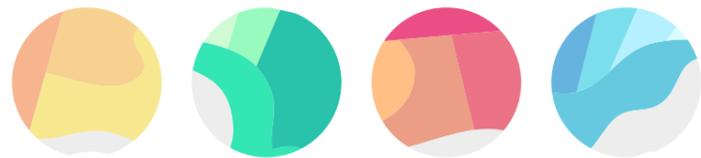


# RCVS Diversity and Inclusion Group Strategy

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2021



## Statement of intent:

**We need diverse and inclusive veterinary professions, where everyone can flourish and be themselves, both professionally and personally. Bias, discrimination and harassment exists within our professions: we need to identify it, reject it and change our culture for the better.**

## Welcome from the Chair

**The RCVS set up the Diversity and Inclusion Group (DIG) in 2019 to work with stakeholders from across the veterinary team to ensure that the veterinary professions are diverse and inclusive, and that everyone can be themselves, both personally and professionally.**

The DIG has objectives and principles, which you can read about shortly, and our work is supported by the current RCVS Strategic Plan, which is emphatic that the RCVS “will have the courage to take a leadership role within the professions, to ensure that the pervading culture is healthy, sustainable, inclusive, innovative and respectful; through this, we will develop confident veterinary professionals.”

Yet these must not just be nice words. We need to take action, and the conversations that support this can often be difficult and challenging. But although this may not be easy, all of us will benefit from professions that include many different points of view, experiences and contributions. Be in no doubt: this work is of benefit to all of us, and to animal health and welfare, and public health.

We must learn from other professions and sectors who are further ahead than we are, and must also put our hands up where things have not moved as quickly as possible or messages have gone awry, discuss these situations with accountability but not blame, learn from them and move forward.

It's vitally important that we take bold, concrete steps towards encouraging a broader range of applicants to veterinary and veterinary nursing schools or we will be missing out on some great talent. It's not enough to say 'our door is open' we need to push it from the inside to allow a greater diversity of potential students to join us, and those individuals need to be able to see role models on the other side of the door, too. This takes hard and active work, not just saying 'things will change with time'.

Once we have achieved a wider pool of applicants to the professions, we must ensure the processes via which students are selected are fair, and that we are committed to supporting students from minority groups within the learning environment.

Finally, there is no point in encouraging people from diverse groups into our professions if they are not respected and encouraged once there – we need to develop working cultures in which everyone can flourish, and clear and transparent reporting structures for if things go wrong.



**“These must not just be nice words. We need to take action, and the conversations that support this can often be difficult and challenging.”**

All of this needs to be underpinned by regulations that support the best outcomes and give a framework and moral backing to change for the better, for all our sakes.

So, thank you to all of you who have opened this document – that's the first step – and a huge thanks to those who are already active in trying to make a difference, including all of the wonderfully passionate and committed members of the DIG and the RCVS staff team that supports us. If you have any questions, or would like to get involved, please do contact us.

We already have veterinary professions of which we can be proud, in so many ways, but we can do better. Improved diversity and inclusion needs a keen focus from all of us, the next generation of veterinary professionals is watching, and the clock is ticking.

**Dr Niall Connell**  
Chair, RCVS Diversity and Inclusion Group



# About the RCVS Diversity and Inclusion Group

The RCVS Diversity and Inclusion Group was set up in 2019 and reports to the RCVS Advancement of the Professions Committee.

Its membership includes RCVS Officers, Council members and staff, together with representatives from organisations across the veterinary and veterinary nursing team, ie:

- Association of Veterinary Students
- British Veterinary Association
- British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society
- British Veterinary LGBT+ Group
- British Veterinary Nursing Association
- Major Employers Group
- Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
- Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons
- Veterinary Schools Council

**Its Terms of Reference are as follows:**

1. To develop a set of key messages to help ensure that all stakeholders understand the benefits of a diverse and inclusive veterinary team, which could form a statement of intent.
2. To make an assessment of the current state of diversity within the veterinary professions, taking account of ethnicity, socio-economic group, gender, sexuality, disabilities and any other relevant groups, based on available statistics, and to benchmark these against other professions. The commissioning of some research may be required at this stage.
3. To develop an understanding of the barriers to a more diverse profession, considering factors such as selection and recruitment to veterinary school; recruitment to the workplace; attitudes and support within the workplace and other aspects – this would involve liaison with specific groups that represent the interests of minorities who may not be represented on the WG.
4. To consider what the role of the RCVS might be in changing the culture, making direct interventions, encouraging change from others and supporting other

relevant organisations. This would include a review of what other regulators do, both within and outside the veterinary profession, in the UK and overseas.

