

Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
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04 April 2024

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing to you on behalf of the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) to express our deep concerns regarding the recent changes to the Immigration Rules announced on 14 March 2024.

The introduction of new skilled worker visa rules requiring veterinary surgeons to meet a salary threshold of £48,100 or £24.67 per hour presents a significant challenge for our profession. Already grappling with a well-recognised veterinary workforce shortage, compounded by retention and recruitment challenges, the United Kingdom remains heavily reliant on overseas graduates registering and practising in our country.

There has been a significant decline in overseas graduates joining the UK register, in particular from the EU, due to the post-Brexit requirements of applying for visas, requirements for sponsorship from employers, and the need for an English proficiency test. Registrations from graduates of EU veterinary schools dropped from a height of 1195 in 2018 (over half the total) to only 365 veterinary surgeons in 2021, and have subsequently only recovered to a total of 536 in 2023. The Covid-19 pandemic also had a significant impact.

While we understand the need for updates to immigration regulations, this abrupt adjustment will impede the recruitment of veterinary surgeons who have graduated overseas and play a key role in supporting UK veterinary capacity.

We acknowledge the provision for veterinary surgeons under the age of 26 to use the Skilled Worker Option E, with a salary threshold set at 70% of the going rate (£33,670 or £17.27 per hour). However, it's important to note that veterinary surgeons undergo a five-or six year degree course, meaning graduates are typically between 24 and 26 years of age, making this option viable for only a limited number of individuals.

Data from the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons in 2022/2023 indicates that UK veterinary surgeons typically do not reach the £48,100 salary threshold until they are at least five years post-graduation. Starting salaries for overseas veterinary surgeons working in the UK are likely to be lower due to their lack of prior UK practice experience. Raising salaries to compensate for the Home Office changes would have an impact on the cost of veterinary services at a time when this is under considerable scrutiny, not least in the current Competition and Marketing Authority investigation.

The implementation of the £48,100 going rate will make it almost impossible to recruit veterinary surgeons from overseas unless they are either very experienced or under 26 years of age. This change will have far-reaching implications across the UK veterinary profession, particularly impacting areas such as public health, veterinary education, and remote and rural livestock practice, as raised in the

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recent [EFRA committee inquiry into Vet shortages](#). As highlighted by FSA in their [written evidence](#) for this session, vets working across the meat sector also underpin the economy, providing value to the £9.1bn domestic meat industry and the £2.1bn meat export trade. We anticipate a rapid exacerbation of the UK veterinary workforce shortage, jeopardising animal welfare and public health standards in the process.

In light of these concerns, we urge you to reconsider the recent changes to the Immigration Rules as they pertain to veterinary surgeons. We believe a proportionate solution would be to set the applicant salary threshold for veterinary surgeons to the standard rate of £38,700 rather than the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020 system. We are strongly supportive of appropriate remuneration for veterinary surgeons, but we believe the proposed changes are unsustainable.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your prompt response.

Yours sincerely



Dr Anna Judson
BVA President



Dr Sue Paterson
RCVS President

cc James Cleverly MP, Home Secretary; Lord Douglas Miller, Minister for Animal Health and Welfare; Tom Pursglove MP, Minister for Legal Migration and Delivery; Sir Robert Goodwill MP, Chair of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee; Professor Brian Bell, Chair of the Migration Advisory Committee; Professor Christine Middlemiss, Chief Veterinary Officer; Emily Miles, Food Standards Agency Chief Executive; and Professor Stuart Reid, Royal Veterinary College Principal.