



Studying Veterinary Medicine – guidance for disabled applicants

Applying for entry to the Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery (BVM&S) programmes.

The University of Edinburgh welcomes applications from disabled students. We hope that by providing this guidance, we will clarify some of the key issues around becoming a veterinary surgeon.

- The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (R(D)SVS) has for some time accepted students who have disclosed a disability or health issue on application and we are keen to give students appropriate support. This is provided by the School, usually in liaison with the University's Student Disability Service.
- Many disabled students and students with health conditions can achieve the required standards of knowledge and skills to enable them to practise as veterinary surgeons. Our main concern is how a student's impairment affects ability to study and to practice as a vet.
- Academic merit is considered first and foremost and all applications, including those from disabled students are considered on an individual basis.
- It should be made clear that being disabled does **not** mean that an applicant will not be admitted to the course. It is the impact of a disability or health condition on a student's ability to study and practise as a veterinary surgeon that is considered.
- The safety of patients, the public, colleagues and the student must always take priority.

Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (RDSVS) considerations

- In determining who to admit and who to graduate, the R(D)SVS must follow the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) prescribed professional standards, as well as our own academic standards and regulations.
- We do not have the discretion to offer individual dispensation from parts of the course, as graduation with a registerable veterinary degree currently leads to automatic membership of the RCVS and the legal right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK.
- The difference between training as a vet and working as a vet. Veterinary schools are 'gatekeepers' for the veterinary profession. In order to graduate, students must have achieved all the competences prescribed by the RCVS – the so-called "Day One Competences" ([link](#)) that are required for practice as a newly qualified veterinary surgeon. Once qualified, it is possible for a veterinary surgeon to restrict their area of practice to particular species, or to work in a non-clinical role. However, as veterinary medicine is a comparative science, it is important for students to receive a broad clinical training across all common domestic species and related veterinary disciplines. This is why there can be no dispensation from parts of the course, as otherwise the standard of competence reached at the end would be severely reduced.

- The R(D)SVS takes its duty of care seriously and will not promote false expectations for students whose impairment impacts on their ability to demonstrate the key skills required by a veterinary surgeon. Work as a vet is very demanding, emotionally and physically.
- It would be unwise for individuals with serious health problems (physical or mental, including a history of addiction) to put themselves into a situation in which this would be a risk to themselves or others, including the animals they are working with.

It is strongly recommended that applicants, in their own interests, disclose any disabilities or long-term illnesses when they apply, as without disclosure, admissions tutors will be unable to properly consider each applicant's individual situation and how best to provide appropriate support.

Any disabled applicant is welcome to contact the Student Disability Service prior to application www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service

The School will consider whether, with appropriate support, a disabled applicant will be able to cope with the demanding academic, practical and clinical components of the veterinary course, and also whether he or she would be able to meet the requirements of the RCVS's 'Day One competences' at the end of the degree course. Please see Day One Skills at:

<http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/day-one-skills/>

In reaching these decisions we follow guidance issued by the RCVS on the admission of disabled students to the professional veterinary degree course. The full guidance document can be downloaded from the RCVS website.

<http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/dda-guidance/>

What does the course involve?

If you are thinking of studying Veterinary Medicine and you have a disability or long-term health condition, it is useful to know in advance what the course might involve.

- Contact our Veterinary Admissions Office vetug@ed.ac.uk
- Ask our staff at any Open Day

What follows are some issues to consider:

- **Work Experience:**
Any experience you gain in a veterinary practice or out in the field before you apply will give you a good idea of what is in store from Veterinary Medicine.
- Specific practical and professional competencies required as part of the BVM&S programmes include being able to:
 - cope with uncertainty and adapt to change – problem solving and flexibility
 - handle and restrain an animal (both large or small) safely and humanely
 - attend all species in an emergency and provide basic first aid (e.g. resuscitation, haemorrhage control, bandaging, and handling).

- Emergency situations could be out in a farm, related to a road accident or within a large or small practice
- perform laboratory tests and use radiographic and ultrasonic equipment
 - prescribe and dispense medicines correctly, accurately and responsibly
 - perform complete clinical examinations, euthanasia and post-mortems examinations.
 - communicate effectively with sensitivity and professionalism to owners and the general public
 - undertake extended periods of working as part of a team, including nights
 - learn and develop skills whilst out in the field.
 - undertake fine motor control tasks such as suturing, surgery, administering anaesthesia injections and taking biopsies.

Additional information and organisations

- RCVS – Day one skills – The RCVS sets out the skills that must be demonstrated in order to register as a veterinary surgeon in their Day One Skills. This is an important document for you to consider if you are thinking of being a veterinary surgeon. <http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/day-one-skills/>
- The RCVS document - *Guidance on the admission of students with disabilities* <http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/dda-guidance/> gives some guidance on specific disabilities and should be referred to.

These include:

DYSLEXIA

“The veterinary schools already have experience of admitting students with disabilities, of which dyslexia is the most common. Students with dyslexia who are admitted to the course may need support from the university’s special needs specialists. By the end of the course, however, students will need to be able to demonstrate that they are able to practise unaided.

As far as written course work and examinations are concerned, whilst some allowance can be made for dyslexia by allowing extra time, or the use of a computer, in written examinations, this should not be such as to give the student an unfair advantage over others, or to prevent the assessment of the student’s ability to cope with written material, which is an essential part of the job. The veterinary surgeon – often working alone - must be able to read and prepare written reports, handle complex data, and prepare and dispense accurate prescriptions, all of which, however, could be computer generated under certain circumstances. Scribes should only be permitted for temporary disability such as a broken arm, not for someone who would never be able to produce the required level of work, either by computer or by hand. If a student’s dyslexia is so severe that it prevents them demonstrating these skills without assistance from a third party, this could ultimately endanger the safety of patients.

Students with a very severe level of dyslexia would have great difficulty in coping with the demands of the registerable veterinary degree.”

SENSORY IMPAIRMENTS (details available in the RCVS document)

Impaired vision

Hearing impairments

MENTAL HEALTH (details available in the RCVS document)

General
Drug abuse
Anorexia

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES (details available in the RCVS document)

Absence or partial loss of a limb
Wheelchair users
Asthma and allergies to animal dander and other allergens
Immuno-suppressive conditions

Once on the BVM&S programme

Occasionally, in a small number of cases, problems affecting a student's ability to practise may emerge or worsen during the course (for example due to an accident or a worsening clinical condition). The School will seek to offer as much support as possible. Individual cases are treated with sympathy and understanding and where possible are helped to complete the programme. However if these difficulties cannot be resolved it may be appropriate for a student to be transferred to another course that would not lead to a registerable degree.

Useful contacts

- If you have any questions about what the course involves and how this might relate to you, please contact our admissions office.

vetug@ed.ac.uk Tel: +44(0)131 651 7305

- The University of Edinburgh – Student Disability Service

www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/applications-admissions/applying/disability>

- Guidance and information on the Equality Act 2010 and disability

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/vision-and-mission/our-business-plan/disability-equality/>

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