

History of the veterinary legislation in the UK

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons exercises functions under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 but was brought into being by a Royal Charter of 1844. A Supplemental Royal Charter of 2015 sets out the objects of the College, gives it power to undertake activities in order to achieve its objects, and makes it the regulator of registered veterinary nurses.

The Act of 1966 was to a large extent a consolidation of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1881, which was amended a number of times and in particular by the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1948. The 1844 Charter was also amended repeatedly, and most of its provisions were revoked by a Supplemental Royal Charter of 1967. The 1967 Charter has in turn been superseded by the Charter of 2015.

<p>Royal Charter of 1844</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognised the "veterinary art" as a profession and incorporated the College; • gave the College power to administer examinations which students of the London and Edinburgh veterinary colleges, and of any future veterinary college which might receive royal recognition, had to pass if they wished to be styled veterinary surgeons and have the privileges of members of a profession; • provided for the College to be managed by a Council, the members of which were to be elected at the annual general meeting of the members. The Council was to have 24 members, six of whom were to be subject to re-election each year; and • gave the Council power to appoint staff, and the College power to hold property and to dispose of it with the concurrence of the Council.
-------------------------------------	--

**Supplemental
Charter of 1876**

- gave the College power to create Fellows (who had to be at least 26 years old, have practised for five years or been professors in a veterinary school and passed a test or special examination). The College could also elect Honorary and Foreign Associates;
- restricted membership of the Council and of the Board of Examiners to Fellows (plus the members of the existing Council) with effect from 1886;
- allowed members of the College to vote by post;
- gave the Council power to remove a member from the register of members (but did not specify the grounds on which this might be done);
- required the Council to appoint a Registrar (who could be a member of the College, or not) on the day of the annual general meeting, to hold office until the next AGM;
- required the Registrar to maintain a Register of the names and addresses of members of the College, and, on payment of one shilling, to certify whether or not anyone was a member;
- gave the Council power to appoint a secretary from time to time, the secretary not necessarily being a member of the College; and
- conferred specific powers to hold and dispose of land and invest money.

**Supplemental
Charter of 1879**

- gave effect to an agreement between the College and the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland in which the Society would stop issuing "certificates of qualification to practise the veterinary art" and in return the College agreed to admit existing holders of such certificates as members; and
- required the use of voting papers for all Council elections in general meetings.

<p>Veterinary Surgeons Act 1881</p>	<p>The preamble to the Act referred to the expediency of allowing people requiring the aid of a veterinary surgeon to distinguish between qualified and unqualified practitioners. The Act accordingly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• laid a statutory duty on the Registrar to keep the Register for which the Supplemental Charter of 1876 provided;• required the Council of the College to publish the Register and laid down detailed procedures for keeping it up to date;• placed the College under a duty to make provision, as permitted by the charters, for the examination of students of the Royal Veterinary College, of the veterinary colleges in Scotland and of such veterinary colleges as might be established in Ireland. Those who passed the examination were to be admitted and registered as members of the College;• qualified the power in the 1876 Charter to remove a member from the Register (otherwise than on the occasion of their dying or otherwise ceasing to practise) by specifying that this should only be done with the consent of the member, or where an entry had been incorrectly made, or where the member had been convicted of a misdemeanour or higher offence or was guilty of conduct disgraceful in a professional respect. The Act also provided for appeals to the Privy Council and for the Council to decide on the restoration of a name to the Register;• entitled a colonial or foreign practitioner with a veterinary diploma recognised by the College to be registered and "become to all intents a member of the said Royal College";
--	---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> entitled unregistered persons who had practised veterinary surgery for the five years before the passing of the Act to be included in a Register of existing practitioners, but they were not to be deemed to be members of the College; made it an offence for a non-member of the College to use any title implying membership. From the end of 1883 it became unlawful for anyone other than a member of the College or an existing holder of the certificate of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland to be styled a veterinary surgeon or veterinary practitioner, and they were not to have power to recover in any court any fee or charge for performing any veterinary operation, giving veterinary attendance or advice, acting as veterinary surgeons or veterinary practitioners, or practising veterinary surgery; gave College power to institute prosecutions under the Act, and a private person could not do so without the consent of the College; and confirmed the charters, except to the extent that they were altered by or inconsistent with the Act, and allowed them to be amended or added to by supplemental Royal Charters so long as the new provision was consistent with the Act.
<p>Supplemental Charter of 1883</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gave the Council powers to set a minimum age for candidates for examination or admission as members, to increase admission fees up to thirteen guineas, and to grant diplomas of membership to foreign and colonial practitioners; and provided for the President, Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and Secretary to remain in office until the Council meeting at which their successors were appointed. The Registrar was to be appointed at that same Council meeting rather than on the day of the AGM.

