Migration Advisory Committee: International students: economic and social impacts

A joint submission from the British Veterinary Association, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and the Veterinary Schools Council

1. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), is the statutory regulator for veterinary surgeons, responsible for the registration of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the UK, and sets, upholds and advances their educational, ethical and clinical standards.

2. The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the UK with over 17,000 members. BVA represents, supports and champions the interests of the veterinary profession in this country and therefore takes a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession.

3. The Veterinary Schools Council (VSC) consists of the heads of seven UK veterinary schools offering degrees accredited by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. VSC also represents two non-UK associate members: The School of Veterinary Medicine, University College Dublin; and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Utrecht University.

4. VSC provides a source of informed opinion on matters concerning veterinary education, from the welfare of its students and academic researchers to its links with government and industry.

5. The UK veterinary profession is relatively small, with over 24,000 veterinary surgeons, but its reach and impact are significant. The UK veterinary profession is an integral part of the international scientific community using evidence and practical skills to further animal health and welfare, and public health. Veterinary surgeons work across the economy, allowing strategically important economic sectors to operate successfully.

6. We are grateful for the opportunity submit a response to this call for evidence on the economic and social impacts of international students in the UK.
Executive Summary

7. There is currently a shortage of veterinary surgeons in the UK, estimated to be 11%.\(^1\)

8. The higher fees paid by overseas students helps to make up for the shortfall in the cost of delivering veterinary education in the UK.

9. Any measure that reduces the number of overseas students will need to be balanced by increased funding for veterinary schools.

10. Overseas nationals graduating from UK vet schools should be allowed to live and work in the UK to help address the shortage of veterinary surgeons.

Veterinary Undergraduate Numbers

![Pie chart showing the distribution of undergraduate students attending UK veterinary degree courses.](chart.png)

Figure 1. Total number of undergraduates attending UK Veterinary degree courses, (Complied using data from Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons RCVS Facts 2016 (2017))

11. There are eight veterinary schools within the United Kingdom, seven of which are established schools approved by the RCVS; and the University of Surrey which

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\(^1\) Based on findings of a review Major Employer Group in July 2017 of members providing first opinion clinical services direct to the public found well over 600 vacancies open for primary veterinary surgeons in the UK. Based on MEG's combined employment at the time of the survey, this represents a workforce shortage of around 11%.
expects to graduate its first students in 2019.

- University of Bristol
- University of Cambridge
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Glasgow
- University of Liverpool
- University of Nottingham
- Royal Veterinary College, University of London
- University of Surrey (not yet approved by RCVS)

12. According to the RCVS, across these universities there were 5,295 veterinary undergraduate students in 2017 (over a five-year course). Of these, 129 were from the EU and 1,016 were from third countries.²

13. As the Migration Advisory Committee notes of all undergraduates 14% are international (6% EU and 9% are non-EU). Veterinary undergraduate courses are more reliant on international students than undergraduate courses generally, with 18% international students. The composition of veterinary undergraduate students is different than the general undergraduate population with more drawn more from third countries (19.2%) than the EU (2.4%).

14. There is variation in the numbers of international students studying across the eight UK veterinary schools. Partially, this is because three of these schools (Royal Veterinary College, the University of Glasgow, and the University of Edinburgh) provide American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accreditation, whereby their degrees are recognised in the United States of America. In the University of Glasgow, 49% of all veterinary undergraduates are overseas students (including EU).

### Economic Contribution

15. The costs per student for veterinary education are high compared to other taught subjects. This is because of the wide range of clinical and professional skills graduates need to be equipped with, as set out in the RCVS Day One Competencies (the minimum essential competences that the RCVS expects all veterinary students to have met when they graduate).³ The current cost of veterinary courses is in excess of £20,000 per student per annum, higher than

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³ Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, RCVS Day One Competences, 2014
any other course. This figure does not include the cost of Extra-Mural Studies (EMS), clinical inputs from vet school owned businesses, and various indirect costs.

Figure 2: Identifying high-cost subjects: Difference between fee income and costs
(Source: Adapted from Universities UK analysis of Higher Education Funding Council for England TRACT(T) and Office for Fair Access data)

16. This is more than the £9,000 covered by student fee plus the current support provided from the Higher Funding Council for England (HEFCE) or similar funding levels provided by the devolved administrations. The economic reality of veterinary education is that student fees and government funding do not meet the costs of producing qualified veterinary surgeons. The higher fees paid by overseas students helps to make up for the shortfall in the cost of delivering veterinary education in the UK.

