

# When It Is Really Good, All You Want To Do Is Science!

The changed career aspirations of students enrolled on an undergraduate science programme

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## Introduction

The Royal Veterinary College, University of London, introduced the non-clinical three-year BSc in Veterinary Science in 2002. Although designed to be completely independent of the Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine (BVetMed), the BSc was used as a stepping stone to the BVetMed by the majority of applicants. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the career aspirations of students with deeply held ambitions to become veterinary surgeons had changed as a result of their experience of the BSc.

## Methods

A questionnaire was distributed to 101 graduates from 2005-2007. Students were asked to state their original motivation for enrolling, as well as their current or future role, and to elaborate on whether this was their ideal choice.

## Results

Fifty six forms were returned (55.4%).

The majority of applicants enrolled on the course in order to become veterinary surgeons (91.1%), however only 60.7% of graduates subsequently entered the BVetMed.

26.8% per cent went on to postgraduate science or laboratory science work. Of these, 66.7% stated science to be their ideal choice. This means that 25% respondents with deeply held ambitions to become veterinary surgeons decided instead to become scientists (Table 1). The proportion of graduates that became scientists has increased over the last three years (Fig. 1).

Another outcome of the study was that whilst those who went on to become veterinary surgeons were split between preferring the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> years of the course, those that went on to become scientists exclusively favoured the 3<sup>rd</sup> year (Figs. 2 & 3).

## Discussion / Conclusions

It is unusual to have an opportunity to assess the ability of a teaching programme to change student motivation and ambitions. This BSc has demonstrated that an inspiring programme can change career ambitions which in some cases have been passionately pursued since infancy. Reasons, to be clarified using structured interviews, are likely to include the option for students to pursue their own interests in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, which one student has clearly recognised as "life-changing". This is made possible through the selection of specialist modules offered by the RVC, and also by Kings College London, and the undertaking of a substantial research project of the students' own choice.

Acknowledgements: Course leaders Rachel Lawrence, Neil Stoker and Caroline Wheeler-Jones contributed to the design of the questionnaire.

## Vets



"Although my main aim is to be a Vet Surgeon, having the BSc is useful in being able to work independently."



"I'm very glad that I did the BSc first and didn't just go straight to BVetMed because the BSc has given me a very good scientific grounding with a veterinary twist."

## Scientists



"Doing the BSc showed me that I enjoyed research and no longer wanted to be a vet."



"The very high research content of this course interested me, and I have spoken to many people who have qualified as veterinary surgeons, and then are not happy and change career anyway."



"The BSc made me realise that there is a lot more to science than I originally thought."



"My dissertation was a life-changing experience, confirming my desire to do a PhD."

## RVC BSc in Veterinary Science



### Year 1

Normal animal structure and function  
Foundations of Science I  
Library Project

### Year 2

Disease (Enemy Within, Enemy Without)  
Pharmacology  
Foundations of Science II  
Laboratory Project

### Year 3

Elective Modules  
Extensive Research Project

	Wanted to be a Vet	Wanted to be a Scientist	Wanted to be Other / Not decided
Became a Vet	32 (57.1%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (1.8%)
Became Scientist	14 (25%)	0	1 (1.8%)
Became Other / Not decided	5 (8.9%)	2 (3.6%)	0

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of primary reason for enrolment versus current role. 25% of respondents chose science over veterinary medicine.

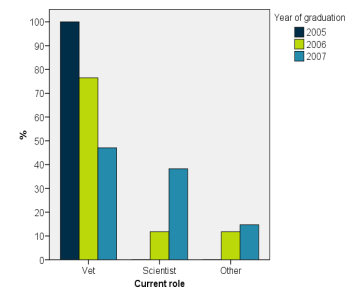


Fig 1. Graduates' current role, grouped by year of graduation.

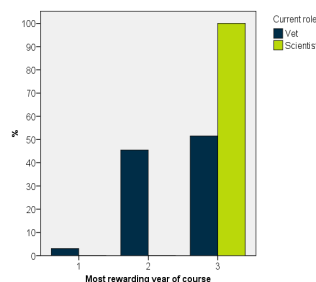


Fig 2. Most rewarding year of course as identified by graduates who became vets and scientists.

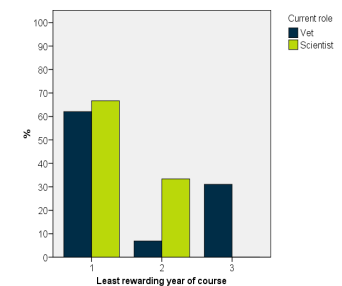


Fig 3. Least rewarding year of course as identified by graduates who became vets and scientists.



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