

Becoming a Vet – Comparing the US to the UK



Amelia Powell

Working with animals and saving their lives is a job that inspires many; but this means that getting into veterinary school is very competitive. In both the US and the UK, universities require a large amount of previous work experience in animal handling and shadowing vets before even applying. However, there are large differences between qualifying for acceptance into veterinary school in the two countries.

In the US, veterinary medicine is a graduate level entry course, meaning you have to complete an undergraduate degree before you can get into vet school. Each University's requirements differ, but these traditionally include having an undergraduate degree in areas such as animal science or biology, and class requirements including subjects such as English, physics, microbiology, and chemistry. In the UK however, this is not the case. British students can apply to vet school from the age of 17 and start in the autumn following their high school graduation.

For an American student, coming to study in the UK can seem inviting as you are not required to spend four extra years undertaking an undergraduate degree before starting the veterinary medicine course. However, to do this you are required by most vet schools to have taken the IB, or to achieve high grades in a large number of Advanced Placement Tests (APs). For example, Cambridge University requires a score of five on five AP tests in relevant subjects. This deters most US students from applying to veterinary school in the UK until after they acquire their undergraduate degree.

Zoe Inglis, current 2nd year veterinary student at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) in London, applied for the course whilst in the final year of her masters in the states. Having just scraped by in her undergraduate degree, she was not offered a place on a vet course in her home country, the US, but was accepted onto the five year course in London, due to the high importance given to work experience. "I clocked 1000+ in clinic hours before I applied and about 8000+ animal handling hours, and it was the international schools that took that into account" she explained.

In the UK, most undergraduate veterinary medicine courses are five years long, except for students intercalating to obtain a bachelor's degree as well as their veterinarian qualification - wherein the degree takes six years. Some schools, notably the RVC and Liverpool Veterinary School, also offer a foundation year, but this is only open to UK residents who did not meet the full requirements for the traditional course.

Some universities offer a four year 'accelerated' course, such as the Dick school of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh and the RVC. This is only open to students who have previously completed an undergraduate course, so this course is very similar to what students in the states would undertake when they go to vet school.

Fees are a large issue for many, and both US and UK higher education is known to be expensive – but how do they compare for US students coming to the UK? The comparison will ultimately depend on whether you are applying for an undergraduate degree or a graduate accelerated degree.

If an American student was accepted onto a five-year undergraduate course in the UK straight after high-school, they would only be paying for five years instead of the minimum of eight in the US, which is a significant difference.

A better comparison would be between the four-year graduate course in the states and the four-year graduate course in the UK. According to Stanford University, the average tuition fees for out-of-state students at US veterinary schools was \$46,000 per year in 2014. The fees to study at most UK vet schools is about £32,000 per annum for international students, which is around \$39,000. With a price difference of around \$7,000 per year, studying in the UK may seem like a cheaper option.

However, US universities also offer in-state tuition fees for state residents, which are normally cheaper, with an average yearly cost of around \$25,000. Additionally, when studying abroad, you also need to factor in costs for flights and accommodation for the whole year, whereas most students are able to bring their belongings home over summer if needs be.

Zoe claimed that if she were studying in her home state at UC Davis, the cost of her education would be pretty much equivalent to the overall cost that she is currently paying, but if she were to be studying at an out-of-state university, she estimates that it would be \$15,000 more expensive.

Another thing to take into consideration before applying for schools in the UK is the difference in culture and not being able to return home very often. For Zoe, the hardest part is leaving behind her whole life; her family, her friends, her job and her pets. Zoe also explained that even though there are some benefits to studying in the UK, there are also some noteworthy downsides:

"You get benefits from studying here, but it also puts some roadblocks up in terms of returning to the US and pursuing a normal pattern of careers. 5th years [in the UK] graduate at the beginning of July, [but] most US internships begin at the beginning of June, and you need that first-year internship to get you in the door!"

Despite studying veterinary medicine in UK having the potential to be cheaper and can take less time, there are a lot of other factors to take into consideration before making the decision to apply abroad; such as minimum grade requirements, costs, framework for your future career and simply being far away from home for months at a time.