

# **THE ROYAL VETERINARY COLLEGE STUDENTS' UNION**

## **TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2019**

The Trustees of The Royal Veterinary College Students' Union ("the Union") present their annual report for the year ended 31 July 2019 under the Charities Act 2011, together with the audited financial statements for that year.

### **REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS**

The Royal Veterinary College Students' Union is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and a registered charity number 1153002. Its office address is as shown in the accounts.

The present Trustees, and any past Trustees who served during the year, are given in the accounts together with the names of the senior executive staff. The name of the President is also given along with the external advisers of the Charity.

### **KEY MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL**

The Royal Veterinary College Students' Union employs a General Manager, a Finance and Shop Manager and Finance Assistant to work closely with the Trustees and ensure effective management of the charity.

General Manager - Dave Sherlock-Jones.

Finance and Shop Manager – Willow Gibson

Finance Assistant – Fuchsia Stoker

The remuneration of key management personnel is set by the college, according to national bargaining agreements and agreed scales through HERA.

### **STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

The Union is governed by its Constitution adopted on 1 August 2013.

### **TRUSTEE BOARD**

The Trustee Board is responsible for the overall governance of the Union and comprise of the President / Chair, four Vice-Presidents and six elected part time officer trustees.

As a very small students' union in terms of staff, the role of the part time officers continues to contribute significantly to our success. To increase the effectiveness of the Trustees' roles and responsibilities, each has portfolio interests which require an understanding and a responsibility for specific aspects of the Union's work.

Due to the nature of the courses and ongoing placements in summer the handover and induction of officers is undertaken on a case by case basis by the officers themselves, whenever they can coordinate to meet up. Further training is also offered through the NUS and during training sessions with the Executive throughout the year. In the coming year we also plan to work with other small and specialist SU's in our region to develop more relevant training for officers in this specialised environment.

The Board delegates the exercise of certain powers in connection with the management and administration of the Union as set out below. This is controlled by requiring regular reporting back to the Board, so that all major decisions made under delegated powers can be ratified by the full Board in due course.

### **UNION COUNCIL**

Union Council acts as a consultative committee and policy forum being an important link between the management of the Union and its student members. Union Council comprises the eleven officer trustees and several members elected democratically including course representatives.

### **DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE**

As a member driven democratic organisation the health of our democratic accountability is of paramount concern to us and we are currently reviewing our constitution and regulations. Constitutional review is also one of the key parts of our Strategic Plan for the year with a working group already meeting to look at ways of making it a better fit to the organisation, shorter and with plainer English where possible.

### **GENERAL MANAGER (CEO)**

The General Manager (GM) is responsible for the day to day management of the Union's affairs and for implementing policies agreed by the Board of Trustees. The GM is assisted by a Finance and Shop Manager and a Finance Assistant and an excellent team of part time student staff, ranging from bar managers to website managers and sports support staff.

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### TRUSTEES' REPORT (continued) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2019

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#### Developing and Strengthening

The Royal Veterinary College Students' Union is an independent, dynamic and thriving membership organisation. Our primary purpose is to make life better for students at the Royal Veterinary College both inside and outside of the two main campuses. We have developed strongly in the past year due to the great work of our staff and officers, especially the President and four Vice-Presidents.

This coming year we are launching our first ever Strategic Plan aimed at strengthening the SU in certain areas, initially focusing on developing our services and visibility on the Camden Campus.

#### Risk Management

The Union is developing a risk management process to highlight issues early and report them to the board, currently this is on a case by case basis but we believe the continued implementation of a digital finance package and better support for the GM and Treasurer will help deliver a more formal risk management process. The college has employed a full time Students' Union Finance and Shop Manager and Part-Time Finance Administrator to support the General Manager and Board. The Board has continued to update their corporate risk register during this academic year working closely with the college Governance Team to develop a register that is relevant to the SU.

#### Principal Risks and Uncertainties

The Board reviews the Union's current and planned future activities in the light of any major risks arising from time to time and the effectiveness of systems and procedures designed to manage them. The principal risks and uncertainties are included in our current risk register but the main ones currently facing the Union are considered to be:

- the possible reduction in funding by the University caused by:
  - Their own financial health including their heavy investment in infrastructure over the last three years which is continuing on at the Hawkshead Campus
  - Their perception of the value of the role of the Union
  - Changes in how education is funded
- The financial health of the University is itself dependent on HEFCE funding, which in turn is susceptible to factors beyond the control of the Union, including:
  - Popularity of the Academic offering
  - Popularity as a result of Academic standards
  - Popularity as a result of the attractiveness of the campus and its facilities
  - Popularity driven by affordability and fee levels
  - Other Demographics
  - reputational damage in the unlikely event of a high profile activity by a student
  - reputational damage in the unlikely event of a high profile activity by a trustee

Our plans and strategies for managing risk include maintaining effective internal controls, a risk register, incident-reporting and monitoring systems and insurance cover wherever appropriate.

