

## Training to be a veterinary surgeon

### The veterinary profession

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is the governing body of the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. If you want to practise as a veterinary surgeon in the UK, you must be registered as a member of RCVS. Under the provisions of the Veterinary Surgeons Act of 1966, with certain minor exceptions, only a registered veterinary surgeon is permitted to diagnose and treat the injuries and ailments of animals.

To train to be a veterinary surgeon you will need to go to university and take a veterinary degree. The UK veterinary schools offering veterinary degrees approved by the RCVS are Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool and London (the Royal Veterinary College) and Nottingham. The degree courses are five years in length (six years at Cambridge). There are also a number of overseas degrees which are approved by RCVS: in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Graduates from North American veterinary schools accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association can also apply to become members of RCVS. Holders of many European degrees are also eligible to register with RCVS if they are also EU citizens. For a list of approved European degrees, please refer to the RCVS website. Information on European veterinary schools can also be found on the EAEVE (European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education) website - [www.eaeve.org/](http://www.eaeve.org/).



*Student veterinary surgeons at work*

Work in the veterinary profession is highly rewarding, but also very demanding. Every veterinary surgeon has an obligation to deal with emergencies in any species at any time. Anyone contemplating a career in veterinary practice should remember that it is a 24-hour service, 365 days a year.

### Career opportunities

The veterinary profession has launched new careers materials in a bid to broaden the range of applicants to veterinary school. Under the theme 'Veterinary Science... for all walks of life', a DVD and brochure which include case studies and videos of vets working in a range of roles. The DVD and brochures have been sent to the librarian of every secondary school and college in the UK. The brochure, which incorporates the DVD video modules, is also available online at [www.walksoflife.org.uk](http://www.walksoflife.org.uk).

The veterinary profession, though numerically small (there are over 20,000 members of RCVS in total), has varied and important duties to safeguard the health and welfare of animals and public health. There are career opportunities in a number of areas including:

### General practice

The veterinary surgeon is responsible for the prevention of disease and for the medical and surgical treatment of animals including household pets, zoo animals, farm animals and horses. Opportunities exist in practices that specialise in small animals, food producing animals, equine work or in mixed practices dealing with both small and large animals. Many veterinary surgeons working in practice choose to further their knowledge by studying for additional qualifications, such as the Certificates and Diplomas offered by the RCVS, and it is a requirement of RCVS that all veterinary surgeons keep their skills and knowledge up to date throughout their careers.

### Veterinary teaching and research

Veterinary researchers play a vital role in advancing our understanding of diseases. Research in veterinary sciences enhances the health, welfare and usefulness of both food producing and companion animals. It safeguards the public from diseases spread from animals in food and by other means. By comparative investigations, it helps us understand and manage human disease, for example in cancer, genetics, reproduction and infections.

Research is undertaken at the university veterinary schools and at research institutes, departments financed by Government, in laboratories and by private enterprise. Many careers in research span the interface between human and veterinary medicine. If you would like to read more about veterinary research, please take a look at the [research section](#) on our website.



*Veterinary surgeons in research*

### Government service

Many opportunities exist within the public sector. Veterinary surgeons are involved in protecting public health in government departments and agencies such as Animal Health, the Food Standards Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) employs vets to monitor animal health and to prevent the spread of diseases.

### Other opportunities

Other opportunities exist in commerce and industry such as in pharmaceutical companies, in international and overseas organisations and consultancies and charities such as the RSPCA and PDSA. The veterinarian's broad scientific training is also of value in areas such as wildlife and environmental conservation.

## University entry requirements

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons can only give general advice on university entrance requirements as there may be some slight variations between the different veterinary schools. You must check the requirements very carefully in the individual university prospectuses. Prospectuses can be obtained free of charge direct from the universities, or can be viewed on their websites. Please see our detailed entrance requirements to find out whether your qualifications will be accepted by the veterinary schools.

