp	2.2pp	1.7pp	1.1pp	0.5pp	The issue of diversity in veterinary education is well documented. Overall our gaps are not big but we are fully committed to diversifying our community as we recognise the benefits this brings to all. We are cognisant that this represents a very ambitious target for the RVC as there are cultural, religious and social barriers for some BAME students aspiring to work in the Veterinary profession.
N/A	PTA_4	Other	N/A	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
N/A	PTA_5	Other	N/A	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
N/A	PTA_6	Other	N/A	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
N/A	PTA_7	Other	N/A	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
N/A	PTA_8	Other	N/A	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A

Table 2b - Success

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
								2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
N/A	PTS_1	Other	N/A	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
N/A	PTS_2	Other	N/A	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A
N/A	PTS_3	Other	N/A	No	Other data source	Other (please include details in commentary)	0	0	0	0	0	0	N/A

