

It should happen to a vet

A career in veterinary science isn't just a job – it's a vocation. To be successful, you will need scientific skills, but you'll also have to be good at dealing with people, says **PROFESSOR GARY ENGLAND**, Foundation Dean at the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham

Work in the veterinary profession is highly rewarding, but it is also very demanding. Anyone contemplating a career in veterinary practice should remember that it is a 24-hour service, 365 days a year. The veterinary profession, though small in number, has varied and important duties to safeguard the health and welfare of animals. It also has a responsibility for public health including the prevention of disease, and for the medical and surgical treatment of animals including household pets, zoo animals, farm animals and horses. It is a requirement of the governing body of the profession, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, that all veterinary surgeons keep their skills and knowledge up to date throughout their careers.

To practice as a qualified veterinary surgeon in the UK, you must study a veterinary degree course that leads to accreditation by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. Only a few universities in Britain offer these courses and this means that there are often a high number of applicants for every place. People regularly comment that it is much harder to become a vet than a doctor. This isn't strictly true, but places are limited. Courses are five or six years long and are offered at Nottingham, London, Bristol, Cambridge, Liverpool, Glasgow and Edinburgh universities.

On successful completion of a veterinary degree, a number of opportunities will be open to you. Most graduates follow a career in general practice, but there are huge opportunities in science, research, preventative veterinary medicine, academia, the Armed Forces, government veterinary service and specialist practice.



School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham

What is taught on the course?

Each undergraduate veterinary science degree is different – but each course prepares you for the variety of skills needed to practice as a professional veterinary surgeon.

The first years of a course generally provide you with the science that underpins veterinary medicine and surgery, and includes topics such as anatomy, biology, biochemistry together with practical animal handling skills and animal nutrition, feeding and husbandry. Later years of the course are typically more clinical, and you will learn about physiological processes and pathological diseases. The final year is spent in clinical practice, where you deepen your medical and surgical knowledge and skills at veterinary hospitals, zoos, government laboratories and in general practice. It is a requirement of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons that you also undertake at least 38 weeks of placements in your vacations.

What qualifications do I need?

A veterinary science degree course is intellectually challenging and as a result entry requirements are set high. Applicants will usually be expected to have excellent GCSE results and to have scored A grades in their GCSE sciences. All veterinary science courses in the UK expect students to have completed biology A-level and most also require an A-level in chemistry. A typical offer made to students applying for a place on a veterinary science course is AAB at A-level; general studies is not included in the terms of the conditional offers made by any of the UK vet schools.

Work experience

All UK vet schools require prospective students to have undertaken relevant work experience in a range of settings; ideally this should amount to several weeks over two to three years. It should cover experience of both large and small animal veterinary

work, animal rescue, zoos, animals in research, equine and a range of farmed species. In addition it is helpful to demonstrate an appreciation that farmed species are part of the food chain and that vets have to care for animals, even in an abattoir.

Many people are intelligent enough to get the right grades so you need to make yourself stand out from the crowd in some way to get a place. One way is to get as much hands-on animal experience as you can. This will almost certainly be voluntary and will probably be very mundane jobs like making tea, cleaning the floors and kennels and generally being a dogsbody. However, if your life's goal is to be a vet then you have to take the bad with the good. Try your local vet practices, kennels, RSCPA, PDSA, pet shops, farms etc. The other benefit of doing this work early on is that you might find that you actually don't want to be a vet. Like any other job it can be tedious and mundane, much of the time is spent doing vaccinations and repeating advice about fleas and worms ad infinitum. It can be stressful and a massive amount of responsibility goes with it.

The admissions process

The admissions process for veterinary science applicants is very thorough. The universities have a large number of applicants, (the ratio of applicants to places may be 10:1) and it is important that students are selected who possess the academic ability and personal skills to cope with a long and demanding course. All applications to veterinary science must be made via UCAS by 15 October each year. In addition to your UCAS application all the vet schools require further information to assess applicants accurately. This may be in the form of a questionnaire, an essay or the results of the BioMedical Admissions Test. All schools only make offers after interview. At interview you should expect to be asked questions on your understanding of the profession, current scientific issues, your motivation and ability. Some vet schools may also include a practical assessment.

Career options

The veterinary profession is diverse and a qualification leads to many



career options. Most vets work in general practice where they are 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.

'The final year is spent in clinical practice, where you will deepen your medical and surgical knowledge'

Other career openings include university, public or private sector research into the health, welfare and usefulness of both food-producing and companion animals; public and animal health roles at a variety of government departments; officer roles in the Armed Forces; prevention and treatment roles at charities such as the RSPCA and PDSA and wildlife and environmental conservation.

The new Nottingham Vet School

The UK's first new vet school for 50 years is opening in Nottingham in September 2006. It provides a progressive and dynamic learning and research environment and equips students with the knowledge, skills and behaviour to be a competent and talented vet. The innovative five-year degree course is designed with clinical outcomes in mind but draws upon leading-edge teaching methods and scientific research advances.

The education provided to students at Nottingham Vet School is hands-on from the moment they join the course: students work with patients and clinical case scenarios from day one. The course is integrated and teaching is problem-oriented – this means that students will study systems-based modules each covering all of the common domestic, wildlife and exotic species. Learning is provided within body systems modules (eg cardiovascular system), allowing students to gain an overall picture of the body system by integrating more traditional subjects such as anatomy, physiology and normal function.

Students will benefit from using the extensive purpose-built, on-site facilities. The Nottingham course is unique in that it will award three separate degrees: the BVMedSci, and the professional qualification, the BVM and BVS degrees. The course will be taught using a modular system for the first four years with a lecture-free clinical final year:

Years 1 and 2 will develop learning primarily about the "normal" animal using clinical case examples and scenarios. Personal and professional skills will focus on learning, communication and the professional role of the veterinary surgeon.

Year 3 will provide a research focus leading to the BVMedSci degree. Years 3 and 4 will develop learning about animal production, trauma management, disease processes, diagnosis, management and prevention. This part of the course will also integrate learning of pathological processes with the food industry, zoonotic disease and public health. Personal and professional skills will incorporate business skills and entrepreneurship.

Year 5 will consist entirely of Clinical Practice Modules with clinical teaching provided by university staff within a hospital/practice/laboratory setting. Successful completion leads to the award of the BVM and BVS degrees. This course has been specifically designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills and behaviour to become a competent and talented vet.

Further details are available at www.nottingham.ac.uk/vet.