

BVA policy position on UK undergraduate veterinary education

Executive summary

BVA supports well-structured and adequately resourced veterinary education programmes in order to produce a well-respected, adaptable veterinary workforce who are able to take the lead in improving animal health and welfare and public health for the benefit of society.

This document is intended to set out the BVA position on UK undergraduate veterinary education in the context of [the overarching Vet Futures ambition to ensure diverse and rewarding veterinary careers](#), recognising a professional landscape in considerable flux, as well as setting out the BVA position in relation to relevant proposals included in [the ongoing RCVS Graduate Outcomes review](#).

Currently UK veterinary undergraduate programmes are held in high esteem for the high-quality, omnicompetent veterinary surgeons they produce, and UK veterinary schools are internationally recognised for their global excellence in teaching and veterinary research.¹

To sustain and develop the UK's high-quality veterinary education and build long-term capability and capacity in the veterinary workforce, all stakeholders should work together to achieve:

- Selection of students who are most likely to thrive in the workplace and deliver improvements in animal health and welfare;
- Recognition of the full breadth of career pathways available to veterinary graduates with curricula that adequately prepares graduates to enter into diverse areas of work;
- Skilled graduates who receive appropriate opportunities to undertake core and elective areas of study and develop clinical and non-clinical knowledge and skills;
- A wide range of rewarding and well-communicated career pathways (both clinical and non-clinical) to attract and retain the best applicants from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic groups;
- Resilient and confident graduates who are aware of, and can navigate, career options through the support networks available to them;
- Graduates who are better supported during the transition from students to the world of work; and
- Graduates who are equipped to [enact a range of roles as part of multidisciplinary, vet-led teams](#).

As part of this, it is important to emphasise that any efforts to further develop veterinary education must recognise the pluripotential of the veterinary degree and the full breadth of veterinary graduates entering the workforce across wide ranging career paths, **both clinical and non-clinical**.

Whilst the veterinary profession is relatively small, its reach and impact are significant, with veterinary surgeons being vital to the UK economy and in our communities. Veterinary surgeons work in myriad settings, including in clinical practice providing preventive healthcare and treatment for livestock, pets and leisure/sport animals, carrying out surveillance, and advancing standards of animal welfare; in research advancing our scientific understanding and ensuring the welfare of animals used in research; in abattoirs and throughout the food chain to secure public health, food safety and animal welfare; in industry and technology ensuring the UK remains competitive; in government providing veterinary expertise to public policy making; delivering control measures to protect public health and animal health; regulation of veterinary medicines and roles in the armed forces.

¹RCVS, 2019. Outstanding performance of UK veterinary schools on world stage
<https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/news/outstanding-performance-of-uk-veterinary-schools-on-world-stage/>

Coupled with the breadth of career pathways available to trained veterinary surgeons, the veterinary profession has also experienced rapid change in the environment within which it operates and there has been a shift in the expectations of clients, stakeholders and beneficiaries of veterinary services. The list of clients, stakeholders and beneficiaries of the services the veterinary profession delivers spans pet owners, farmers, industry, Government and other allied professionals [who form part of the vet-led team](#).

Developments within veterinary education should therefore be mindful of the evolving needs and expectations of the veterinary profession from wider society, as well as capacity and capability complexities within the professional landscape.

With this in mind, BVA has set out 50 recommendations pertaining to key areas across the trajectory of veterinary education:

- **Communicating the breadth of veterinary careers through a whole-system approach**
- **Selection and widening participation**
- **Delivery and quality of veterinary undergraduate programmes**
- **Retaining UK veterinary graduates as part of the domestic workforce**
- **Extra-mural studies (EMS), tracking and methods of assessment**
- **Graduate Outcomes: Day One Competences and the Professional Development Phase**
- **Supporting equality and diversity in the workplace and educational settings**

Our specific recommendations are:

Communicating the breadth of veterinary careers through a whole-system approach

Recommendation 1: There should be a whole-system approach to promoting veterinary careers. This should span from primary school to veterinary undergraduate education and beyond.

Recommendation 2: To support a whole-system approach to promoting veterinary careers, there should be accurate, transparent information available for careers advisors, teachers and lecturers so that they can inform prospective veterinary students and graduates about entry requirements across UK veterinary schools and the diversity of uses of the veterinary degree.

