

# **BVA policy position on UK undergraduate veterinary education**

## **Executive summary**

BVA supports well-structured and adequately resourced veterinary education programmes in order to produce a well-respected, adaptable veterinary workforce who are able to take the lead in improving animal health and welfare and public health for the benefit of society.



**Recommendation 7:** BVA has a role to play in working with the UK veterinary schools and [My Vet Future](#) to formally collate accessible information about graduate entry to veterinary medicine, fast track courses and potential sources of funding.

**Recommendation 8:** As part of their pre-entry requirements, UK veterinary schools should continue to adopt an outcomes-based approach to work experience, focusing on what is learnt and how this is reflected upon as opposed to prescribed durations of placements alone.

**Recommendation 9:** UK veterinary schools should continue to work collaboratively to share best practice and effective strategies to widen participation in veterinary education. This should include considering the best ways to raise awareness of available widening access routes and gateway programmes.

**Recommendation 10:** BVA has a role to play in terms of working collaboratively with the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS), British Veterinary LGBT+ (BVLGBT+) and RCVS Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Working Group to develop an engagement strategy and resources to raise awareness amongst underrepresented and minority groups of veterinary career paths and the different routes into veterinary education.

**Recommendation 11:** BVA should work collaboratively with the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS), British Veterinary LGBT+ (BVLGBT+) and RCVS Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Working Group to facilitate 'diversity ambassadors' within the profession to act as

**Recommendation 18: UK veterinary students studying in EU and non-**

**Recommendation 31: Veterinary students should be exposed to a range of learning environments and given the opportunity to select work-based placements that enable them to develop their Day One Competences, meet their individual learning objectives and explore diverse career pathways.**

**Recommendation 32: As well as clinical competences, veterinary graduates should have the opportunity to develop a range of non-clinical competences and be prepared to navigate the decision-making processes they will be expected to undertake as part of their first role.**

**Recommendation 33: Day One Competences and guidance must pay due regard to veterinary surgeons who embark on varied, including non-clinical, career paths.**

**Recommendation 34: Awareness and training in animal welfare, science, ethics and law (AWSEL) should be integrated across undergraduate curricula.**

**Recommendation 35: For the veterinary profession to position itself as animal welfare focussed, awareness and training in animal welfare advocacy at undergraduate level should be strengthened.**

**Recommendation 36: Species/sector-specific veterinary associations should develop guidance on what the 'Day One Competences' look like in their sectors.**

**Recommendation 37: BVA supports the provision of continued and post-graduate education throughout the veterinary career to enable varied career choices at any stage of professional life.**

**Recommendation 38: Animal health and welfare should be at the heart of any review of the Day One Competences or any proposed models of competence.**

**Recommendation 39: RCVS should develop enhanced guidance detailing the standard expected from new graduates for Day One Competences areas identified as having low competency scores.**

**Recommendation 40: It should be recognised that PDP is not only for new graduates but is also an appropriate way to support veterinary surgeons changing their area of practice or returning to work after a career break.**

**Recommendation 41: PDP must be applicable and relevant**



# BVA Policy position on UK undergraduate veterinary education

## Introduction

BVA supports well-structured and adequately resourced veterinary education programmes in order to produce a well-respected, adaptable veterinary workforce who are able to take the lead in improving animal health and welfare and public health for the benefit of society.

This document is intended to set out the BVA position on UK undergraduate veterinary education in the context of [the overarching Vet Futures ambition to ensure diverse and rewarding veterinary careers](#), recognising a professional landscape in considerable flux, as well as setting out the BVA position in relation to relevant proposals included in [the ongoing RCVS Graduate Outcomes review](#).

Currently UK veterinary undergraduate programmes are held in high esteem for the high-quality, omniscient veterinary surgeons they produce, and UK veterinary schools are internationally recognised for their global excellence in teaching and veterinary research.<sup>3</sup>

-quality veterinary education and build long-term capability and capacity in the veterinary workforce, all stakeholders should work together to achieve:

- Selection of students who are most likely to thrive in the workplace and deliver improvements in animal health and welfare;
- Recognition of the full breadth of career pathways available to veterinary graduates with curricula that adequately prepares graduates to enter into diverse areas of work;
- Skilled graduates who receive appropriate opportunities to undertake core and elective areas of study and develop clinical and non-clinical knowledge and skills;
- A wide range of rewarding and well-communicated career pathways (both clinical and non-clinical) to attract and retain the best applicants from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic groups;
- Resilient and confident graduates who are aware of, and can navigate, career options through the support networks available to them;
- Graduates who are better supported during the transition from students to the world of work;
- Graduates who are equipped [to enact a range of roles as part of multidisciplinary, vet-led teams](#).