<p>Supplemental Charter of 1892</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revoked the provision of the 1876 Charter excluding most ordinary members from membership of the Council; • confirmed that the President and Vice-Presidents were to be elected by Council members from their number. The size of the Council was fixed at 32, with eight members retiring annually; • Council members ceased to be eligible to be examiners, and vice versa; and • confirmed the College's power to administer an examination in general educational knowledge before the first professional examination.
<p>Veterinary Surgeons Amendment Act 1900</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extended the disciplinary jurisdiction of the College to holders of the veterinary certificate of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland as if they were members of the College
<p>Supplemental Charter of 1914</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • laid down new rules for filling occasional vacancies on Council; • limited the number of Vice-Presidents to two; • reduced the age limit for Fellows to 23 and the minimum period in practice to two years; and • gave the College power to award a Diploma in Veterinary State Medicine.

<p>Veterinary Surgeons Act (1881) Amendment Act 1920</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduced an annual fee of a guinea to be payable by all members practising in the UK (apart from holders of the veterinary certificate of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland). Unpaid fees were to be recoverable as debts; • entitled those registered under the 1881 Act as existing practitioners to style themselves veterinary surgeons and to be subject to the disciplinary jurisdiction of the College as if they were members; and • provided that anything which would be an offence under the 1881 Act if committed by an individual would be an offence if committed by a registered company or provident society.
<p>Supplemental Charter of 1923</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allowed teachers in the veterinary schools to be appointed as internal examiners in RCVS examinations, alongside two external examiners, and allowed ordinary members of the College to act as examiners; and • changed the rules on advertising the AGM.

<p>Veterinary Surgeons (Irish Free State Agreement) Act 1932</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confirmed an agreement between the British Government and the Irish Free State, provided for the relevant UK enactments to have effect subject to the agreement, and provided for the charters to be modified as necessary by further supplemental charters. The powers, jurisdictions and authorities of the College under the Acts and charters in relation to persons, colleges and matters in the Free State were to continue, but an Irish Free State Veterinary Council was to be set up to register persons entitled to practise in the State; • allowed Council to have four extra members to represent members of the College resident in the Free State, and those four were also to be members of the Irish Free State Veterinary Council; • provided that anyone registered as a member of the College was entitled to be registered also in the Free State, • provided for co-operation over disciplinary proceedings; and • allowed the College to continue to hold examinations in the Free State, but with a local internal examiner and with power for the Irish Free State Veterinary Council to appoint observers.
<p>Supplemental Charter of 1932</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modified the provisions concerning the constitution of the Council in order to give effect to the agreement with the Irish Free State; • gave the Council power to set membership and examination fees in byelaws from time to time; • gave power to appoint two Fellows each year without examination, provided they were members of 20 years' standing); and • gave power to institute postgraduate diplomas in Tropical Veterinary Medicine and other branches of veterinary science.

**Veterinary
Surgeons Act 1948**

- amended the 1881 Act extensively but did not repeal it;
- introduced recognised university degree courses and examinations as the main route to registration;
- provided for the Privy Council to recognise UK veterinary degrees after consulting the College and entitled the holders of recognised degrees to be registered as veterinary surgeons and become members of the College. The College was given the function of supervising courses leading up to recognised degrees or to the RCVS examination;
- made it unlawful for anyone other than a registered veterinary surgeon, or someone entered in the Supplementary Veterinary Register, to practise veterinary surgery (whether or not for payment). Exceptions were set out in Schedule 1 to the Act and Ministers were given power to make further exceptions in exemption orders;
- required the Registrar to list in a Supplementary Veterinary Register any applicant of the age of 28 or more who had for seven out of the last ten years been engaged in the UK in diagnosing diseases of animals and giving medical or surgical treatment to animals;
- gave the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries power to license an employee of a voluntary society to give treatment;
- reconstituted the Council of the College with 20 members elected by members of the College resident outside Eire, two nominees of each university with a recognised degree, and four Privy Council appointees;
- revised the disciplinary provisions of the 1881 Act, with the appointment of a Disciplinary Committee. Suspension for a specified period was introduced as an alternative to removal from the Register. Appeals against removal or suspension were to the High Court and its Scottish and Northern Irish counterparts (not the Privy Council). The disciplinary jurisdiction was extended to persons registered in the Supplementary Register;

- provided for Orders in Council to give effect to any agreement between the British Government and the Government of Eire which might allow holders of specified Irish degrees to be registered as veterinary surgeons in the UK and become members of the College. There could also be provision for the appointment or election of members to the RCVS Council in accordance with the agreement;
- gave the Privy Council powers to give directions to the Council of the College if the latter had failed to maintain proper standards in examinations held by the College, failed to exercise its new supervisory powers appropriately or failed to exercise any other powers or duties under the Act;
- removed the disqualification on teachers in veterinary colleges acting as RCVS examiners;
- exempted practising veterinary surgeons from jury service;
- gave RCVS Council power to prescribe annual fees to be paid by persons in the Register and the Supplementary Register, up to specified maxima, with removal as the sanction for failure to pay; and
- made regulations or rules of the Council under the Act were to be subject to confirmation by the Privy Council.