Recommendation 3: BVA has a role to play in ensuring access to transparent information about veterinary careers by engaging with the [National Careers Service](#) to encourage signposting to [My Vet Future](#) as a 'one-stop-shop' resource for veterinary education and careers information.

Recommendation 4: Species/sector-specific veterinary associations should be encouraged to provide easily accessible information about career pathways in their sectors, including non-traditional career routes and post-graduate education opportunities.

Selection and widening participation

Recommendation 5: UK veterinary schools should continue to use a range of selection methods to ensure that the most suitable students are selected to enter the veterinary workforce, whatever their background.

Recommendation 6: Further research should be undertaken to explore the predictive validity of selection methods in veterinary education, both in terms of future performance, resilience, job satisfaction and in terms of widening participation.

Recommendation 7: BVA has a role to play in working with the UK veterinary schools and [My Vet Future](#) to formally collate accessible information about graduate entry to veterinary medicine, fast track courses and potential sources of funding.

Recommendation 8: As part of their pre-entry requirements, UK veterinary schools should continue to adopt an outcomes-based approach to work experience, focusing on what is learnt and how this is reflected upon as opposed to prescribed durations of placements alone.

Recommendation 9: UK veterinary schools should continue to work collaboratively to share best practice and effective strategies to widen participation in veterinary education. This should include considering the best ways to raise awareness of available widening access routes and gateway programmes.

Recommendation 10: BVA has a role to play in terms of working collaboratively with the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS), British Veterinary LGBT+ (BVLGBT+) and RCVS Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Working Group to develop an engagement strategy and resources to raise awareness amongst underrepresented and minority groups of veterinary career paths and the different routes into veterinary education.

Recommendation 11: BVA should work collaboratively with the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS), British Veterinary LGBT+ (BVLGBT+) and RCVS Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Working Group to facilitate 'diversity ambassadors' within the profession to act as role models for prospective students from underrepresented and minority backgrounds.

Delivery and quality of veterinary undergraduate programmes

Recommendation 12: There should be additional government funding from UK funding bodies for veterinary education by increasing the unit of resource per student in order to maintain quality and standards in veterinary education and contribute to retaining capacity in the veterinary workforce.

Recommendation 13: Any increase in the number of vet students must duly consider potential unintended consequences on the quality and standards of veterinary education.

Recommendation 14: Any increase in the number of vet students to address workforce shortages must be supported by additional Government funding in order to safeguard existing quality and standards in veterinary education.

Retaining UK veterinary graduates as part of the domestic workforce

Recommendation 15: The UK Government should add veterinary surgeons to the Shortage Occupation List² or its equivalent and extend/continue to recognise existing MRPQ legislation through a transitional arrangement.

Recommendation 16: Consideration should be given as to how to support international graduates who are taking the RCVS Statutory Examination for Membership, as well as support their transition into different roles within the UK veterinary workforce.

Recommendation 17: Overseas nationals graduating from UK veterinary schools should be allowed to live and work in the UK to help address the shortage of veterinary surgeons, this could be facilitated through the implementation of a post-study work visa.

Recommendation 18: UK veterinary students studying in EU and non-EU countries should be encouraged and supported to return to the UK to pursue diverse and fulfilling career pathways within the UK veterinary workforce.

² Since agreement of this document at BVA Council (April 2019), and following successful campaigning from BVA and RCVS, the UK Government has announced its intention to restore veterinary surgeons to the Shortage Occupation List.

Extra-mural studies (EMS), tracking and methods of assessment

Recommendation 19: EMS should be underpinned by a commitment to maintain exposure to different sectors, career routes and overseas opportunities, as well as recognition of the importance of exposure to general practice as a cornerstone of veterinary education.

Recommendation 20: There should be increased communication between veterinary schools and EMS providers about the aims of EMS, both in general and for individual students.

Recommendation 21: EMS providers should be encouraged to use a formal structure to communicate the aims and objectives of EMS placements with students, such as the [AVS Pre-EMS objective setting templates for small animal, farm animal and equine practice](#).

Recommendation 22: There should be increased provision of mentorship and education-based training of staff in workplaces providing EMS placements.

Recommendation 23: BVA has a role to play in supporting the delivery of EMS for both providers and students across clinical and non-clinical settings by reviewing and updating its EMS guides for [providers](#) and [students](#).

Recommendation 24: Students, along with their tutors, should take responsibility to ensure that their EMS meets their own personal development objectives.

