

Ms Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities
Department for Education
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Dear Minister,

Joint letter from the RCVS, BVA and VSC concerning a potential cap on student numbers in 2021

We are writing on behalf of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), British Veterinary Association (BVA), and Veterinary Schools Council (VSC), concerning the recent announcement about plans to introduce a cap on student numbers at UK universities. While we understand that there are good reasons for introducing such a cap, we write to request that veterinary degree programmes be exempted from any such cap.

The United Kingdom currently has a shortage of veterinary surgeons (estimated at 11-13%). We are also heavily reliant on overseas graduates; over 60% of vets registering in recent years graduated overseas. Over 95% of veterinary surgeons working in public health graduated overseas. The vast majority of these qualified in the European Union, and we expect much greater difficulties in recruiting from EU Member States once the Brexit transition period ends in early 2021. In recognition of this challenge, the veterinary profession was recently restored to the Shortage Occupation List to help streamline future visa applications.

It is therefore critical that we greatly increase the number of graduates from UK veterinary schools in the coming years, supported by appropriate funding, in order to reduce our reliance on overseas graduates and ensure a sufficient workforce to support animal health and welfare and public health. In order to achieve this, student numbers need to be increased (alongside ongoing measures to increase retention rates). A cap on student numbers (even one that allowed a small amount of growth) would therefore be counterproductive. We would be grateful for reassurance that no such cap will be put in place for these (oversubscribed) veterinary degree programmes.

We also request that you issue guidance to ensure that universities are not tempted to use the 5% growth allowance to focus on profitable courses while freezing or cutting their veterinary school course numbers. Guidance should encourage universities to focus on growing their veterinary degree courses to address the critical workforce shortage. We also ask that veterinary degrees are included in the recently proposed 5,000 extra places for health sciences.

If you have any questions or require any further information regarding this matter then please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Niall Connell, President, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)



Daniella Dos Santos, President, British Veterinary Association (BVA)



Prof Susan Dawson, Chair, Veterinary Schools Council