**Veterinary
Surgeons Act 1966**

The Act consolidated the earlier legislation and made a number of changes, notably:

- the number of elected members of Council was increased from 20 to 24, and any newly recognised veterinary schools were to appoint two members to Council;
- Council was given power to grant temporary registration to persons who had passed the examinations for a recognised veterinary degree but not yet received the degrees, or to holders of Commonwealth or foreign veterinary qualifications;
- employees of animal welfare societies practising under licences under section 7 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1948 were brought within the Supplementary Veterinary Register;
- Council was given discretion to set registration and retention fees, subject to Privy Council approval;
- Council was required to set up a Preliminary Investigation Committee to look into disciplinary allegations, and the Disciplinary Committee was enlarged from nine to twelve members;
- appeals from directions of the Disciplinary Committee were to be heard by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council instead of the High Court;
- applications for restoration to the register were only to be made after the expiry of ten months; and
- there were some changes in the exceptions to the rule prohibiting unqualified persons from practising veterinary surgery: in particular, they could no longer spay pigs or castrate horses.

The Act has been amended a number of times, notably:

- under powers in the European Communities Act 1972, to designate competent authorities for the purpose of the relevant Directive and provide for the registration of European Union right entitled persons;

- by an order under the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006, to provide for the Preliminary Investigation and Disciplinary Committees to be made up of veterinary surgeons and lay persons who are not Council members; and
- by orders under section 19 of the Act changing the treatment and operations listed in Schedule 3 which may be carried out by persons other than veterinary surgeons.

**Supplemental
Charter of 1967**

- revoked the Charter of 1844, except so far as it incorporated the College, recognised the "veterinary art" as a profession and authorised the College to have a common seal, to hold property, and to sue and be sued;
- dealt with general meetings of the College;
- provided for it to be directed and managed by a Council as constituted under the Act;
- regulated the transaction of Council business;
- provided for the election of a Treasurer and appointment of a Registrar, Secretary and other staff;
- required the Registrar to certify, in response to enquiries, whether a certain person was on the register or not;
- regulated the use of the College seal;
- gave powers to pay expenses, engage in property transactions and hold investments;
- gave the College power to support the RCVS Trust and similar bodies;
- gave Council powers to elect Fellows;
- gave Council power to admit members, but only if they held certain qualifications (which would entitle them to be registered under the Act) or were entitled to be registered by virtue of Community rights;
- gave Council powers to award diplomas and certificates in such branches of veterinary science and its auxiliary sciences and arts as might be found expedient, and to make bye-laws in respect of them;
- gave Council powers to make bye-laws for the good order and management of the College;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• permitted Council to elect honorary associates; and• gave Council power to amend or add to the Charter by resolution, subject to procedural requirements, confirmation by a general meeting and approval by Her Majesty in Council.
--	--

**Supplemental
Charter of 2015**

The Charter was granted on 17 February 2015. It

- revoked that of 1967, except to the extent that that Charter had preserved some of the provisions of the 1844 Charter;
- established the objects of the College, namely "to set, uphold and advance veterinary standards, and to promote, encourage and advance the study and practice of the art and science of veterinary surgery and medicine, in the interests of the health and welfare of animals and in the wider public interest";
- gave the College power to undertake activities which seemed to it necessary or expedient to help it to achieve its objects, a number of such activities being specifically mentioned;
- provided for the affairs of the College to be managed by the Council as constituted under the Act, but for the Council to have power to delegate its functions;
- required the Council to make bye-laws for the conduct of its business (an initial set of such bye-laws being attached to the Charter) and gave the College power, by resolution of the members in a general meeting, to alter the bye-laws, subject to the approval of the Privy Council;
- gave the Council power to make rules, protocols and procedures related to Charter activities and College business;
- provided for the members of the College to be those who, on being registered under the Act, were entitled to become members, and for those removed or suspended from the register following disciplinary proceedings to cease to be members. The members were to be entitled to use such descriptions as were laid down in the bye-laws;

- required the College to continue to keep a list of veterinary nurses, to be known as the register of veterinary nurses, and for registered veterinary nurses to be associates of the College;
- provided for the Veterinary Nurses' Council to continue as a committee of the Council regulating the profession of veterinary nurse and for it to set standards for pre-registration training and education, requirements for registration and standards for conduct;
- gave power for new bye-laws to recognise other classes of associate and for the Council to make rules as to their registration;
- required the Council to appoint the Registrar and gave the College power to employ staff;
- gave the Council power to charge fees for goods and services supplied;
- gave the College powers to engage in financial and other transactions, including supporting the RCVS Trust and other bodies with similar objects and paying expenses to persons engaged on College business; and
- regulated the use of the College seal.

The bye-laws scheduled to the Charter dealt with the summoning of general and other meetings; the use of the postnominals FRCVS, MRCVS and RVN; the keeping of the register of veterinary nurses; the investigation and determination of allegations of serious professional misconduct on the part of a veterinary nurse; membership of committees of the Council; deputising in the absence of the Registrar; election of the Treasurer; and financial controls.