

Submission from the 'Working Group for Reform in Irish Veterinary Education' to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine

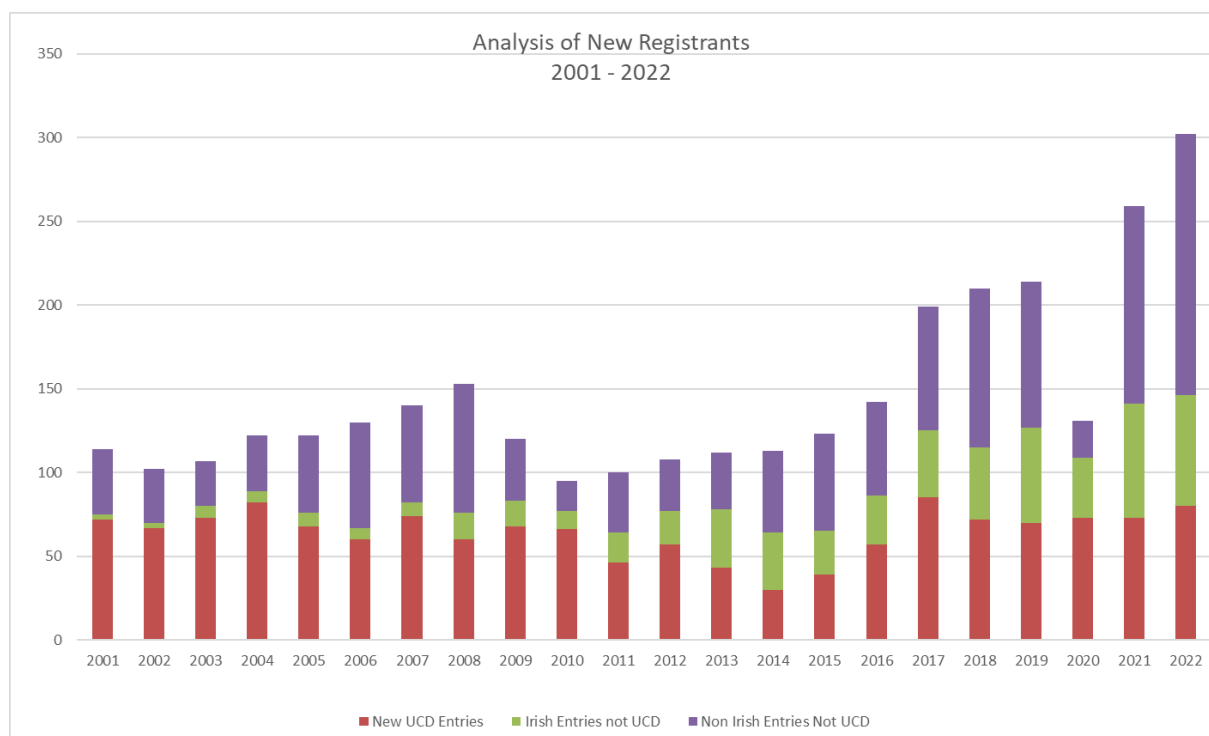
Chronic shortage of vets in Ireland particularly rural Ireland

We make this submission to the Committee on behalf of a working group of veterinary practitioners in Ireland, who have been advocating since November 2021 for the establishment of a second veterinary school in the State. This has long been called for by those of us in the profession, to address the chronic shortage of places available to study veterinary medicine as well as the undersupply of veterinary talent in Ireland, particularly in rural areas.

Appended are some statistics on the profile of vets on the Irish Veterinary Register

The key trends are as follows:

- Approximately three quarters of new registrants are graduating overseas
- The age profile and bias of younger vets in urban areas indicates that the shortage of vets in rural practice is going to significantly worsen



The Higher Education Authority has recently concluded its calls for expressions of interest from Higher Education institutions interested in building capacity in veterinary medicine, with the University of Limerick (UL) one of the institutions that submitted a bid.

We fully support and endorse UL as the preferred institution to deliver Ireland's second veterinary school. The location of its campus in one of Ireland's agri-food heartlands, the status of its existing faculties and its experience with comparable degree programmes – especially its School of Medicine – makes it the strongest option. In addition, UL is a 'research based' university and holds the high world ranking necessary to attract competent teaching staff to facilitate accreditation requirements.

The matter of accreditation is paramount, to ensure **any new programme of veterinary medicine is fit-for-purpose**, and meets the standards set out by these regulatory bodies. This is to provide veterinary graduates with a degree that is recognised internationally, and which would qualify them to work across the whole island of Ireland as well as pursue further training opportunities abroad if they choose.

UL have planned a curriculum which is mapped to international competencies acceptable to the accreditation bodies of the Veterinary Council of Ireland and Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. It is also compatible with the Shared Island Programme and close to the heart of the veterinary imperative for providing services across the whole island of Ireland. UL will also aim to achieve the necessary accreditation standards for North America and Australasia, allowing graduates to continue training and practice across most of the world.

Finally, due to the chronic shortage of places in the State's only veterinary programme at present, with only 82 places available annually in UCD Veterinary School, it has become one of the most competitive third level programmes to enter. UL are committed to promoting changes to the entry requirements for a new veterinary school and to a different education model, one that mirrors their very successful School of Medicine model which is based on embedded experience in first opinion GP practices. We note that UL has double the proportion of Irish medical graduates in GP versus the other national universities. We are confident the similar approach will result in higher numbers of veterinary graduates remaining in clinical practice, and in particular rural practices where they are badly required.

UL will also provide for an initial minimum capacity of 60 students which will increase to 120 over an agreed period, which will make an immediate and significant contribution to the supply of talent in the Irish veterinary sector.

It is our view that UL is the preferred institution to deliver Ireland's second veterinary school for the benefit of future veterinary graduates and for Irish rural and urban society . We welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further with the Committee members.

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