

**The Right Honourable Chris Smith, Lord Smith of Finsbury
Chancellor of the University of Cambridge**

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Tuesday 23 December 2025

Dear Lord Smith of Finsbury,

RE: The vital role of Cambridge Veterinary School

We are deeply concerned to hear that the University of Cambridge is considering the future of its veterinary undergraduate degree, and are writing to express our strong opposition to the closure of the Veterinary School. The School plays a vital role in ensuring the UK has a resilient veterinary workforce, which is critical to the UK economy, animal health and welfare, and protecting the UK against public health risks such as future pandemics.

The University of Cambridge Veterinary School is a strategic national and international asset whose closure would represent a profound gamble with public health and scientific excellence. While financial sustainability for professional clinical training is a valid concern in the absence of a government funded, NHS-like hospital to support clinical training, the irreplaceable value the School provides to the UK and the world far outweighs the internal institutional cost. At a local level, it will also represent the loss of a critical tertiary care centre for referral, essential for client choice and provision of high-level care in the area, in particular for farm animals.

It is important to remember that a veterinary degree is a 5-year science degree (or 6 years for the majority of Cambridge students). Veterinary graduates are first and foremost scientists, many of whom go on to become clinicians, but many make valuable contributions to the advancement of scientific knowledge. Cambridge has a long and proud tradition of producing veterinary graduates who go on to lead and innovate across critical sectors, and any reduction in training capacity would place further strain on future workforce resilience and capacity, with far reaching consequences.

Global Health: The One Health Vanguard

The greatest public health threats of the 21st century, from Avian Flu and Ebola to the next unknown pathogen, are zoonotic, meaning they originate in animals. The Vet School is indispensable as the UK's first line of scientific defence under the One Health paradigm.

- **Pandemic Preparedness:** Cambridge trains many of the veterinarians and veterinary scientists who specialise in epidemiology, disease surveillance, and interspecies transmission. Shutting down this source of expertise directly compromises the nation's capacity to predict, prepare for, and respond to future global pandemics.
- **Irreplaceable Research Impact:** The Department's research is demonstrably world-leading (91% rated 4* or 3* in the REF). This research has a direct global impact, from developing rapid diagnostics for equine diseases worldwide to informing WHO meningitis guidelines, and most critically, combating Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)—a major international health threat.
- **Workforce Resilience:** Closing one of the nation's most prestigious training institutions would have a significant negative impact on the pipeline and future sustainability of the veterinary workforce, limiting the supply of highly trained professionals needed to ensure food safety and security, animal welfare, and a healthy agricultural sector.

International Leadership and Standing

The University's global reputation is built on excellence across all academic fields. The Veterinary School is a key part of this, and closure would cause significant damage to Cambridge's reputation in science and medicine.

- **Unmatched Academic Synergy:** The Cambridge VetMB course is unique, integrating the foundational years into the Natural Sciences Tripos. This provides its graduates with a depth of scientific rigor and an

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interdisciplinary perspective unmatched elsewhere. Graduates are not just clinicians; they are often world-class researchers and future leaders across government, academia, and industry, often facilitated by the immediate international recognition of the Cambridge name. This education model has significant value nationally as it gives a breadth of knowledge and education to Cambridge graduates that other vet schools may not focus on.

- **Global Standing and Scientific Breadth:** The School's unique position, bridging biological sciences, medicine, and clinical practice, is integral to the University's holistic scientific profile.
- **Diversity of education models:** There is enormous strategic value in the UK retaining a diversity of veterinary education models. We need to produce veterinary scientists, veterinary clinicians and veterinarians with the skills to work in the civil service, food safety, public health and industry in order to deliver the government's growth agenda. Cambridge makes a significant contribution across all areas where vets are employed.

Conclusion

The argument for closure is based on financial concerns regarding clinical training and a perceived failure to find a viable clinical services model. However, the signatories consider that the decision of the Council of the School of Biological Sciences was premature, flawed and short-sighted, ignoring the immeasurable public good provided by the school and the various viable options to address clinical teaching.

The core argument for strengthening and keeping the Vet School open is that its value cannot be measured in the financial deficit of a clinical hospital. The University, being the largest biomedical cluster in Europe, possesses the financial and intellectual resources to resolve the clinical service model's challenges. The professional bodies, staff, and students are united in their assessment: the closure recommendation is hasty, unjustified and flawed.

It is critical for the University's governing bodies to reject this recommendation, recognise the irreplaceable public good the School provides, and commit to finding a robust, sustainable funding model that preserves Cambridge's vital role at the forefront of global health and scientific leadership. The Vet School is an indispensable national resource that must be preserved and fully supported.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr Charlotte Commins BVetMed MRCVS, President, British Veterinary Poultry Association

Dr Benjamin H Dustan BVSc Cert CHP BSc(Hons) MRCVS, President, Goat Veterinary Society

Dr Peter Heather BVSc MRCVS, President, British Veterinary LGBT+ Society

Dr Julian Hoad BSc(Hons) BVetMed HonMBVNA MRCVS, President, British Small Animal Veterinary Association

Dr Claire Hodgson BVetMed CertAVP MRCVS, Director, British Veterinary Chronic Illness Support

Mr Jayson Hughes, President, Association of Veterinary Students

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