As part of this, it is important to emphasise that any efforts to further develop veterinary education must recognise the pluripotential of the veterinary degree and the full breadth of veterinary graduates entering the workforce across wide ranging career paths, **both clinical and non-clinical**.

Whilst the veterinary profession is relatively small, its reach and impact are significant, with veterinary surgeons being vital to the UK economy and our communities. Veterinary surgeons work in myriad settings, including in clinical practice providing preventive healthcare and treatment for livestock, pets and leisure/sport animals, carrying out surveillance, and advancing standards of animal welfare; in research advancing our scientific understanding; in abattoirs and throughout the food chain to secure

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<sup>3</sup>RCVS, 2019. Outstanding performance of UK veterinary schools on world stage <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/news/outstanding-performance-of-uk-veterinary-schools-on-world-stage/>

public health, food safety and animal welfare; in industry and technology ensuring the UK remains competitive; and in government providing veterinary expertise to public policy making.

Coupled with the breadth of career pathways available to trained veterinary surgeons, the veterinary profession has also experienced rapid change in the environment within which it operates, and there has been a shift in the expectations of clients, stakeholders and beneficiaries of veterinary services. The list of clients, stakeholders and beneficiaries of the services delivered by the veterinary profession spans pet owners, farmers, industry, Government, and [other allied professionals who form part of the vet-led team](#).

Developments within veterinary education should therefore be mindful of the evolving needs and expectations of the veterinary profession from wider society, as well as capacity and capability complexities within the professional landscape.

## **A professional landscape in flux**

### **Recruitment and retention**

There is general recognition that the veterinary profession is facing a recruitment and retention crisis,

shortages.<sup>456789</sup> As the [Vet Futures Action Plan](#) sets out, there is a need for veterinary stakeholders to review student recruitment, selection and support, as well as graduate outcomes, in order to encourage a well-supported, healthy workforce that is able to successfully navigate the breadth of opportunities presented by the veterinary undergraduate degree, as well as dealing with the challenging realities of the world of work.

However, several years ago there were serious concerns about the overproduction of veterinary surgeons<sup>10</sup>, as well as concerns that there were not enough jobs to meet demand.<sup>11</sup> Such concerns were considered in [the 2013 BVA position statement on the future of the veterinary profession](#).



(RCVS) increased each year from 2010-2016, accounting for around 50% of veterinary surgeons registering in the UK (approximately 1,000 veterinary surgeons in 2015 and 2016 in total).<sup>14</sup> Any reduction in the number of veterinary surgeons migrating to the UK, or an increase in the number leaving the UK because of its exit from the EU, will have a destabilising effect on the veterinary workforce, potentially impacting on the already over stretched staffing levels across the profession and increasing demand for veterinary graduates. There are also reports that applicant numbers from the EU for UK clinical veterinary positions have fallen dramatically in the past two years.

Further, 22% of the current veterinary teaching and research workforce are EU nationals.<sup>15</sup> Restrictions on EU immigration would therefore limit the ability of UK veterinary schools to sustain sufficient academic staff to promote innovation and global excellence in teaching standards and veterinary research.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Wider context of higher education reform**

Veterinary education must be considered within the context of higher education provision and how the government responds to the [Post-18 Review of Education and Funding. The review has recommended that the government should reduce the fee cap chargeable to Higher Education students to £7,500, and that the government should replace the lost income to higher education institutions by increasing the teaching grant.](#) The report also recommends that the government should adjust the teaching grant attached to each subject to reflect more reasonable costs and its social and economic value to students and taxpayers.<sup>17</sup>





the range of careers, increase awareness of career pathways that may not have been otherwise explored, and provide information on how to gain employment in the chosen area. BVA also has a role in supporting the species/sector-specific veterinary associations to collate and present this information.

