Veterinary Surgeon

Veterinary surgeons (vets) diagnose and treat animals that are ill or injured, including domestic pets, farm animals, zoo animals and horses. They prescribe medicines, use anaesthetics and x-rays and carry out surgery.

The Work

You could be:

- diagnosing and treating illnesses using a range of techniques
- giving animals medicines and carrying out surgery
- giving animals vaccinations to prevent disease
- neutering animals to stop them breeding
- examining farm animals and giving advice to farmers on nutrition, breeding and livestock health
- giving advice to pet owners on animal care
- inspecting places where animals are kept, such as race tracks, stables, zoos, pet shops and kennels
- specialising in working with small or large animals or in a particular area such as anaesthetics or x-rays
- doing research or specialising in preventing disease.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

The average starting salary for newly qualified vets in the UK is around £40,000 a year. This may include allowances for accommodation, a car and fuel and for professional fees. With experience and training this can increase to between £45,000 and £60,000, with senior partners earning up to around £75,000 a year.

Conditions

- Much of your work would be in the surgery, but you may also have to visit farms, stables and people's homes.
- The working conditions can sometimes be cold, wet, dirty, noisy and smelly.
- There may be a risk of attack from nervous, scared or aggressive animals.
- Working hours can be long, involving shift work, evenings and weekends.
- Depending on the type of practice, you would work on average 43 hours a week, plus additional hours for being on call.
- You may often be on emergency call, at nights and weekends.

Getting In

- You need a degree from a university vet school. This will give you membership of the Royal College of

Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), which you must have to work in the UK.

- In Scotland degree courses normally last 5 years, and are run at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- In England, degree courses are run at Bristol, Cambridge, Central Lancashire, Liverpool, Nottingham and Surrey Universities and the Royal Veterinary College (University of London), Harper and Keele Veterinary School and The Aberystwyth School of Veterinary Science (in collaboration with the Royal Veterinary College).
- Entry requirements for the University of Edinburgh are Advanced Higher Chemistry and another science subject at BB plus 5 Highers at AAAAB (first sitting) including Biology and Chemistry at A and either Maths or Physics. If Biology has not been studied in S5 it should be studied at Higher level in S6. You must have Physics at least at National 5.
- The University of Glasgow also requires you to have 5 Highers at AAAAB at first sitting. These must include Biology, Chemistry and Maths or Physics. You also need Advanced Highers in Biology and Chemistry at BB from S6. You must also have English at National 5 at B.
- The University of Edinburgh also offers a 4-year graduate entry programme. Applicants must have a 2:1 honours degree in a biological or animal science subject.
- It is helpful to have work experience in a vet surgery, on a farm, or in kennels or stables before taking your degree.
- You should have a full, clean driving licence.
- You need to be fit as there is a lot of standing, lifting, bending and holding and treating animals in awkward positions.

You could work in private practice, an animal welfare society such as the PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals), a zoo or wildlife park, a research centre or a university veterinary school.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- confidence handling animals
- patience and care when dealing with animals and their owners
- good communication skills
- problem solving skills and a scientific approach
- good business sense
- the ability to get on with owners from a wide range of backgrounds
- good observational skills
- a reliable and responsible attitude
- resilient, to deal with upsetting situations.

You should not be squeamish, as you will have to:

- treat injured animals
- do internal examinations, surgery and post-mortems
- put some animals to sleep (euthanasia).

Training

- After qualifying, you would normally work as an assistant vet in private practice to develop your practical skills and build up your experience.
- The RCVS requires you to continue to develop your professional knowledge and skills throughout your career (known as Continuing Professional Development, or CPD). Therefore, you would attend courses and conferences, taking advanced qualifications as required.
- The RCVS offers postgraduate training courses that allow you to specialise in areas of surgery such as cardiology, pathology or anaesthetics.

Getting On

- With experience, you may become a senior assistant and then a partner in private practice.
- In time, you might set up your own practice.
- You could work in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps.
- You could become a senior vet with an animal welfare society or in a zoo or wildlife park.
- You could do an advisory or research job in a government agency.
- You might go into university teaching or research.
- There may be opportunities to work abroad.

Contacts

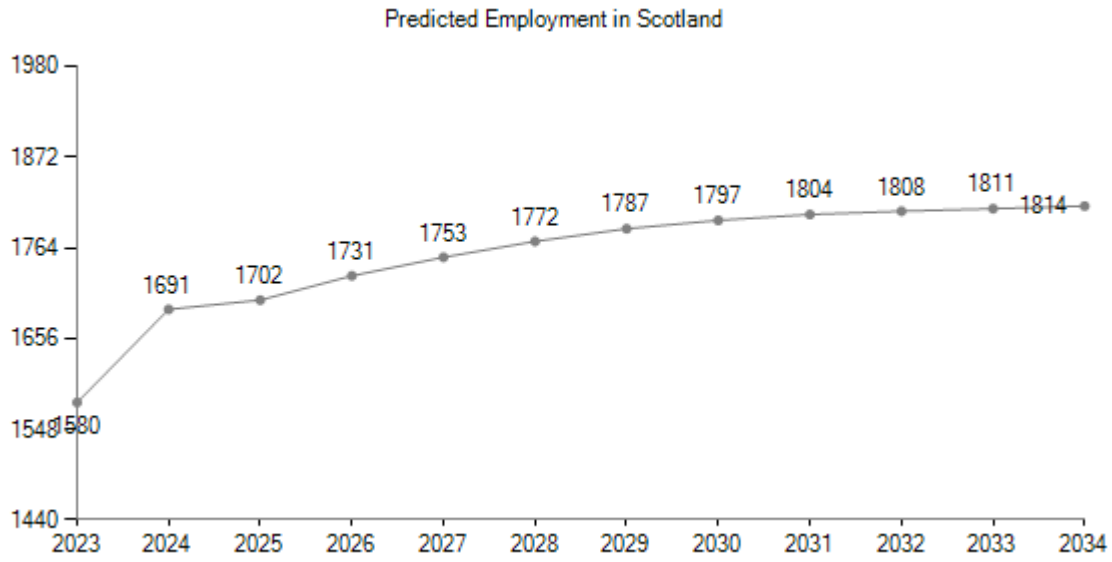
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Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.



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