5. To ensure RCVS staff, Council and committee members and other groups have adequate awareness of the issues and are provided with training and development to mitigate any unhelpful behaviours. This may include surveys to understand current levels of conscious and unconscious bias.
6. To establish what success would look like, how long this might take and how it might be measured.

**Principles**

All those in the Group have agreed to work in accordance with the following principles:

- a) **Safe-space** – by its nature, the subject matter we will discuss may be personal and difficult for some members of the Group. The DIG will be a safe non-judgemental space for discussion. Matters will only be reported in minutes against a name if there is a specific pre-agreed reason to do so.
- b) **Future-focused** – although we will need to spend time understanding the issues, we will then commit to moving forward and not spending time narrating the problems on an ongoing basis.
- c) **Solutions-oriented** – we need to take a pragmatic approach to discovering concrete actions we can take, and understand where we can have best influence.
- d) **Evidence-based** – where possible, our interventions will be backed by evidence.
- e) **Democratic** – everyone in the room has equal voice, they represent their stakeholder groups but also bring their personal experience to bear.
- f) **All in it together** – problems are not just for the RCVS to fix, but for all stakeholders within the profession to work on together.





# Diversity statement

**Members of the DIG, and the RCVS more widely, have agreed to the following diversity statement:**

In our work to enhance society through improved animal health and welfare, we believe diversity and inclusion are fundamental to our core values. No one should be discriminated against because of any difference, for example, those characteristics that are defined by the Equality Act 2010, that is age, ability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity/paternity, race, religion or belief, or sex, together with other factors such as socio-economic status.

We aim to ensure that our regulatory policies and standards stimulate equity of opportunity and encourage diversity and inclusivity in terms of access to, and work within, the veterinary professions, and access to veterinary services.

Within our own team, we strive to generate an inclusive environment where each individual is valued for their uniqueness and recognised for their diverse experience, and where everyone can be themselves, both personally and professionally.

It is only by adhering to these values that we can best serve the public, our professions and animal health and welfare.



**“It is vital that we are all able to work within a profession that is open, trusting, safe and most importantly diverse. It is wonderful to see the RCVS lead our profession on this journey whilst taking an active role in promoting inclusion and diversity.”**

**Dan Makin, British Veterinary LGBT+ representative on DIG**





# Workstreams

To make a real difference, we need to acknowledge that concepts about the veterinary profession and what it means to be a vet, are built in children's minds from an early age. If we wish to attract a wider pool of applicants to veterinary education, it is important to start the process of communication as early as possible.

Meanwhile, it is reckless and dangerous to attract diverse applicants if the support and culture they need to flourish is not there, either within education or within the profession at large.

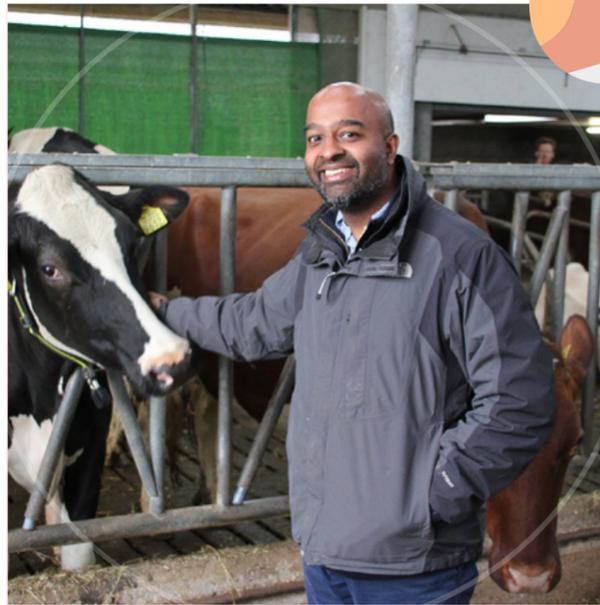
Our six workstreams therefore start by aiming to change the views of school children about the accessibility and relevance of veterinary careers, helping to develop supporting academic communities, through to influencing those professionals who will be employing them.