**Recommendation 4: Species/sector-specific veterinary associations should be encouraged to provide easily accessible information about career pathways in their sectors, including non-traditional career routes and post-graduate education opportunities.**

## Selection and widening participation

The purpose of selection methods should be to select those students who will most benefit from veterinary education and go on to have fulfilling careers in the veterinary workforce, taking the lead in improving animal health and welfare and public health for the benefit of society.

The demographics of those admitted to veterinary school largely reflect the applications received.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, more work needs to be done to encourage applications from a diverse range of students.<sup>22</sup>

Whilst it is important to recognise that widening participation is a complex socio-economic issue, with demographics of those admitted to vet school largely reflective of applications received<sup>23</sup>, further efforts should be undertaken by stakeholders across veterinary education to attract students from underrepresented and minority groups.

### Selection methods

approaches to student admissions, and we support the further encouragement of UK veterinary schools to develop admission approaches that select for both undergraduate and postgraduate success.

UK veterinary schools use a range of selection methods<sup>24</sup> to select veterinary students, including academic records, interviews, situational judgement tests and aptitude tests. The undertaking of these selection methods is inevitably costly for universities; however, we note that there is a need to generate additional evidence to assess how these selection methods influence undergraduate and graduate outcomes.

UK veterinary school admission processes and entry requirements traditionally centre on core components with different weightings and durations depending on the veterinary school in question. These components include, but are not limited to:

- Work experience (comprising animal husbandry and/or clinical experience with a veterinary surgeon for varying lengths of time ranging 1-6 weeks depending on the veterinary school)
- Tests and questionnaires before interview
- Interviews (with or without role-play or other scenarios) dependent on the veterinary school)





