

Migration Advisory Committee: Call for evidence

Shortage Occupation List review 2018

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 (VNs) in the UK, and sets, upholds and advances their educational, ethical and clinical standards.
2. We are grateful for the opportunity submit a joint response to this call for evidence.
3. Veterinary nurses are a crucial part of the vet-led team, undertaking numerous roles in practice. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 allows acts of minor veterinary surgery to be delegated to veterinary nurses, and in so doing frees up veterinary surgeons time to undertake tasks that are restricted to them. This is absolutely crucial at a time when the profession of veterinary surgery, which has a crucial role in public health and the trade in meat products as well as animal health and welfare, is also in shortage.

Introduction

What do you think are the main reasons for job shortages (answered in the question above), and or wider shortages in the sector(s)? (Not to exceed 500 words).

4. Please refer to the joint RCVS-British Veterinary Association submission for veterinary surgeons (attached) for background information. Veterinary nurses share many of the problems facing veterinary surgeons including a rapidly growing sector and changing demographic factors.
5. In addition, the production of veterinary nurses in the UK is limited by the difficulty in expanding the number of veterinary practices willing to train veterinary nurses. Despite this, annual student enrolments have grown from 1,259 in 2012/3 to 1,990 in 2017/18.
6. The Major Employers Group, which represents some of the largest UK veterinary businesses providing primary care directly to the public, conducted a survey of vacancy rates amongst its members in November 2018 and showed 475 veterinary nursing vacancies in practices employing over 6200 veterinary nurses representing a shortage of approximately 7.6%.
7. Therefore, we ask that the veterinary nursing profession is added to the Shortage Occupation List.

Please explain what measures have been taken to reduce shortages in the sector as informed by your members and or research. (Not to exceed 500 words).

8. Low retention in the veterinary nursing workforce has been an ongoing concern for the RCVS for some time.
9. The British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) and the RCVS have expended considerable time, effort and resource addressing this problem. Together, we published the VN Futures Report and Action Plan in September 2016. The VN Futures project set out a number of ambitions, including:
 - a. Creating a sustainable workforce
 - b. Structured and rewarding career paths
 - c. Confident, resilient, healthy and well-supported workforce
10. Consideration is also being given to how the veterinary team can be reformed to allow VNs to take on additional tasks, freeing up veterinary time to undertake roles for which they are best qualified; any such reform needs to be undertaken in a measured way that prioritises animal health, animal welfare, public health, and retains the assurance provided by a veterinary surgeon's signature which facilitates international trade.
11. This work is being undertaken as part of the RCVS Legislation Review. Recommendations for reform will be published in 2019, some of which will require legislative reform before they could be implemented.

Have these measures worked, if not why? (Not to exceed 500 words).

12. The VN shortage predates the decision of the UK to leave the EU. Concerns about VN capacity led to the VN Futures programme and a strong commitment from the RCVS as the representative body to address these issues, but it is too early in the process to see the results of this work.

Are the jobs that you have said are in shortage, open to eligible workers from the Tier 2 points-based visa system?

13. Yes – but the salary cap is a major barrier.

If known, how many workers from outside of the UK have been recruited using the Tier 2 points-based visa system in the past 12 months, stating the job titles. (Not to exceed 500 words).

14. The RCVS does not hold the figures for Tier 2 visa applications for veterinary nurses. However, it is likely that additional registrants would have sought to come to the UK via this route had the Tier 2 cap not been exceeded.

If you have supporting evidence such as survey results from members please attach here. Please remember to omit sensitive details before attaching.

- VN Futures Report & Action Plan

If you have any other information that might be useful for our call for evidence please use the space below to explain (Not to exceed 500 words).

Our calls

15. A future immigration system must allow UK employers to recruit overseas veterinary nurses to address shortages in the workforce, and to facilitate delegation by veterinary surgeons thereby freeing up veterinary surgeon's time to undertake tasks that are restricted to them, including in the crucial area of public health.
 16. In addition, we recommend that veterinary employers be exempt from the Immigration Skills Charge in order to avoid any additional barriers or burdens to veterinary nursing employment. This is particularly important due to the composition of the veterinary industry, which is still includes many small businesses which would struggle with the cost and administration related to the Charge.
 17. We further recommend that there is no minimum earning cap for veterinary nurses applying for working visas. Veterinary nurses are skilled professionals who may choose to work in the UK for reasons other than remuneration. Further, VN wages are often considerably lower than the existing and proposed wage cap.
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