In general terms, the entry requirements of the university veterinary schools are as follows:

### A Levels

Biology must usually be offered at A level. The requirement for other subjects varies a little from university to university, but either one or two subjects from Chemistry, Physics or Mathematics should be offered. Some universities may accept a third A level in a non-science subject, but it must be an academically sound subject. The minimum grades generally expected are two A's and a B, though some schools will require three grade A's.

### AS Levels

Some universities accept AS levels, but precise requirements can vary. Sometimes, 2 AS levels will be accepted in lieu of 1 A level, except in Chemistry where a full A level is usually required.

### SCE Highers

Chemistry must be offered and generally two subjects from Biology, Physics or Mathematics. The grades generally expected are AAABB.

### Advanced Highers

Applicants are normally advised to proceed to the Sixth Year and include CSYS Chemistry and Biology or Physics in their subjects.

### GCSE

You must meet the general entrance requirements of the university. Most universities require you to have at least a grade C pass in English Language, Mathematics and Science, and many will expect A grades at GCSE. Where A level Biology or Physics is not offered, you must have a good pass in that subject at GCSE level.

### Vocational qualifications

Some universities will consider applicants with relevant vocational qualifications, such as the BTEC Diploma in Animal Science, with distinction grades.

### Alternative routes

If you have not managed to get the correct grades or have not chosen the correct subjects, there are still options available for getting into a veterinary degree course. Some of the schools offer a 6 year course which is aimed at those students who do not have the required scientific qualifications. This extra year will focus on the types of subjects that most students will study at A level, and this will prepare the student for the 5 year degree. If you do not have the expected subjects/grades you are advised to speak to the admissions departments at the relevant universities.

### Work experience

All of the university veterinary schools require applicants to show evidence of their interest and commitment by having gained experience of working in a veterinary practice and working with and handling animals including livestock. However, precise work experience requirements vary between the universities and you should consult the prospectuses carefully to see what each requires.

### Applying to university

All applications for places on veterinary degree courses at UK universities must be made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). For further information, contact the Secretary of UCAS, Fulton House, Jessop Avenue, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 3SH, or visit their website at [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)

UCAS publishes an annual guidance handbook to assist in completing the application form. Applications must be received by UCAS by 15 October in the year before admission. Applicants for entry to Cambridge must also submit, at an early stage, a preliminary application form direct to the college of their choice within that university or an open application to the Cambridge InterCollegiate Applications Office. You will only be able to list four veterinary schools on your UCAS form. The remaining two choices should be for non-veterinary degrees.

### Mature students and graduates

To gain admission to a veterinary degree course, mature students without a degree should hold good GCSE 'A' level examination passes in subjects including chemistry, biology and physics/mathematics, or be able to produce evidence of knowledge to this standard in comparable examinations.

Graduates would normally be expected to hold at least an upper second class honours degree in a related subject, but you should note that graduate entrants to the undergraduate veterinary degree usually have to pay full tuition fees, which can make this a very expensive route. If you hold a relevant science degree, you may be able to complete the veterinary degree in 4 years, rather than 5.

Graduates and mature students may need to discuss their own particular qualifications and experience with the veterinary schools' admissions tutors.

## Students with disabilities

The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 requires veterinary surgeons to be able to give at least basic and emergency treatment to all common domestic species.

The RCVS sets and monitors standards of veterinary degree courses in the UK, but it is the veterinary schools that are responsible for selecting the students they admit to their courses.

If you are considering applying for a place at veterinary school and you have a disability that you think might affect what you are able to do, you are strongly encouraged to discuss this with the veterinary schools to which you intend to apply, so that they can discuss your particular requirements with you.

## Financing studies

Applicants should be aware that owing to the requirements of the course, veterinary students are generally unable to use their vacations to earn money. General information on financial support for students is available from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills website at [www.education.gov.uk/16to19/studentsupport](http://www.education.gov.uk/16to19/studentsupport)

Applicants who already hold a degree should make enquiries about financing their studies before entering into any commitment. Veterinary degrees are some of the most expensive courses to fund. There are no recognised sources of grants for UK students taking a second undergraduate degree in veterinary science or any other subject and, unfortunately, the RCVS does not have any funds which it can offer to undergraduate veterinary students. Students may, however, still be able to apply for a student loan towards their maintenance costs.