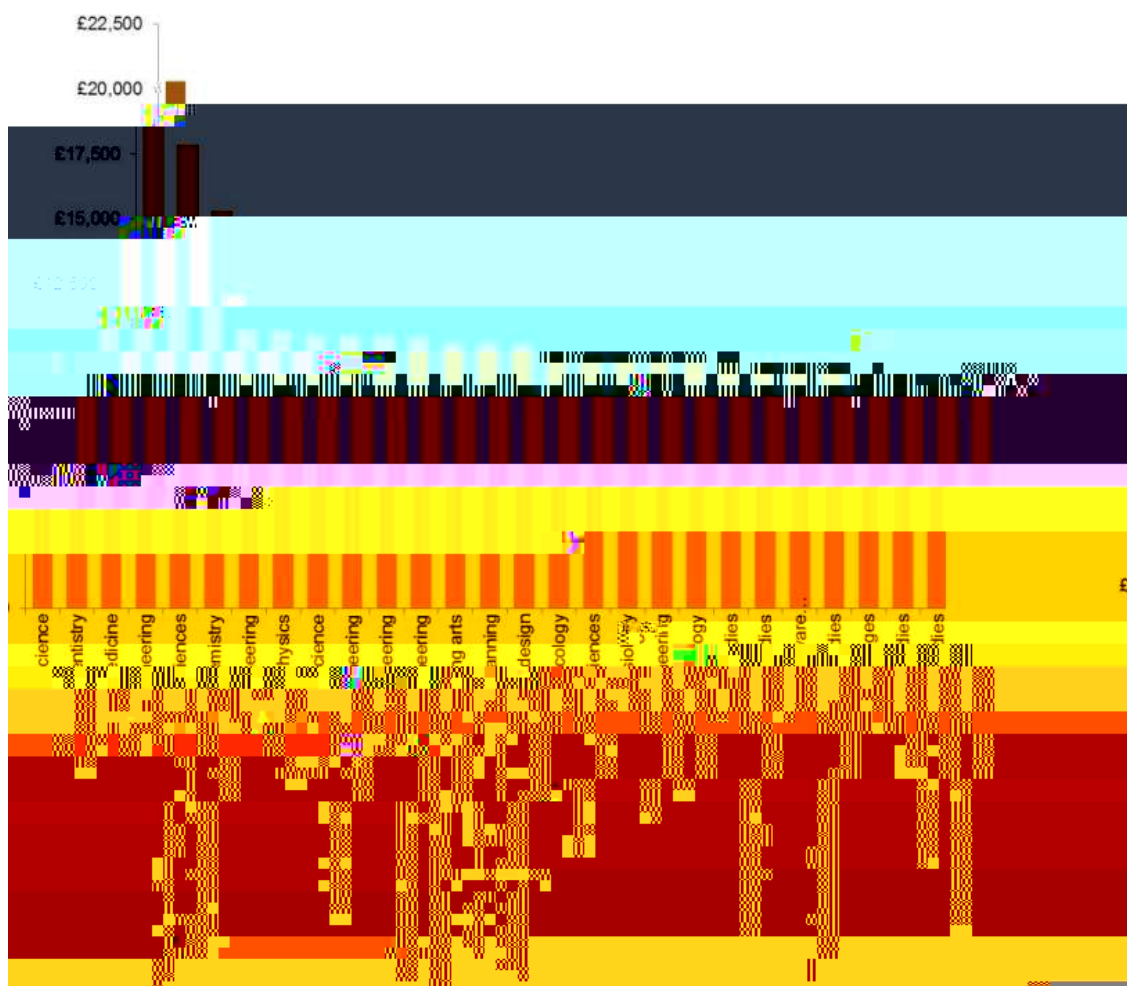


Scotland. Fees for those taking second degrees vary between UK veterinary schools, and non-EU students are required to pay the full



the additional costs of Extra-mural Studies (EMS), clinical inputs from vet school owned businesses or 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



Given the high-cost of delivering the veterinary undergraduate degree, a reduction in tuition fees in the context of current funding mechanisms has the potential to negatively impact on teaching standards and quality - removing a large proportion of the funds needed to successfully deliver the veterinary undergraduate degree as it is currently structured. This is a particularly pertinent consideration in context of the [Post-18 Review of Education and Funding, which has recommended that that the government should reduce the fee cap chargeable to Higher Education students to £7,500 and that the government should replace the lost income to institutions by increasing the teaching grant. The report also recommends that the government](#) should adjust the teaching grant attached to each subject to reflect more accurately and taxpayers. Given the valuable contribution that veterinary graduates make to society and the high

cost of delivering the veterinary undergraduate degree, we strongly support the recommendation to increase the teaching grant for high-cost subjects if the student fee cap is reduced.

Further, the economic reality of veterinary education is that student tuition fees and government funding do not meet the costs of producing qualified veterinary surgeons. We would therefore support additional government funding for veterinary education by increasing the unit of resource per student to safeguard the quality of graduates and ensure a consistent supply of qualified veterinary surgeons.

**Recommendation 12: There should be additional government funding from UK funding bodies for veterinary education by increasing the unit of resource per student in order to maintain quality and standards in veterinary education and contribute to retaining capacity in the veterinary workforce.**

#### **Safeguarding quality and standards of veterinary education**

With growth in the provision of veterinary services (including both the first opinion and specialist referral market) estimated at 5% per annum<sup>39</sup>, meeting the growing demand for veterinary surgeons will require

exit from the EU which continues to exacerbate existing concerns regarding workforce shortages.<sup>40</sup>

A possible approach to address workforce shortages could be to increase the number of UK graduates that are being produced. However, it is important to outline that as the number of veterinary places is not capped and Government funding for education is not calculated per capita, Government funding for veterinary education does not automatically increase if a new vet school is created or if the intake of vet students at existing UK schools increases. Further, for European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) accredited veterinary schools, there are specific staff:student ratios that universities must adhere to<sup>41</sup>, meaning that any increase in students would also require additional funding for staff and could impact on teaching capacity and teaching facilities.

Therefore, when creating additional places for veterinary students, at new or existing veterinary schools, serious consideration must be given as to how this could impact on teaching standards and quality of education, as well as the potential unintended consequences on the number of students that other veterinary schools are able to admit.

With this in mind, efforts to address the capacity crisis in the veterinary profession must avoid oversimplification and reliance on an inputs-based approach alone.

**Recommendation 13:**



As part of this, it is also important to ensure that UK veterinary students studying in EU and non-EEA countries are encouraged to return to the UK to pursue diverse and fulfilling career pathways within the UK veterinary workforce.

