

Unions Launch Campaign to Save the Vet School

Through Unite, Unison, and University and College Union (UCU), staff at the University of Cambridge launch a campaign to save the Department of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Cambridge.

The Save the Vet School Campaign has emerged as a result of recent communications from the central University's General Board to staff at the Department. A letter dated 14th November 2024, sent by the University's Academic Secretary to the Head of Department of Veterinary Medicine, stated that the General Board considers "the current business plan for the delivery of clinical services [within the department is] ... not viable", and that they are instead giving consideration to transferring students after 3 years (on completion of the Bachelor of Arts Degree) to another institution, or fulfilling their teaching requirements through partnerships with "private sector external clinical service providers". The Department was also told consideration was being given to closing admissions to the Veterinary Medicine (VetMB) course from 2026.

The timing of this letter coincided with the publication of a report from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) that assigned Conditional Accreditation to the VetMB Degree, which will be reviewed in September 2025. That report by the RCVS highlights that the Department has been consistently let down by the University, which has not provided it with adequate support to maintain the high quality of the programme. This takes place in the context of the Department's long-term exclusion from University Estate planning, and the General Board's launching of an internal review of the Department's future in 2023, which is yet to draw any conclusions or make formal recommendations. The General Board's actions unhelpfully conflate the two separate issues of teaching accreditation and long-term position within the University, and reflect an opportunistic decision by the University to increase pressure on the Department. Indeed, the November letter from the General Board gave the Department less than a month to come up with an entirely new model of teaching, despite admitting that no viability assessment of alternative models had been carried out.

Through their respective Unions, staff and students of the University have made clear the important position that the Vet School holds within the University community, as well as to its national and international reputation. Indeed, the British Veterinary Union (BVU) in Unite have called the potential closure of the School a "national mistake". Unite, Unison, and UCU each affirm that any University aiming to provide academic excellence should never be organised around profit-seeking principles, especially related to the privatisation of teaching provision through outsourcing to external providers. The actions proposed by the University put over 160 jobs at risk, creating tremendous stress for staff and extreme anxiety for hundreds of current and future students. In particular, the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Vet School, and the University's lack of clear communication around it, has left many students concerned about the implications for their future employability if the University does not indicate that it continues to have confidence in the teaching provided by the Department. Furthermore, there is clear concern that a pause in admissions would impact students' ability to make the best decisions for

their own learning, particularly in cases where a student may need to consider intermitting into a non-existent year group.

The suggested alternative teaching provisions and timelines suggested by the University are rushed and wholly inadequate, and would deprive the Department of at least six years' worth of student tuition as it navigates its long-term future. The clear solution to the separate issues of accreditation and the Department's future is to allow continued Undergraduate admission, and to focus on financial investment in facilities and staffing to ensure the maintenance of the Department's world class teaching and a return to Full Accreditation with the RCVS. This should be followed by a separate assessment of how to ensure the Department's long-term success, secure in the knowledge of its continued position as a critical component of the University teaching landscape.

The Campaign's first focus is to draw attention to the University General Board meeting taking place on the 5th March, at which the University will formally decide on whether to pause undergraduate admission from 2026. There is a widespread feeling within the Department that this must not be allowed to go ahead, if the Department is to retain its staff and secure its future. UCU has voted within its branch to consider Dispute proceedings with the University in the event the General Board press ahead with this premature decision, with Unite and Unison planning to introduce motions that would allow them to follow suit. All of these Unions plan to host a rally on the **4th March at 1pm outside Great St. Mary's Church** to demonstrate the scale of opposition to these changes from staff and students across the University.

Our Campaign message is simple: **Hands Off the Vet School!**

Signed

University of Cambridge Unite the Union, Unison University of Cambridge, and University of Cambridge UCU