There are also streams that focus on the behaviour within our own organisations, and wider culture change.

**Our six workstreams are:**

1. Recruitment to vet/veterinary nurse training and education
2. Retention and support within the vet/VN schools at under- and post-graduate levels
3. Recruitment within the profession
4. Retention and support within the professions
5. DIG member organisational (internal) policies and procedures
6. Culture change

These are reflected in the action plan, which is reviewed and updated at every meeting.



**“It is important we embrace and support diversity in all its forms in our people, to help foster inclusiveness and strength. Having the RCVS create and facilitate the Diversity and Inclusion Group, important conversations are being undertaken to coordinate action for real change, which will benefit everyone who are lucky enough to belong to the veterinary profession.”**  
**Navaratnam Partheeban, British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society representative on DIG**





# Focus of activity

When looking to address culture change, particularly where progress has been slow in the past, it's tempting to put all resources into supporting those who have been affected by poor behaviour. While this is important, it's also key to ensure a good balance of activities takes place across both preventive and reactive areas, incorporating systemic long-term change and more short-term support.

Threaded through our workstreams are three strands of interlinking activity:

- 1. Promote** – what we can do to promote better opportunities and experiences for those from minority groups – eg breaking down systemic barriers, offering proactive and positive support, developing inclusive policies, encouraging and celebrating the positive aspects of diversity – this is where we start to get a more level playing field
- 2. Understand** – what we can do to help everyone understand how their behaviour can impact on other people's opportunities and experience – training, anti-racism activities, culture change etc – this is where we help those not in minority groups understand why this is so important and how they can be allies
- 3. Support** – what we can put in place to support those who may be at the sharp end of poor behaviour, such as better reporting lines, safe spaces for conversation, strong lines and policies for organisations to take in the event of something going wrong, how to call out poor behaviour – and a visible commitment to doing this



**“We live in a multicultural society and so it is essential that our veterinary profession reflects that diversity. The DIG has a role to identify the issues that currently limit broadening our demographic but policies need the support of the RCVS in order to implement them.”**