**Recommendation 18: UK veterinary students studying in EU and non-EU countries should be encouraged and supported to return to the UK to pursue diverse and fulfilling career pathways within the UK veterinary workforce.**

### **Extra-mural Studies (EMS), tracking, methods of assessment**

BVA recognises that

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their delivery of placements. As highlighted in [the EMS Recommendations, Policy & Guidance as approved by RCVS Council in November 2009](#):

*Bearing in mind that practices receive no financial remuneration for their contribution to the training of veterinary students, universities should consider offering EMS providers discounted and/or preferential access to some services, facilities and/or CPD provided by the university. This will help to strengthen links between practices and universities, bringing benefits to both sides. Whilst these recommendations have financial implications for the universities, it should be recognised that it could cost them considerably more to try and replace EMS completely by in-house or university-owned provision, if indeed it ever could be replicated.*

**Recommendation 25: The delivery of EMS should involve the whole veterina**









animal owners and society. BVA would like to see animal health and welfare at the heart of any review or proposed models of competence.<sup>52</sup>

According to the 2017 [Veterinary Schools Council Employer Survey](#) the following areas received the lowest competency scores and therefore may benefit from enhanced guidance regarding the standard expected from the new graduate:

- Can perform a systematic post-mortem examination, including recording their observations
- Demonstrates an understanding of the economic context of the veterinary profession
- Is aware of the legislation affecting veterinary businesses (eg disposal of clinical waste and safety of medicines)
- Demonstrates knowledge of systems of quality assurance (eg knowledge and explanation of the procedure for reporting adverse incidents)
- Remains calm and appears comfortable working in pressurised situations
- Shows an awareness of expenditures involved in running a veterinary business

In addition, in the [BVA position on veterinary scanning surveillance \(animal health and disease monitoring\)](#), BVA identified that the Day One Competences should be further developed to include specific reference to practical skills in surveillance activities (contributing to and using surveillance reports and understanding the value of doing so), which are consolidated by veterinary graduates throughout their Professional Development Phase.<sup>53</sup>

**Recommendation 38: Animal health and welfare should be at the heart of any review of the Day One Competences or any proposed models of competence.**

**Recommendation 39: RCVS should develop enhanced guidance detailing the standard expected from new graduates for Day One Competences areas identified as having low competency scores.**

#### **Professional Development Phase (PDP)**

BVA recognises the importance of having a structured process to support new veterinary graduates during the transition from the structured environment of veterinary education to the world of work.

In order to help retain veterinary surgeons within the profession and in order to adapt to future changes in the requirements for veterinary surgeons, it is important to stress that the PDP is not only for new graduates but is also an appropriate way to support veterinary surgeons changing their area of practice or returning to work after a career break. Similarly, it is important to note that embarking on a career path in general practice and then specialising is not the only viable post-graduate route for veterinary surgeons. The PDP must therefore be applicable and useful for veterinary surgeons in non-clinical roles.

**Recommendation 40: It should be recognised that PDP is not only for new graduates but is also an appropriate way to support veterinary surgeons changing their area of practice or returning to work after a career break.**

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<sup>52</sup> British Veterinary Association, 2019. [BVA, AGV, AVI, AVS, BCVA, BEVA, BSAVA, BVPA, GVS, LAVA, PVS, SVS, SPVS and VPHA response to RCVS consultation on graduate and professional development phase outcomes](#)

<sup>53</sup> British Veterinary Association, 2018. BVA position on veterinary scanning surveillance (animal health and disease monitoring). Available at:

[https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News\\_campaigns\\_and\\_policy/Policy/Animal\\_disease\\_surveillance/BVA%20position%20on%20veterinary%20scanning%20surveillance.pdf](https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News_campaigns_and_policy/Policy/Animal_disease_surveillance/BVA%20position%20on%20veterinary%20scanning%20surveillance.pdf)

**Recommendation 41: PDP must be applicable and relevant for veterinary surgeons in non-clinical roles.**

**Focus of the PDP**

The PDP should provide opportunities for the development of clinical and professional skills; confidence in different areas of work (both clinical and non-clinical); opportunities to apply moral reasoning and ethical decision-making and, importantly, mentorship to develop in each of these areas according to individual need and circumstances in which the individual is working.

