



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies

Studying Veterinary Medicine – guidance for disabled applicants and applicants with health issues

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

The University of Edinburgh welcomes applications from disabled students and students with health issues. 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 (R(D)SVS) 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" 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:

<https://animalowners.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/day-one-competences/>

In reaching these decisions we follow HEOPS guidance. This documentation has been put together following wide consultation, including with the RCVS, on the admission of disabled students to the professional veterinary degree course. The full guidance document can be downloaded from.

http://www.heops.org.uk/uploads/1521730981HEOPS_Veterinary_Students_fitness_standards_2013_v10.pdf

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. <https://animalowners.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/day-one-competences/>
- **HEOPS**- Higher Education Occupational Physicians/Practitioners guidance for Veterinary Students – Standards of medical fitness to train. http://www.heops.org.uk/uploads/1521730981HEOPS_Veterinary_Students_fitness_standards_2013_v10.pdf

Additional guidance provided by the RCVS to the Veterinary Schools includes guidance on the following:

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

Impaired vision

“A veterinary surgeon may be able to practise with some limited visual impairments (eg. colour blindness or monocular vision), although the extent of impairment would need to be assessed against the requirements of the Day One Competences. It should be noted that students will have to perform surgery during their course in order to meet the Day One Competences, and a judgement will need to be made in this context. A severe visual impairment would render the individual unable to practise as a veterinary surgeon. “

Hearing Impairments

“Experience has shown that individuals with a hearing impairment are not necessarily ruled out for admission to the veterinary degree, as long as they have the appropriate coping strategies and make use of appropriate aids (eg. cochlear implants and the use of amplified stethoscopes). In such cases, admissions staff will need to have access to medical and other background information to inform their decision. Issues to be taken into account will include the individual’s ability to communicate with others, as well as their ability to cope in a range of practice and clinical-based contexts so as not to be a danger to themselves, colleagues, clients and animals. “

MENTAL HEALTH

General guidance. “When considering applicants with mental health problems such as serious depressive illness, or the position of students who develop such problems during their time as undergraduates, it must be borne in mind that studying on the veterinary course and working in the veterinary profession is a stressful undertaking. Although a history of mental illness would not necessarily preclude admission, it is advisable for such candidates to be the subject of a risk assessment. In the context of the ready availability of drugs to a veterinary surgeon, and in a profession with a higher than average suicide rate, a history of mental illness could be grounds for not admitting an applicant onto the course where they could be a danger to themselves.”

Drug Abuse. “A history of drug abuse could render an individual unable to practise and the university could therefore be justified in refusing to admit, or not allowing a student with a drug problem to graduate with the registerable veterinary degree. Mental impairment as a result of drug abuse could cause significant difficulties for the individual in coping with the veterinary degree course as well as posing a danger to others. “

Anorexia. “One of the problems often associated with anorexia is the sufferer’s inability to admit to the condition or accept treatment. Veterinary students must develop a capacity for self-audit and a person who is unable to admit to a condition such as severe anorexia and accept the necessary treatment would not meet this competence. Physical problems and lack of strength and stamina associated with the condition would also be likely to make an applicant unsuitable for the course. However, lack of strength *alone* would probably be insufficient grounds for rejection. Documented severe anorexia that has not proved amenable to treatment could provide grounds for non-admission.”

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Absence or partial loss of a limb. “On its own, loss or partial loss of a limb would not necessarily preclude an individual from consideration for admission. The effects of the individual’s disability with reference to the Day One Competences should be considered. In particular, the individual’s ability to handle and restrain animals safely, and to handle equipment will need to be considered. “

Wheelchair users. “An individual who is permanently in a wheelchair would be unable to demonstrate the full range of Day One Competences and would not therefore be able to graduate with the registerable veterinary degree.”

Asthma and allergies to animal dander and other allergens. “In the interests of the individual’s safety, self-disclosure of such conditions is important at the point of entry to the course. Generally, such conditions are controllable and students cope well. In some severe cases, however, an allergy may prove to be uncontrollable and life threatening and thus could be grounds for non-admission. Exposure to a wide range of species on the veterinary course is an inevitable and integral part of veterinary training, and applicants need to be advised that the requirements of the Day One Competences mean that they will not be able to avoid contact with certain species on the grounds of an allergy, or to request dispensation from parts of the course.”

Immuno-suppressive conditions. “Applicants who are taking immuno-suppressants need to be made aware that they would be exposed to organisms that, while not normally pathogenic, might pose a risk to anyone who is immune-suppressed. It may therefore not be in their best interests to be admitted to the course. Admissions staff will need to take further medical advice on a case-by-case basis.”

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

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service>

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/applying/ucas/disability>

- Guidance and information on the Equality Act 2010 and disability

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance>

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