

Survey of UK Veterinary Students' Perceptions about a Career in Equine Practice

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Abstract

Background: Workforce shortages are key challenges facing veterinary practice. Anecdotal evidence suggests that veterinary students are less interested in entering equine practice than previously. Objectives: To investigate veterinary students' perceptions about their equine veterinary education and about working in equine practice. Study Design: On-line survey. Methods: Survey distributed via social media to veterinary students at UK veterinary schools. Questions to document intended career path of students and evaluate perceptions about careers in equine practice. Results: 744 students completed the survey - from all 10 veterinary schools. 88.8% intended to work in clinical practice (32.9% mixed; 25.3% small animal; 20.2% equine; 10.9% farm; 10.7% other/undecided). Factors considered most important for their first job included: mentoring and support (47.0%), team and practice culture (26.2%), working hours (including out-of-hours) (9.2%), location (6.6%), salary and benefits (5.7%) and familiarity with the practice (3.1%). 55.2% felt there were barriers to entering equine practice. 46.9% had ridden a horse regularly; 14.2% had never ridden. Respondents in clinical years rated their university training in equine practice as 'Excellent' (10.0%), 'Good' (45.9%), 'OK' (35.3%), 'Poor' (7.0%) and 'Rubbish' (1.8%). 48.9% respondents felt EMS had contributed most to their equine training. Statistical associations were identified between the following variables and intention to work in equine practice: owning a horse, having ever ridden a horse, confidence in handling horses, student membership of BEVA, and desire to undertake an internship. Main Limitations: Potential selection bias. Conclusions: 20% of students reporting an intention in equine work does not explain problems with recruitment of equine vets. Potential mismatch between numbers of students interested in equine practice and availability of equine jobs for new graduates. Students with pre-existing equine interest /experience were more likely to want to enter equine practice. EMS appears important for students' training in equine medicine.

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