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The economic and social contribution of veterinary students extends far beyond the lecture theatre. Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International Pathways commissioned London Economics to analyse the contribution of international students to the UK economy. The report estimates the net economic impact to be £68,000 for each typical non-UK EU student in the 2015/16 cohort, and £95,000 generated by each typical third country student. "In other words, every 15 EU students and every 11 non-EU students generate £1m worth of net economic impact for the UK economy over the duration of their studies."

**EU Nationals working in academia**

Non-UK EU nationals make up 22% of veterinary surgeons working in academia in the UK, most of whom will be in roles directly linked to providing education and training within the undergraduate veterinary degree. All of the UK veterinary schools have expressed concerns about losing EU staff who report feeling uncertain about their future rights to live and work in the UK, or who may not be permitted to stay after Brexit. UK academic institutions must be able to attract staff from an international pool.

**Brexit and the veterinary workforce**

As noted in the joint BVA and RCVS submission to the Migration Advisory Committee call for evidence on the contribution of EU immigration to the UK economy, fulfilling demand for veterinary surgeons, following the departure of the UK from the EU will be essential to maintain animal health and welfare, public health, food safety and trade. This is the context within which decisions on international students will need to be made.

Following the decision that the UK should leave the EU, RCVS commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to conduct three online surveys over a two-year period to gather the views and intentions of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses registered to practise in the UK whose nationality is non-UK European. Of those who responded to the first survey:

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6 BVA RCVS response to MAC consultation on EEA workers in the UK labour market [https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News,_campaigns_and_policies/Get_involved/Consultation_archive/Migration%20Advisory%20Committee%20BVA%20RCVS%20Submission%20FINAL.PDF](https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News,_campaigns_and_policies/Get_involved/Consultation_archive/Migration%20Advisory%20Committee%20BVA%20RCVS%20Submission%20FINAL.PDF)

7 Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons European veterinary surgeons working in the UK: The impact of Brexit (baseline survey), 2017
• 18 per cent are actively looking for work outside the UK;
• 32 per cent are considering a move back home;
• 40 per cent think they are now more likely to leave the UK.

21. In the months following the UK’s decision to leave the EU, there was a reduction in the numbers of EU graduated vets registering to work in the UK.\(^8\) This contradicts the trend, which had seen a steady increase in the numbers of vets from elsewhere in the EU.

22. On leaving the EU, the UK will not merely need to maintain the current level of veterinary workforce, but also meet additional demands. Post-Brexit all EU countries may fall to be regarded as third countries for the purposes of exports and imports. Consequently, there may be increased demand for veterinary certification and supervision estimated by the Chief Veterinary Officer to be as much as 325%.\(^9\) The government has stated that “high environmental and food standards will not be diminished or diluted because of leaving the EU or establishing free trade deals with other countries.”\(^10\) Further, the veterinary sector has been expanding at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of \(5.6\%\) in recent years.\(^11\) Consequently, there will be no reduction in the demand for vets going forward.

23. A consistent supply of qualified vets will be necessary to maintain standards. In the short to medium term, it will be impossible to meet this demand with UK nationals. The veterinary students from third countries who are educated in the UK, at present are qualified to practise in the UK but are often unable to stay because of visa restrictions. Accommodating these graduates within a post-Brexit immigration policy would assist with alleviating an impending workforce shortage. It would also allow graduates who have contributed to UK economy and wider society to continue to do so.

Our calls

24. We would jointly like to make the following calls:

\(^8\) RCVS figures
\(^9\) Chief Veterinary Officer Speaking at Official Veterinarian Conference 2017, reported https://www.vettimes.co.uk/news/non-uk-vets-essential-after-brexit-says-cvo/
\(^10\) George Eustice MP, Minister of State (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) July 2017 http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-07-07/3647/
a. That student numbers are not included in the overall immigration target, as to do otherwise would add to the downward pressure on the number of qualified vets able to come here from abroad.

b. That overseas students who qualify in the United Kingdom should be able to remain here to live and work after graduation in order to alleviate the existing shortage of vets.

c. That any required increase in the number of UK-national veterinary graduates - whether in general or due to a reduction in the number of overseas students - be properly funded, noting as outlined above that they currently make a disproportionate contribution to the finances of the veterinary schools.