

Annex D: Template for a student protection plan

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Student protection plan for the period 2019/0

1. An assessment of the range of risks to the continuation of study for your students, how those risks may differ based on your students' needs, characteristics and circumstances, and the likelihood that those risks will crystallise

Items one through five are considered to be unlikely and hence mitigating actions are reported in this section. Items six through 9 are considered to be "less unlikely" and hence our mitigating actions are reported in section 2.

1) Financial risk

The risk that the College is unable to finance its operations is considered low because of its strong financial standing (both currently and historically), robust financial controls and the existence of a comprehensive and fully-tested business continuity plan.

The strong financial standing is illustrated by a sustained period of achieving healthy operating surplus levels (2018/19: £4.1m*; 2017/18: £5.9m*) and the generation of substantial cash reserves (2018/19: £44.6m**; 2017/18: £48.4m**). This has further been driven by positive contributions from clinical and commercial activities, increased recruitment of international students and careful management of expenditure.

The strong financial performance is underpinned by rigorous controls that contribute to ensuring the College's financial sustainability. These include the use of prudent assumptions in the budget, detailed and timely quarterly forecasts, a requirement for investments to be supported by a sound business case, robust procurement processes and regular reviews of loss making activities and service pricing. To remain sustainable, we are investing for the long term and our financial strategy has been to reach a position where we are able to make that investment both in our infrastructure and human resources. The College is therefore well placed, financially, to ensure continuity of study for all students. Where we partner with other institutions for our educational delivery, we assess their financial stability (amongst other considerations) at an early stage via due diligence procedures. Teach out clauses are included in all teaching partnership contracts. To remain sustainable, we are investing for the long term and our financial strategy has been to reach a position where we are able to make that investment both in our infrastructure and human resources.

The College has a business continuity plan in place to deal with events ranging from a minor power outage to a complete loss of site. This plan has undergone desktop testing exercises for a range of scenarios and on each occasion outcomes have proved manageable. The business continuity plan is supplemented by a comprehensive risk register and proactive risk management at a range of levels within the College

**the surplus figures above are prior to the technical adjustments required under the new SORP. Reported outturn figures were a loss of £7.0m in 2018/19 and a surplus of £8.3m in 2017/18. The loss in 2018/19 is due to an increase (£12.9m) in the pension liability relating to USS based on the 2017 valuation.*

***cash and short term deposits*

2) BREXIT

We consider the immediate impact of BREXIT on current EU students is low as we are re-assured by government statements that existing students (including those commencing study in 2020/1) will be permitted to complete their studies and benefit from SLC support for the duration of those studies where eligible. Updates on funding eligibility are noted on Fees and Funding course study pages to ensure that new students are informed of these at an early point in course selection. For existing students, we have created Brexit advice pages on our intranet which are reviewed and updated as government policy and deadlines are updated. We have written to all EU/EEA students to advise them of the need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme and individual advice has been provided via campus drop-in sessions and via the Advice Centre student advisors. We continue to monitor any impact of associated risks via our Strategic Risk Register and will adjust home and international recruitment targets to off-set any potential adverse staff/student recruitment/financial impact in the future.

3) Professional accreditation of courses

In November 2018 our BVetMed course was reviewed by all accrediting bodies (RCVS, AVMA, EAVE, SAVC and AVBC) and reaccreditation secured. In July 2019 our Nursing provision was also reviewed by RCVS; final decision is pending. We consider the risk of non-reaccreditation to be low as we report annually to these bodies (plus the Royal Society of Biology for our bioscience degrees) who have been satisfied with our financial standing, continuous course improvements and student outcomes.

4) Loss of UKVI Tier 4 license

We consider that our risk of losing our UKVI Tier 4 license to recruit and teach international students to be low. We are a Premium Sponsor with a subscription cost of c£8k p.a. to ensure we are up-to-date with policy & process changes and receive bespoke advice on our internal processes and individual decisions where necessary. Our international standing, tuition fee levels and entry requirements ensure we are recruiting genuine students who are likely to successfully complete their studies. An audit of the RVC's UKVI status (including duties as a Tier 4 sponsor) was completed by Veristat Immigration Consultancy, in March 2016. The outcomes indicated that our performance against UKVI criteria is strong. A further audit to assess on-going compliance is planned for 2019/0.

5) Optimising student health and well-being

To optimise our students' overall experience and their ongoing health and wellbeing the College has created a dedicated Directorate for Learning and Wellbeing with expansion of resources in a range of areas including learning development, personal development and employability. The Directorate has a ring-fenced budget to ensure a range of initiatives aimed at addressing and improving our students' wellbeing, as well as mental health, are prioritised.

6) Loss of specialist teaching staff

To deliver our core programme, the BVetMed, we require specialist clinicians to be employed by RVC in our teaching hospitals. Due to competition with private practice for these specialists we consider the risk of losing or not recruiting these staff to be moderate.