Recommendation 25: The delivery of EMS should involve the whole veterinary profession, with each organisation(s) being responsible and accountable for different aspects of delivery. For example, RCVS should have overall oversight, define minimum requirements and provide guidance on objectives and standards for delivery. Individual veterinary schools should be able to determine the details of the amount and type of EMS to achieve their own curricula and student outcomes.

Recommendation 26: Consideration should be given to the ways in which veterinary schools and professional associations can further support EMS providers in their delivery of placements.

Recommendation 27: Consideration should be given to establishing a system for EMS, which enables veterinary students to undertake EMS in wide range of settings including clinical, non-clinical and non-traditional settings.

Recommendation 28: BVA has a role to play in supporting species/sector-specific divisions to better showcase and signpost to the wide range of EMS opportunities that are on offer across sectors.

Recommendation 29: BVA supports a degree of partial tracking where students are able to 'track' and/or undertake an elective in one or a limited number of species or disciplines. As part of this students should maintain a broad exposure to different species so that they are able to maintain their omnipotential or change their minds as to their preferred area of practice or work during the undergraduate degree.

Recommendation 30: Without evidence to suggest otherwise, there should not be a move towards standardised methods of assessment at this time.

Graduate Outcomes: Day One Competences and the Professional Development Phase (PDP)

Recommendation 31: Veterinary students should be exposed to a range of learning environments and given the opportunity to select work-based placements that enable them to develop their Day One Competences, meet their individual learning objectives and explore diverse career pathways.

Recommendation 32: As well as clinical competences, veterinary graduates should have the opportunity to develop a range of non-clinical competences and be prepared to navigate the decision-making processes they will be expected to undertake as part of their first role.

Recommendation 33: Day One Competences and guidance must pay due regard to veterinary surgeons who embark on varied, including non-clinical, career paths.

Recommendation 34: Awareness and training in animal welfare, science, ethics and law (AWSEL) should be integrated across undergraduate curricula.

Recommendation 35: For the veterinary profession to position itself as animal welfare focussed, awareness and training in animal welfare advocacy at undergraduate level should be strengthened.

Recommendation 36: Species/sector-specific veterinary associations should develop guidance on what the 'Day One Competences' look like in their sectors.

Recommendation 37: BVA supports the provision of continued and post-graduate education throughout the veterinary career to enable varied career choices at any stage of professional life.

Recommendation 38: Animal health and welfare should be at the heart of any review of the Day One Competences or any proposed models of competence.

Recommendation 39: RCVS should develop enhanced guidance detailing the standard expected from new graduates for Day One Competences areas identified as having low competency scores.

Recommendation 40: It should be recognised that PDP is not only for new graduates but is also an appropriate way to support veterinary surgeons changing their area of practice or returning to work after a career break.

Recommendation 41: PDP must be applicable and relevant for veterinary surgeons in non-clinical roles.

Recommendation 42: The PDP should provide opportunities for the development of clinical and professional skills; confidence in different areas of work (both clinical and non-clinical); opportunities to apply moral reasoning and ethical decision-making and mentorship.

Recommendation 43: There should be a move away from an input-based process for PDP towards an outcomes-based approach, focussed on the outcomes that the graduate is expected to achieve by the end of their PDP, rather than focusing on the number of cases that have been treated.

Recommendation 44: Further support, guidance and resources should be developed to support graduates completing the PDP, as well as employers providing PDP.

Recommendation 45: BVA has a role to play in supporting the delivery and completion of PDP guides for [employers](#) and [employees](#).

Recommendation 46: Consideration should be given to developing appropriate CPD to support the role of PDP mentors or supervisors.

Recommendation 47: BVA supports the inclusion of enhanced standards relating to the provision of PDP within the current Practice Standards Scheme and consideration could be given to the RCVS accreditation of existing graduate schemes outside of the PDP.

Recommendation 48: BVA supports a different system of recording the PDP that includes the facility to record professional skills alongside clinical skills and a system into which both the graduate and a mentor can contribute.

Recommendation 49: As part of the RCVS Graduate Outcomes review, consideration should also be given as to whether it is possible to develop an integrated system to record experience and competence for students, graduates and post-graduates.

Supporting equality and diversity in the workplace and educational settings

Recommendation 50: BVA has a role to play in working collaboratively with organisations such as the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS), British Veterinary LGBT+ (BVLGBT+) to develop guidance and resources to support equality and diversity in the workplace and educational settings.