**Professor Rob Pettitt, Veterinary Schools Council representative on DIG**



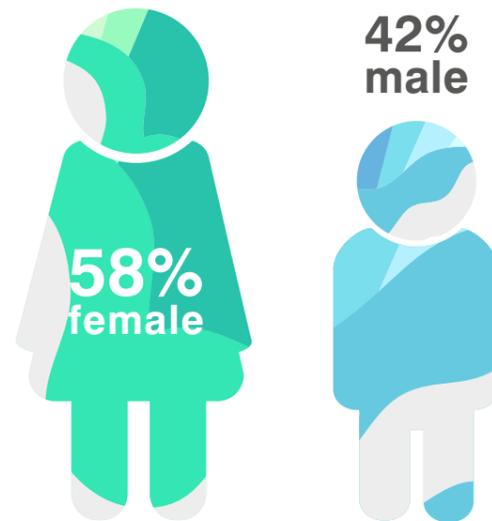


# Demographics data: Veterinary Surgeons

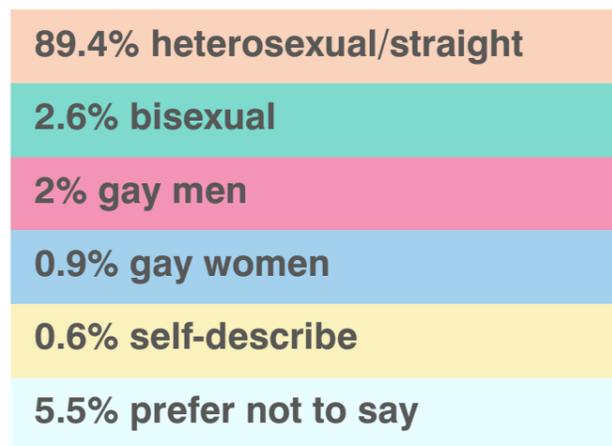
## Average age



## Gender

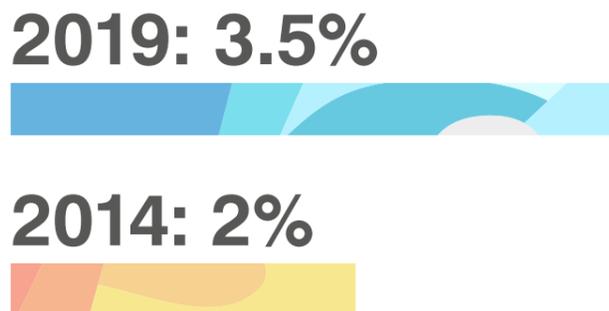


## Sexual orientation

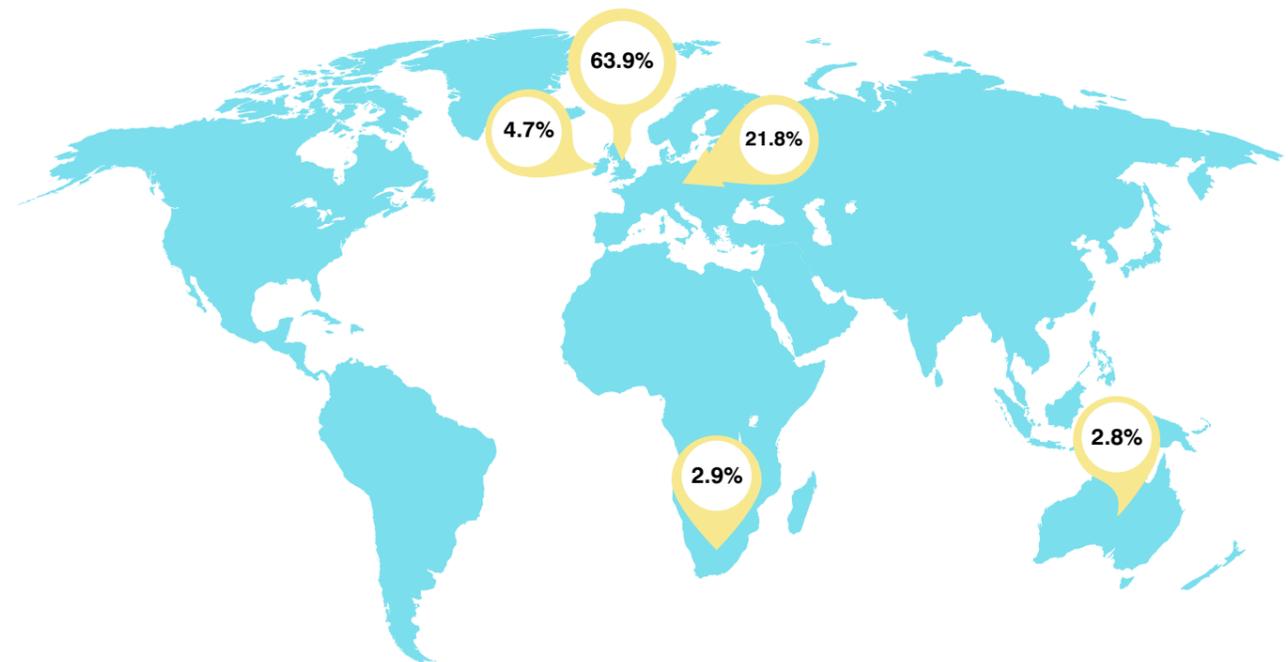


## Ethnic background

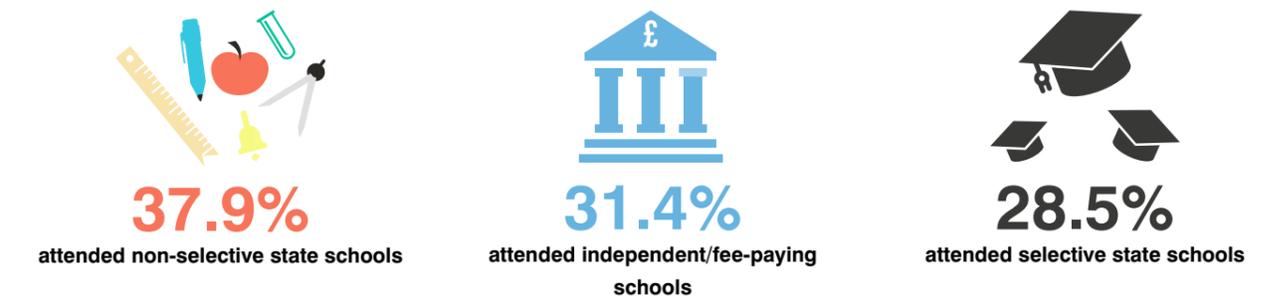
Respondents from black and minority ethnic backgrounds