7) Securing adequate clinical caseload for the BVetMed/placements for FdSc Nursing

In order to provide an adequate range of clinical experiences for our BVetMed students we need to work in partnership with external organisations. There is a moderate risk that we will not be able to source or secure these contracts due to increased competition with other HEIs delivering veterinary training. For the successful delivery of our FdSc Nursing we must secure placements for our students, currently managed in partnership with the College of Animal Welfare. This contract is due for renewal in 2020/21.

8) Disruption to student learning and/or assessment due to building works

Over the last 10 years we have invested approximately £29 million on developing campus facilities and are currently investing in further campus development programmes to the value of £58 million over the next four years to ensure that our facilities remain fit-for-purpose and continue to support the learning and wellbeing of our students, particularly those with learning differences and/or additional needs. Consequently, we consider the risk of disruption to student learning and/or assessment is minimal to moderate.

9) Disruption to student learning and/or assessment due to strike action

It is not possible to evidence the number of academic staff who are registered with a trade union and may take strike action as subscriptions may be paid directly to the union. At RVC we believe numbers to be low as just 19 staff took action in the March 2018 USS dispute; this equates to just 6% of academic staff. However, we do recognise that a single academic on strike could affect a significant number of students due to lecture size so consider the potential for disruption to be moderate.

2. The measures that you have put in place to mitigate those risks that you consider to be reasonably likely to crystallise

6) Loss of specialist teaching staff

We endeavour to reward all staff for their contributions via competitive salaries and recognition of excellence via promotion and reward opportunities. As an example of our proactive approach to pay and reward we have a competitive pay scale for our clinical staff making RVC clinical veterinarians as well or better remunerated than any other HEI in the UK or Europe. We also continue to highlight the benefits of working at RVC – we operate the largest small animal referral hospital in Europe and provide additional benefits such as working within multi-disciplinary teams to facilitate advanced patient care at a tertiary referral level, extensive clinical research opportunities and opportunities to work within comparative biomedical research groups and working in one of the best equipped veterinary centres in the world. Please see <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/about/our-people/human-resources/information-for-staff/benefits-and-reward> for further information.

7) Securing adequate clinical caseload for the BVetMed/placements for FdSc Nursing

We work in partnership with external organisations and veterinary practices to provide an extensive clinical caseload in a diverse range of practices and charity centres for our undergraduate and postgraduate clinical training. These partnerships are formed and reviewed by the Collaborative Clinical Training and Development Group which reports to our Teaching Quality Committee and ultimately Academic Board. We have provided this group with legal training re: contract formation and student protection and will now undertake a review of our contract templates to ensure that they are compliant with QAA and CMA expectations. All contracts have teach-out clauses within them to ensure that students are supported for the duration of the contract and training is provided by the RVC to external staff to assure the quality of the student experience and learning. We partner with a range of providers to ensure that we are not overly-reliant on single relationships for our largest student group. Whilst we have significantly fewer students on our FdSc Nursing it cannot run without sufficient placements for our students. Should the RVC not renew its contract with the College of Animal Welfare (CAW) in 2021 the RVC would develop its own portfolio of Training Practices and provide the administrative resources required by utilising financial resources currently allocated to CAW. These would be used to expand and train the College's BVetMed placement team as well as the development of supporting IT and other systems.

8) Disruption to student learning and/or assessment due to building works

Ongoing building works causing disruption to ongoing business, poor quality staff and student environment, adverse financial impact and deterioration in external stakeholder relationships all appear prominently on our risk register. Building works inevitably involve some level of disruption but we are taking the following measures to mitigate any adverse impact on students. The programme schedule is mindful of the academic calendar with work on key teaching spaces scheduled for times of least use, such as the summer period. Where this is not possible, we will be utilising alternative teaching spaces at either campus. Additional travel costs associated with any move of teaching will be met by the RVC in line with our "Student Fees Policy 2019/20" please visit <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/about/the-rvc/academic-quality-regulations-procedures#panel-general> for further information. Additional support or concessions for students with disabilities will be considered on an individual basis related to need. Alternative delivery modes will be utilised wherever feasible – for example, streaming of lectures via Echo 360 and the availability of additional learning materials in our VLE. Where exams may be compromised by building works we will re-locate them. This may be to a different RVC building or campus. We will also utilise external but local venues with whom we already contract – for example the London Irish Centre (Camden) and the Furze Field Sports Centre (Potters Bar). Additional travel costs associated with any move of exams will be met by RVC in line with our "Student Fees Policy 2019/0" policy (see link above). Additional support or concessions for students with disabilities will be considered on an individual basis related to need.