## Reference list

There is a wide range of books about life as a veterinary surgeon. Please contact your local bookshop or library for more information. You may also wish to look at our links page on the RCVS website.

Donald, V and Shepherd, A . 8th Ed. (1997), **Careers Working with Animals**. *Kogan Page*

**DfES, Higher Education Student Support**, available from DfES Publications Centre, PO Box 6927, London E3 3NZ, or on the website at [www.education.gov.uk/16to19/studentsupport](http://www.education.gov.uk/16to19/studentsupport)

UCAS. **University and College Entrance: The Official Guide** (published annually). View also the UCAS website at [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)

- For an online edition of the Walks of Life brochure and videos - [www.walksoflife.org](http://www.walksoflife.org)
- British Veterinary Association – [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)
- British Small Animal Veterinary Association – [www.bsava.com](http://www.bsava.com)
- Animal Health – [www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/)
- Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons – [www.spvs.org.uk](http://www.spvs.org.uk)

- Association of Veterinary Students – [www.avs-uk.org.uk](http://www.avs-uk.org.uk)
- European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education – [www.eaeve.org](http://www.eaeve.org)
- American Veterinary Medical Association – [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)
- Connexions – [www.connexions.gov.uk](http://www.connexions.gov.uk)
- You can read in more detail what studying a veterinary degree involves in the QAA's Benchmark Statement for Veterinary Degrees, which is available on the careers page of the RCVS website.
- For information about other animal related courses and careers - [www.vetnetlln.ac.uk](http://www.vetnetlln.ac.uk)

## UK veterinary schools

### Bristol

Veterinary Admissions Clerk  
 University of Bristol, Senate House  
 Bristol BS8 1TH  
 T 0117 928 9000  
[www.vetschool.bris.ac.uk](http://www.vetschool.bris.ac.uk)

### Cambridge

The Department Secretary  
 Department of Clinical Veterinary Medicine  
 University of Cambridge, Madingley Road  
 Cambridge CB2 0ES  
 T 01223 337600  
[www.vet.cam.ac.uk](http://www.vet.cam.ac.uk)

The Cambridge Intercollegiate Applications Office  
 Kellet Lodge, Tennis Court Road  
 Cambridge CB2 1QJ  
 T 01223 333308

### Edinburgh

Admissions Officer  
 Faculty of Veterinary Medicine  
 Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies  
 University of Edinburgh, Summerhall  
 Edinburgh, EH9 1QH  
 T 0131 650 6130  
[www.vet.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.vet.ed.ac.uk/)

### **Glasgow**

Admissions Officer  
University of Glasgow Veterinary School  
464 Bearsden Road, Bearsden Road  
Glasgow, G61 1QH  
T 0141 330 5700  
[www.gla.ac.uk/faculties/vet/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/faculties/vet/)

### **Liverpool**

The Admissions Sub-Dean  
Faculty of Veterinary Science  
University of Liverpool  
Liverpool, L69 7ZJ  
T 0151 794 4281  
[www.liv.ac.uk/vets/](http://www.liv.ac.uk/vets/)

### **London**

The Head of Registry  
The Royal Veterinary College  
Royal College Street  
London, NW1 0TU  
T 020 7468 5000  
[www.rvc.ac.uk](http://www.rvc.ac.uk)

### **Nottingham**

The School of Veterinary Medicine and Science  
University of Nottingham  
Sutton Bonington Campus  
Sutton Bonington  
Leicestershire, LE12 5RD  
T 0115 951 6417  
[www.nottingham.ac.uk/vet](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/vet)

The veterinary school websites can be accessed from the RCVS website: [www.rcvs.org.uk/careers](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/careers)

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