## Place of qualification (top 5)



## Social mobility



## Disability or medical condition (physical or mental) that limits work

	2019 N	2019 %
Yes	858	6.7
No	12,017	93.3
Total	12,875	100



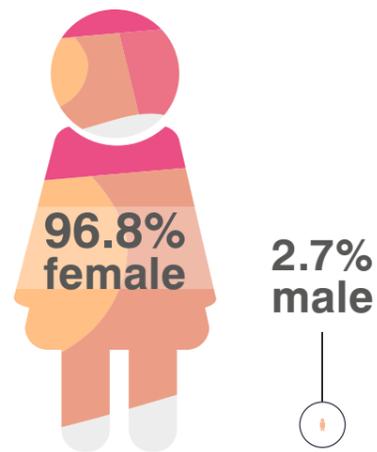


# Demographics data: Veterinary Nurses

## Average age of respondents



## Gender



## Sexual orientation



## Ethnic background

Respondents from black and minority ethnic backgrounds

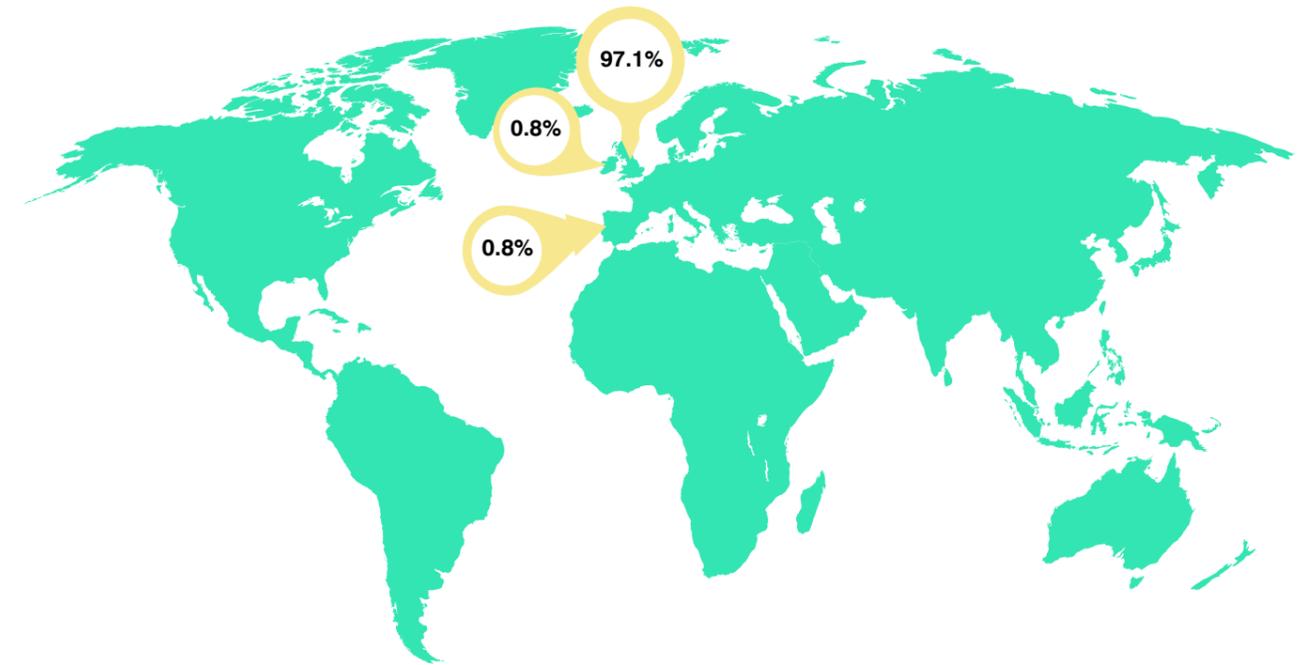
**2019: 1.9%**



**2014: 1.1%**



## Place of qualification (top 3)



## Social mobility



**73.8%**

attended non-selective state schools



**5.2%**

attended independent/fee-paying schools



**19.7%**

attended selective state schools

## Disability or medical condition (physical or mental) that limits work

	2019 N	2019 %
Yes	554	7.4
No	6,949	92.6
Total	7,503	100





# Some current projects

The action plan includes our current operational activities and these are subject to regular update and review. The following examples, while not exhaustive, give a flavour of current projects:



	Workstreams/Focus	Promote	Understand	Support
1.	Recruitment to vet/veterinary nurse training and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop case studies, ambassadors and careers materials and communicate to children from a young age</li> <li>Review work experience requirements</li> <li>Update RCVS documentation around access requirements</li> <li>RCVS consultation on new legislative requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commission new research to better understand the barriers</li> <li>Host joint RCVS/VSC roundtable to better understand issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with organisations that support university applications from those from diverse backgrounds</li> <li>Consider mentor schemes</li> </ul>
2.	Retention and support within the vet/VN schools at under- and post-graduate levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update RCVS veterinary school standards to reflect our diversity and inclusion aspirations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement outcomes of RCVS/VSC Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority student support roundtable and host similar for VN students</li> <li>Training for faculty on diversity and inclusion, and how to support individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear reporting systems and support for those who suffer from discrimination on extra-mural studies</li> <li>Encourage setting up of student-led support networks</li> </ul>
3.	Recruitment within the profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage take up of workplace awards/ standards, for example, Stonewall, Disability Confident, Race at Work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help employers understand the business, moral and societal case for diversity and inclusion</li> <li>Understand first-hand the barriers faced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with employers to develop toolkit to support better recruitment advertising and practices and encourage people to call out poor examples</li> </ul>
4.	Retention and support within the professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop case studies and positive role models</li> <li>Strengthen standards regarding staff support within RCVS Practice Standards Scheme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage members of the veterinary team in a wide variety of workplace types to attend diversity and inclusion training eg via RCVS Leadership MOOC</li> <li>Produce materials that support difficult conversations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusion of strong wording in the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct to enable more confident reporting of poor conduct and behaviour</li> </ul>
5.	DIG member organisational (internal) policies and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RCVS and other organisations to ensure policies around membership/registration, standards, complaints, meetings &amp; events, grants &amp; awards, marketing &amp; outreach, and employment promote and support diversity and inclusion (where applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a toolkit to support in-house conversations around diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage all veterinary organisations to have regular discussion around diversity and inclusion and to have a visible statement</li> </ul>
6.	Culture change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work to improve diversity of governance and leadership via visibility, demonstration of core values and review of recruitment/nomination processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure diversity and inclusion is included on congress agendas, within CPD etc and that outputs are disseminated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enable, via DIG, a safe space for organisations to discuss their progress and where they need help going forward; to support and communicate each other's efforts</li> </ul>

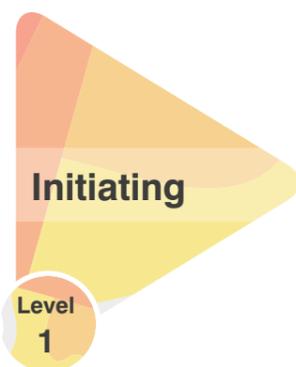


# Evaluation and progress

Each of our workstreams has specific goals and evaluation parameters within the operational plan, but it is also important to keep in mind a more strategic view of progress.

An excellent model has been proposed by the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAE) and Science Council (SC) which facilitates reflection on the developing maturity and impact of streams of work. The following model is adapted from that, with recognition of the huge amount of work that will have gone into the RAE/SC framework.

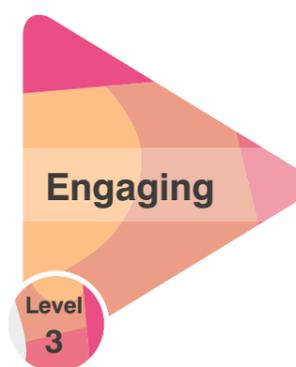
## Progressing our case – a four-stage approach



Case for change is **EMERGING**, data and insights being gathered, action tends to be informal, isolated, bottom-up, one-offs



**CASE FOR CHANGE** is clear, quantative data gathered, responsibility and accountability being formalised, guidelines being developed, activity being launched, connections being made