#### FUNDRAISING

The charity had no fundraising activities requiring disclosure under S162A of the Charities Act 2011.

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## TRUSTEES' REPORT (continued) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2019

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### OBJECTS, OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNION

The objects of the Union are the advancement of education of Students at the Royal Veterinary College for the public benefit by:

- Promoting the welfare and interests of the Students of the Royal Veterinary College;
- Representing the student body of the Royal Veterinary College to external bodies and to the management, committees and Council of the Royal Veterinary College; and
- Encouraging the personal development of the Students of the Royal Veterinary College through providing social, cultural, educational and recreational activities organised in clubs, societies, symposiums and discussion groups and through developing and maintaining appropriate facilities to accommodate such activities.

The Union will seek at all times to encourage and support diversity in the student body through ensuring the Union's decision making and service provision are solely to advance the above objects, and are made independently and without discrimination with regard to race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, disability, medical conditions, or political beliefs.

The Trustees confirm that they have complied with their duty in section 17(5) of the Charities Act 2011 to have due regard to the guidance concerning the operation of public benefit published by the Charity Commission.

Our principal activities to achieve these Objects are campaigning, representation, provision of social activities and, the organisation of sporting and recreational activities and opportunities. The objectives of those activities for the year, and the Union's achievements against them, are discussed below.

### OUR MISSION

- to improve the quality of life and learning for students at the RVC

To achieve our vision, The Royal Veterinary College Students' Union is starting the first year of a five year Strategic Plan, in the first year this will focus on developing engagement in the Camden Campus, reviewing our governance and constitution and providing a business case for new staff. We will work hard to show members the value of deeper engagement with The Royal Veterinary College Students' Union through the scope of our activities and leadership opportunities. Additionally we will identify valuable new opportunities for all our members and provide a robust platform on which they can create more opportunities for each other and improve the quality of life and learning for all students at the RVC.

Over the years the RVC Students' Union has consistently evolved to meet its mission statement of representing the student body and maximising the student experience at the RVC by any means it deems necessary.

This year in office has been one of immense self-reflection for the organisation. We have decided to look inwards as well as outwards, so that we can explore the views of the students we represent and find areas where much more improvement is needed. Our focus for the year was ensuring we adapt our services to the changing demographics of the student body. Considering this, we decided to invest heavily to form our very first RVC SU Strategic Plan by recruiting research firm, Red Brick. The outcome of producing a written strategic plan will allow us to continuously reflect and refer back to our purpose as an organisation, and make sure we remain accountable to an increasingly time limited student body, which we serve. Underpinning this we aim to then develop operational plans and an Engagement Strategy to combat areas where we have seen a drop off in student activity.

In terms of representation, we perhaps do not have not go much further than the Camden Construction Project to appreciate the importance of individual course year reps in feeding back the views of their cohorts. Through the work of our current and previous SU Post Grad and Camden Officers we ensured that the College was always in the loop of the student opinion, which resulted in issues being resolved as quickly as possible. Despite this, there is much to learn from our experience at Camden, and we will use the insight gained to ensure that the student experience in the HH Construction project will be a much more pleasant one.

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### **TRUSTEES' REPORT (continued) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2019**

The achievements of individual SU Officers whilst bearing in mind that these are full-time students and part-time officers is quite astounding. I will include some brief examples of the work of our officers below. Our Fresher's events this year included an increased number of non-alcoholic events and were very well received by the students. Freshers Fair continues to be a critical event for showcasing all the opportunities available to our students. The drop-in talks held by BVA, BVNA and the Royal Society of Biology were deemed very useful by the students, and we will continue to build on this for the next year.

RVC vs Surrey varsity, which was led by our VP Activities and Campaigns was an immense success, and I am very pleased to announce that we maintained our winning streak, despite the shield somehow ending up on the coach back to Surrey... We have continued to build on our Sports and Societies Ball to celebrate the incredible impact of the work by our clubs and societies, as well as extraordinary individuals who well and truly go above and beyond to maximise the experience of their colleagues.

This year's sporting and societies highlights include our Tri Club won the 151-year-old United Hospitals Shield in the London Colleges Indoor Competition for the first time ever, our men's and women's football teams winning their leagues and getting promoted, men's hockey won their league. Our Equestrian team has placed well in regionals with the A and C teams competing in the Nationals. Our Performing Art Society put on two shows a pantomime at Christmas and the very popular Urinetown in March, and the Music Society has put on several performance and collaborated with the Advice Centre for University Mental Health Day under the theme 'Find Your Voice'.

This year has also seen the opening of our Activities Studio in Camden as part of the major refurbishment works. This is a student run facility which provides a variety of classes ranging from Ballroom to yoga and provides a space for many student groups to meet and train or rehearse. We have two student Sports Assistants, trained to carry out gym inductions and put on classes throughout the year, this has been a great success.