The [Student Minds Graduate Mental Wellbeing in the Workplace Report](#) (although not specific to veterinary graduates) highlights a number of factors associated with the transition into the workplace. Addressing these factors could be emphasised within the PDP:

- The graduate has a manager who is interested in their personal development;
- The graduate has someone they feel confident contacting if they are struggling with their wellbeing;
- The graduate feels comfortable taking breaks during the workday, for example, taking a break for lunch;
- The graduate finds the work they are doing interesting;
- The graduate feels able to keep up with financial pressures;
- The graduate feels that their organisation is proactive about promoting wellbeing;
- The graduate feels included in work-related social activities.

**Recommendation 42: The PDP should provide opportunities for the development of clinical and professional skills; confidence in different areas of work (both clinical and non-clinical); opportunities to apply moral reasoning and ethical decision-making and mentorship.**

**Structure, delivery and recording of the PDP**

BVA supports the way in which the current PDP competences largely mirror the Day One Competences. However, as competence is relative to the expected standard, both in terms of task and fluency, greater clarity is needed, for both graduates and those supporting them on the expected level of competence on completion of the PDP.

PDP can often be seen as a tick box exercise with the emphasis more on the number of cases treated than on the learning that has taken place and the development of competence.<sup>54</sup> This approach also creates problems for those who, for whatever reason, do not have access to particular clinical cases. We therefore support a move away from an input-based process for PDP towards an outcomes-based approach, focussed on the outcomes that the graduate is expected to achieve by the end of their PDP, rather than focusing on the number of cases that have been treated

**Recommendation 43: There should be a move away from an input-based process for PDP towards an outcomes-based approach, focussed on the outcomes that the graduate is expected to achieve by the end of their PDP, rather than focusing on the number of cases that have been treated.**

The [RCVS/ BSAVA 2017 evaluation of the PDP for veterinary graduates](#) highlights particular challenges for graduates, such as the disparity between what students were being taught in veterinary school and how applicable this is to real life cases, and around non-clinical skills, including making d24(D)30(P)-P

in mind, we would support the development of appropriate CPD to support the role of PDP mentors and supervisors.

**Recommendation 44: Further support, guidance and resources should be developed to support graduates completing the PDP, as well as employers providing PDP.**

**Recommendation 45:**



## Annex A – Widening participation and gateway programmes offered by UK vet schools

BVA is aware of the widening participation and gateway programmes set out below. This list is not exhaustive. For more information please contact the individual veterinary school admission office.

University	Overview
<b>The Royal Veterinary College (RVC)</b>	The Royal Veterinary College offers <a href="#">The Veterinary Gateway</a> programme, which integrates an additional preparatory year designed to equip widening participation students with the appropriate knowledge and skills to undertake a veterinary medicine degree.
<b>The University of Nottingham</b>	The University of Nottingham offers a 6-year <a href="#">Veterinary Medicine and Surgery programme including a gateway year</a>
<b>The University of Bristol</b>	<p>The University of Bristol offer a <a href="#">BVSc Gateway Veterinary Science programme</a>, which, upon successful completion, allows students to join the BVSc veterinary science course.</p> <p>The University of Bristol also offer an <a href="#">Insight into Bristol</a> residential summer school programme, with a Veterinary Sciences stream, that aims to encourage and support students</p>

## **Annex B – Extract and table taken from in the Veterinary Schools Council Admissions processes and entry requirements for UK veterinary school report (2019)**

### **How the UK veterinary schools widen participation in their courses and the profession**

It is important that access to veterinary training is available to as many people as possible, and this table is a summary of how the UK veterinary schools promote admissions of applicants from disadvantaged and under-represented groups. Please be aware that this table is just a brief summary, and much more detail is available on individual vet school and university websites.

The activities, funding and special arrangements listed below are available to applicants and students whose circumstances indicate they are from a disadvantaged or under-represented group. This is determined according to a range of parameters - such as nationally-

## Glossary of terms

Term	Explanation
<b>Extra-mural studies (EMS)</b>	Extra-mural studies refer work-based placements that veterinary undergraduate students must undertake to gain experience across a breadth of veterinary workplace settings.  Currently, students must complete a minimum of 38 weeks EMS during their course, which should normally consist of 12 weeks pre-clinical and 26 weeks of clinical placements.
<b>Extra-mural studies (EMS) provider</b>	Extra-mural studies providers refer to the veterinary work places and staff (both clinical and non-clinical) that provide EMS placements to students.

## Day One Competences