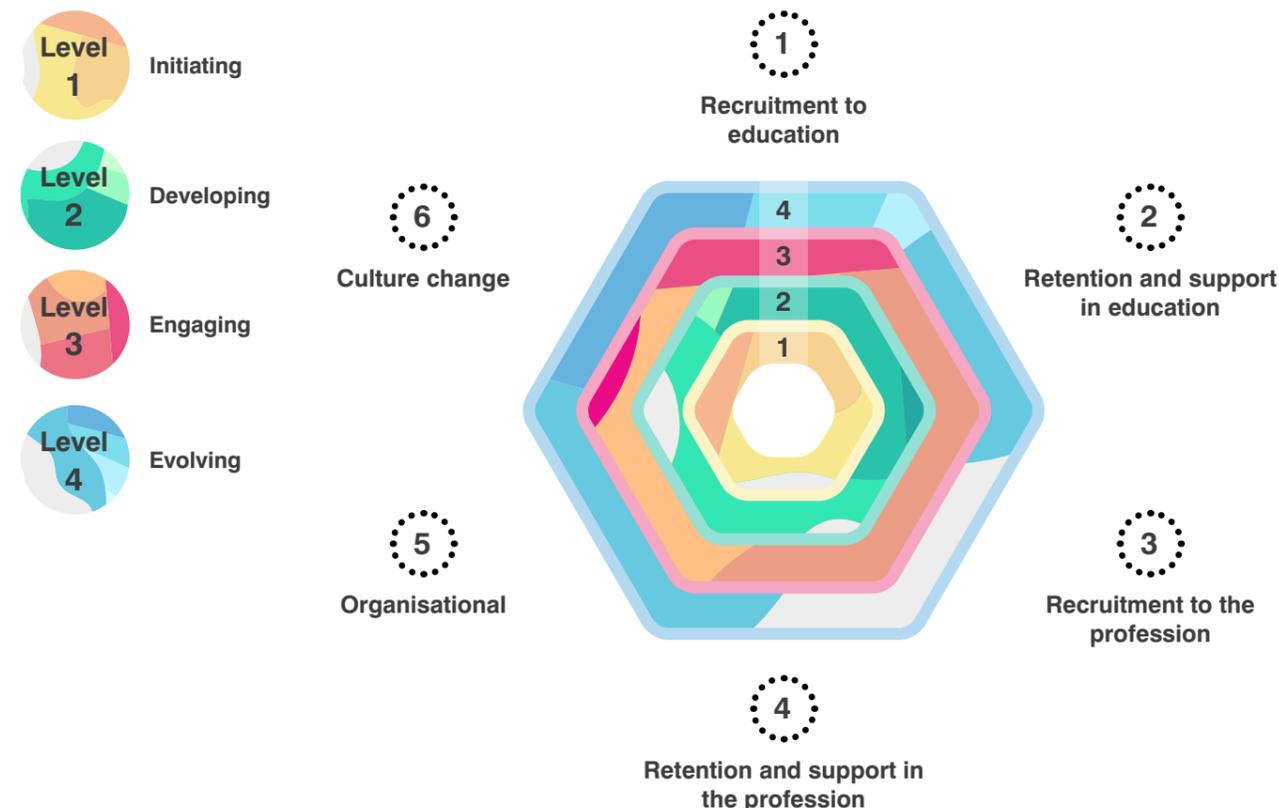
Case for change is **WELL ESTABLISHED**, qualitative data being gathered and shared, sustained senior level support in place, skills and capabilities being built, activity catching on, high levels of engagement and collaboration, clear signs of change



Case for change constantly **EVOLVING**, complex qualitative data being routinely gathered and shared, high levels of dialogue, collaboration and learning, clear evidence of change in individual behaviour and organisational culture

## Overview of progression across all streams

On a regular basis, we will reflect on where each of our six streams of activity sits in terms of the four-stage approach to progress, using the template below. This will help us to develop plans to move our activity to the next stages.



With a profession as vast as veterinary, change and progression are the keys to success and sustainability within our community. Hence why the work of the RCVS Diversity and Inclusion Group is so essential, to ensure that access, support and the ability to succeed are open to everyone, across all aspects of our amazing profession. **Izzie Arthur, Association of Veterinary Students representative on DIG**