Our course reps training our Vice President Representation and Communication has increasingly been described as essential and truly engaging, we now annually take them all on a weekend training session once they have been elected in November. The ROI for our course reps has increased dramatically, not only do course reps benefit from professional training via our external facilitator, they are also invited to social events organised by our VP Rep Comms throughout the year. Their engagement with the college committee process is noticeably improving year on year as trained reps go through the system, many staying on for several years and bringing their experience to the fore.

Our VP Welfare has been busy organising events such as Mug Painting during Freshers' with the chaplaincy, welfare "care packages" for students to pick up, and recently a very successful Salsa booking. Of course, the officer is also one of the first points of contact for students who wish to have a chat regarding their welfare, which as you can imagine can be quite prominent during times of high stress. We carried out many exam stress events, including the ever popular puppy days.

In addition, we have had many national and multi-national events organised by our officers, such as AVS Congress, which was hosted at the RVC with 310 attendees, all organised by RVC students and the SU. The IVSA Group exchange featured vet students from around the world (including South Africa) visiting the RVC, and our students visiting their schools in turn again all organised by RVC students and the SU. The RVC chapter of SAVMA has also been very active with many events including Thanksgiving, the White Coat Ceremony. Our many presentations, grants awarded to individual students and support for the Zoo Soc Symposium. Five representatives also went to the AVMA convention in Denver and three to the SAVMA Symposium in Athens. This all reflects on the engagement our students have on both a National and International Level.

Environment Officers have been busy to maintain the NUS Green Impact Bronze award we achieved last year and are currently running a campaign on changing the college's search engine from Google to Ecosia, which is a company that uses a proportionate amount of its revenue to fund tree planting projects around the world.

**RVCSU President / Chair – Gorprit Singh 2018-2019**

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#### FINANCE, BARS, SHOPS AND ENTERTAINMENT

This year we posted a small surplus in both bars due to the excellent and consistent work of the bar managers in keeping down costs and increasing turnover, this was especially significant with the Haxby Bar in Camden, where the newly refurbished bar made a surplus for the first time.

The shop has developed with the SU purchasing an embroidery machine to make ad hoc orders more achievable within a short timescale. Initially we were looking to entirely do all our own embroidery but in practise this has proven not to be cost effective so we will revert to bulk ordering embroidered clothing and using the machine for more ad hoc orders.

We had a very successful Freshers period with wristbands for Freshers fortnight selling out. We sold out many of the major events and in general the whole period was well received by our students. Listening to our membership we made more of an effort to provide alcohol free events.

We did have a tough time selling our Christmas Ball this year as the college moved some exams to the day after the event meaning a whole cohort of students did not buy tickets or attend creating an approximately £8,000 deficit on the event but we clawed this back over the year by tightening our belt on all other spending.

This was our second year running Freshers Fair in the Sports and Wellbeing Centre in the HH Campus which was much needed as with record numbers of students the whole space is utilised.

#### AFFILIATIONS

During the year the Union affiliated to the following organisations in order to support its core objectives:

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
The National Union of Students (NUS)	<b>7,980</b>	6,700
British Universities & Colleges Sports Association	<b>7,080</b>	4,482
British Veterinary Association	<b>13,882</b>	10,818
Association of Veterinary Students	<b><u>2,788</u></b>	<b><u>1,790</u></b>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>31,730</u></b>	<b><u>23,788</u></b>

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#### **FINANCIAL SUMMARY**

During the year the Union received £212,000 (2018: £201,600) in direct grant funding from the College. The Union overall made a surplus of £14,593 (2018: £8,802) in the year of which a deficit of £4,400 (2018: surplus of £13,620) was from restricted funding spent by sports teams and societies and surplus of £18,993 (2018: deficit of £4,818) from the Main fund. Free reserves at the year-end were £34,473 (2018: £13,314). The closing fund balances in the restricted funds was £48,332 (2018: £52,732) and in the unrestricted funds was £44,687 (2018: £25,694).

#### **RESERVE POSITION**

As the General Manager, President and four VP's are paid directly by the College, the SU has not yet developed a full reserves policy, this will change as the SU develops but currently our target for reserves is £30,000, this will not be achievable in one year but a plan to accrue this needs to start being put in to action.

The SU settled on £30,000 as a guide figure to cover the costs of our NUS affiliation, six months costs funding our clubs and societies and underwriting our funding of the shop and the SU bars. Working with such a small amount of money for a block grant always means it is difficult to build up such reserves so the SU so we are looking at ways of diversifying income and assigning any surplus from this to a reserve fund.

This report was approved by the Trustees on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020 and signed on their behalf by:

Jade Urquhart-Gilmore

**President and Chair of the Board of Trustees 2019 – 2020**

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