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The weekly news journal for the profession

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POSTGRAD COST CUTTING IS RISKING FUTURE, CLAIMS BVU

UNIVERSITIES are putting the future of veterinary medicine in jeopardy by offering a raw deal to postgraduates, according to the British Veterinary Union (BVU).

The BVU has published a report it claims shows the UK's seven vet schools are systematically exploiting young vets who decide to return to the academic arena.

It claims postgraduates at some schools are forced to live on less than the minimum wage, while other colleges don't pay maternity leave and only offer limited holiday entitlement.

The BVU has called for action by demanding fairer terms for interns, senior clinical training scholars (SCTS) and junior clinical training scholars (JCTS).

Shams Mir, chairman of the BVU's professional advisory committee, said: "It is not putting it too strongly to say the future of the profession is being put at risk by this if it is allowed to continue.

report by
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"Many of the brightest and best vets will be put off this path by the conditions they will face and that is a big loss to academia and research.

"Already most of them will have been in the profession for some time and know what it is like to work in practice, which makes it more unlikely they will leave private practice to commit themselves to postgraduate programmes, that could last for four to five years, for peanuts compared to what they could earn in private practice.

"In comparison to their counterparts in private practice, these vets are massively underpaid and we must not forget they spend most of their time in

clinics doing work financially gainful for the universities, including out-of-hours work. They also spend time in the clinical environment tutoring undergraduate students."

Dr Mir believes the solution to the problem would be for the schools to recognise postgraduate clinical programmes as work by enrolling junior vets as employees, providing them with employment benefits.

Only the University of Liverpool's School of Veterinary Science does this for its internship and SCTS intake, and the BVU has urged the rest to follow suit.

"The issue at the heart of the problem is deliberate avoidance by the universities to recognise these programmes as work-based programmes," added Dr Mir.

"It is understood the universities do this for cost-cutting reasons by avoiding employment related tax implications. There is no legal or

ethical justification for this approach.

"It could harm the vet schools in the long run. If junior vets find the route to academia and research poorly rewarded, they are less likely to take it. This will adversely affect the academic and research excellence to which our universities aspire. Without significant improvement in the remunerations and terms of appointment, fewer vets joining these programmes will mean the university hospitals could struggle to function properly."

Good deal

However, Jo Price, head of the School of Veterinary Sciences at University of Bristol, believes junior vets are actually far better off than postgraduates in other fields.

Prof Price said: "Clinical training scholars at the University of Bristol are postgraduate students undertaking structured

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medicine international news at the Department of Veterinary Medicine, University of Cambridge, on December 7. There will be two presentation streams – canine and feline – with John Bonagura (Ohio State University), Ian Ramsey (University of Glasgow) and Michael Herrtage, Dean of Cambridge Veterinary School, all due to speak. For more information, visit www.eastofenglandcpd.com

shire farm in March and found around three per cent of the animals' (six cattle and nine sheep) contained SBV antibodies. However, when the same flock and herd were tested again in June, a small number of new cases were seen (one additional cow and two new sheep), revealing SBV is still circulating in the UK.

Since SBV was first detected in the UK at the start of this year, it has been found on 276

the whole of the UK.

He advised farmers to think about widening their livestock mating schedules to spread the risk to lambs and calves conceived later this year.

Speaking to *Veterinary Times*, Mr Fishwick reiterated the uncertainty of the situation, but stressed the importance of vets reassuring clients and putting SBV in context with other diseases on-farm.

"It might be exponentially

■ POSTGRAD COST CUTTING IS RISKING FUTURE, CLAIMS BVU – from page one

clinical training programmes and their training and recruitment is governed by university regulations.

"While most postgraduate students are required to pay their own tuition fees and fund their own living expenses, tuition fees of veterinary training scholars are paid for them and they are provided with a tax-free allowance that is worth as much as the take-home pay of a teaching associate. The fees and allowances are either funded by an external grant or by the veterinary school.

"In addition, fees charged to the public for their services support their training costs and help offset the costs incurred in running university clinics, whose primary purpose is to train veterinary surgeons. Once these students have achieved a specialist qualification, their earning potential in private referral practice is considerable."

Veterinary Times contacted RVC principal Stuart Reid, who fully endorsed the comments made by Prof Price. "These postgraduates are students, not employees – it is simply not analogous. I would also say the BVU appears to have been very selective in using only part of the information," he added.

Competition

The BVU report was compiled using data collected from an online survey of veterinary postgraduates, augmented with information gleaned via a series of requests made by the BVU under the Freedom of Information Act.

However, its revelations are unlikely to discourage competition for places, which remains fierce, according to a statement released by the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

Prof Reid said: "Places for clinical training programmes are highly competitive and much sought after. These programmes are expensive to run and the school covers the cost of fees in addition to providing stipends for students.

"Students receive intense one-to-one training with specialists, study leave, the opportunity to attend relevant meetings and conferences and to take part in research projects. They are also able to take exams for specialist status as diplomates of either the European College of Veterinary Surgeons or American College of Veterinary Surgeons to help further enhance their careers."

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