

The Rt Hon David Willetts MP
Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Your ref: 222695

5 May 2011

Dear Mr Willetts

Higher education funding for veterinary students

Thank you for your letter of 17 December 2010 in reply to my letter. I apologise for the long delay in responding.

The BVA has been looking into the reference made in your letter to additional maintenance loans:

“It is possible that students could benefit from additional maintenance loans to cover the period of EMS. Veterinary schools would need to be able to confirm that EMS represents an integral part of the course.”

Upon first reading of this paragraph we had hoped that there was scope for additional funding to be made available to veterinary students to assist with the additional financial burdens of (unsubsidised) long courses and the requirement to complete Extra Mural Studies outside of term time.

We have been in contact Alison Haines at BIS and provided her with some additional information. Unfortunately, after some consideration she responded (by telephone) to say that there would not be additional funding available for veterinary students.

We are, of course, very disappointed with this response but we understand that the Government is looking more widely at funding issues surrounding long courses (including veterinary science, medicine, dentistry and architecture) and the BVA has provided a briefing for Simon Hughes, Advocate for Access to Education, following a roundtable meeting with him in March.

As you will be aware I also raised the BVA's significant concerns regarding the future provision of veterinary services with your colleague Caroline Spelman at the BVA's annual London dinner in February and she has since raised this issue at a meeting of the Cabinet. We would be very keen to be involved in any future discussions on the issue of funding long courses.

British Veterinary Association
Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

7 Mansfield Street | London W1G 9NQ

T 020 7636 6541 F 020 7908 6349
E bvahq@bva.co.uk W www.bva.co.uk

Registered number: 206456 England. Company limited by guarantee

There were a couple of issues raised in my original letter which your response did not address directly. The first is to ask what the Government's response is to Lord Browne's recommendation that clinical training programmes, such as veterinary science, should attract investment.

The second is to ask what your assessment is of how the proposed changes in England and Wales will fit with the existing funding system in Scotland, given that two of the UK's seven veterinary schools are in Scotland.

Finally, the BVA is deeply concerned about the impact that increased tuition fees will have on veterinary research (much of which is linked to human health and food security). Debts of up to £54,000 in tuition fees alone will be a significant disincentive to taking on further debt associated with postgraduate research, particularly a 3 to 4-year PhD.

I am sure you will agree that veterinary surgeons play a key role in public health, food security, and disease control in the UK. Attracting the most able students to pursue a veterinary career should be our ultimate goal. We believe that veterinary students should not be unfairly disadvantaged for making that career choice (particularly when financial reward is clearly not the motivating factor) and hope we can work with you and your colleagues to address these concerns.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harvey Locke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Harvey Locke BVSc MRCVS
President

cc Myfanwy Hill, President, Association of Veterinary Students (AVS)