9) Disruption to student learning and/or assessment due to strike action

It is challenging to mitigate the impact of strike action in advance as notice of action is not required of staff. However, where notice is received we inform students in advance so that unnecessary travel is avoided. Academic Registry monitor sessions and activities affected by strike action and for lectures ensure that previous learning materials (Echo 360 lecture recordings, PowerPoint presentations etc.)

are available for students as soon as possible. Where in-class assessments are compromised these are re-scheduled and if additional costs are incurred by students to attend the re-scheduled session these are met by RVC in line with our "Student Fees Policy 2019/0" – please see <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/about/the-rvc/academic-quality-regulations-procedures#panel-general>. Examinations are likely to continue in the event of a strike as invigilators are external to RVC and are managed by Academic Registry staff. In the event that strike action involves withdrawal of marking activity we may be unable to adhere to our assessment board schedule due to lack of availability of external examiners (see Section 1, Item 9 re: low percentage of RVC staff undertaking strike action). In this eventuality, we would run a provisional board to the original schedule and confirm results and awards as soon as external examiner input had been received. Should any delay in award disadvantage a student we would encourage them to submit a formal complaint which outlined the impact to them personally so that suitable resolution (including appropriate compensation) could be determined. We offer a small number of courses in collaboration with other HEIs and liaise with them re: the impact of any strike action on our students, ensuring that our students studying at other institutions are not disadvantaged.

3. Information about the policy you have in place to refund tuition fees and other relevant costs to your students and to provide compensation where necessary in the event that you are no longer able to preserve continuation of study

The Student Fees Policy 2019/0 covers the following:

- refunds for students in receipt of tuitions fee loan from the Student Loans Company;
- refunds for students who pay their own tuition fees (self-payers); and
- refunds for students whose tuition fees are paid by a sponsor.

The Policy also covers remedial arrangements for students in the event that a programme is materially changed or withdrawn. The policy covers:

- the payment of additional travel costs for students affected by a change in the location of their course;
- commitments to honour student bursaries;
- compensation for maintenance costs and lost time where it is not possible to preserve continuation of study; and
- compensation for tuition and maintenance costs where students have to transfer courses or provider.

Our course information pages also provides information on costs that are and are not included in the tuition fee.

We have significant cash and short term investments (£44.6m at July 2019) which would be sufficient to provide refunds and compensation in, what we judge to be, the unlikely event of suspension of teaching activity for one or more programmes of study and resultant significant loss of income. As noted above in sections 1, 2 and 3 we have not identified any increased risk of non-continuation of study. We are satisfied that we have sufficient financial resources to meet the financial implication of our refund and compensation policy.

We regularly monitor risks to both financial and teaching operations through our Strategic Risk Register.

4. Information about how you will communicate with students about your student protection plan

- We publicise our student protection plan (SPP) to current and future students by including it in our student-facing policy webpage which is readily accessible from the study section of our website (<https://www.rvc.ac.uk/study>).
- In addition, we include the SPP in the online enrolment process for students who have accepted the offer of a place on any of the courses that the College provides. Students are be required to acknowledge receipt in order to complete enrolment with the College.
- We remind current students of this document on an annual basis by requiring them to acknowledge receipt of the document as part of the annual online enrolment process.
- We will advertise the SPP to staff in a number of ways. It will be made available to current staff on staff pages of the intranet. It will also be provided to new staff with induction material and discussion of this document will be included in mandatory training courses for all new academic staff.

- We ensure that staff are aware of the implications of the SPP when proposing new courses by making consideration of the SPP a part of the 'Design and Approval of Courses' procedure, overseen by the Course Proposal and Development Group.
- It is also be incorporated into procedures required to make any significant changes to a course. Course change documentation is reviewed by the relevant course management committee and requires approval by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, or the Research Degrees Committee and ultimately then Academic Board. In addition, course directors will be required to include consideration of the SPP in their annual quality improvement reports that are reviewed and approved by the Teaching Quality Committee.
- The plan was initially developed in collaboration with officers from the RVC Students' Union and will be reviewed annually by the Student Development Committee (SDC). It will be formally approved by Academic Board; both of these committees have student representation. However, if any new risks emerge and/or existing risks change between reviews, an appropriate group (i.e.: those responsible for the risk and mitigations for students) will convene to update the plan to manage them appropriately.
- Should we need to implement the SPP due to material changes being made to a course, we will communicate directly with the students by both email and advertised open fora. Course directors will also arrange to meet with students affected by such changes to discuss options either in person or via video call technology. The minimum notice period we will give students when we need to make material changes to their course is 12 months (for major course changes) or three months (for minor course changes).
- If we need to implement the measures in the student protection plan, academic tutors, course directors and advice centre staff will provide support and advice for affected students both individually and collectively and we will ensure that the RVC Students' Union has appropriate resources to provide external independent advice.
- Should students wish to complain about the implementation of the SPP, they will be able to do so through the College's complaints procedure.