



Senate Office
R532 Level 5
Main Building
Glasgow
G12 8QQ

27th September 2011

Dear Ms Butcher,

Re: Proposal to establish an intercalated degree programme at Masters level in the School of Veterinary Medicine for student uptake in academic session 2012/13.

We would be grateful if the below proposal and accompanying letter could be considered by the Academic Standards Committee on the 7th October 2011.

I am writing to you as the delegated Champion for intercalated degrees at the School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM). Two years ago I was appointed to this position with the remit to enhance and promote intercalated degrees to the BVMS undergraduates. The major drivers for the initiation of this appointment were (i) to improve the numbers of BVMS undergraduates obtaining an intercalated degree and in doing so, encourage more students to pursue a research career post-graduation and (ii) a Wellcome Trust funded scheme called the Clinical Veterinary Research Training Initiative (CVRT). The Wellcome Trust acknowledge the important contribution made by veterinary surgeons to biomedical research and endeavours, through various routes including intercalated degree funding, to encourage the number of veterinary surgeons in research. A source of funding for BVMS undergraduates to pursue intercalated degrees is essential given the financial constraints which are particular to veterinary students e.g. the long time course of the veterinary degree programme and the necessity to perform unpaid extra mural studies out-with the semesters. The CVRT therefore provides a competitive source of funding for both tuition fees and stipends for intercalated degrees. In the last two years, we have achieved a 100% success rate in Wellcome Trust funding (8 awards totalling £60,615) and currently our students are undertaking intercalated degrees both at the University of Glasgow and other UK universities. It should be noted here, that while we are pleased with the successful recruitment of our BVMS undergraduates onto intercalated degree programmes during the period of my appointment, the numbers are still very low relative to the other six UK Veterinary Schools (e.g. Bristol, Royal College of London, Liverpool and Edinburgh have been awarded 42, 32, 18 & 16 awards respectively over the last two years). Further work is required to reach the levels achieved by other UK Veterinary Schools in this area but it is clear that one of the major advantages that other UK veterinary Schools have over ours is the direct provision of one or more intercalated degree courses (BSc and/or MSc). To this end, we request permission to establish an intercalated MSc degree at the School of Veterinary Medicine. The following outlines the aims of our proposal:

1) The need to attract Veterinary Students into Research

- Veterinary students are selected from a pool of school leavers with a very high academic potential and desire to become veterinary surgeons. They do not normally consider veterinary research as a career option. Because of this, Veterinary graduates are underrepresented in the animal diseases and biomedical research sectors compared to both science and medical graduates. As a result we are not maximising the impact and contribution veterinary graduates can make to these areas.
- An important contributing factor to the low proportion of Veterinary graduates opting for a research/academic career is a lack of experience within a research environment.
- The challenge facing the Veterinary Schools is to ensure that a small proportion of their graduates consider a research career so that the next generation of academic leaders can ultimately emerge.

2) Why an intercalated Masters degree?

- The primary objective of the Masters year would be to give the students a real and meaningful experience of research. Veterinary undergraduates spend a minimum of 26 weeks extramural studies, mostly in veterinary practice, so they have a good understanding and expectation of this career choice. However, it is not possible to give students an equivalent experience in laboratory-based methodologies and environment for a significant period of time because of the nature of the undergraduate course which aims to ensure that the students are prepared for day-one competencies as a veterinary surgeon rather than being trained for a scientific career.



- There is a low take up rate for intercalated BSc degrees amongst our undergraduate veterinary students. This may be in part because students have not perceived it as important to their future career prospects and in part because additional formal teaching is not seen as an attractive option. Another important aspect is that a large proportion of our BVMS undergraduates are (i) international students for whom this is not their first degree and (ii) are BSc graduates from other UK universities. Many of the students from these two cohorts have expressed an interest in undertaking an intercalated degree but would only commit to this if it were at a Masters level.
- Data collected over the two years suggest that one of the factors which limit the students from undertaking an intercalated degree is the lack of available courses. An MSc degree programme undertaken within a particular research laboratory would provide a more attractive choice and opportunities to the BVMS undergraduates.
- The experience of a full year of research together with the completion of a thesis of Masters standard would make veterinary graduates much more competitive for prestigious scholarships/PhD positions upon completion of their clinical training.
- A research year would greatly facilitate subsequent selection of talented and highly motivated candidates as well as lay the ground work for PhD studentship applications. Such applications could be prepared whilst the student is in their clinical years so that funding is in place following completion of the BVMS course.

3) The proposal details:

- Undergraduate veterinary students who had successfully completed three years of the undergraduate course would be eligible to apply to read for the intercalated MSc (Vet Sci) degree.
- Veterinary students from UK (or other recognised institutes) at an equivalent stage in their training would also be eligible.
- Students would be liable for fees at the postgraduate level (home or overseas as appropriate).
- The intercalated MSc will be indistinguishable from the normal MSc (by research) in terms of expected student performance, standard of thesis, research training.
- The study period would be 12 months.
- It would be a normal requirement that thesis submission took place before the student re-entered the veterinary course.

4) Specific issues to consider:

The entry point for a Masters degree would be unusual within the University of Glasgow. This may raise concerns regarding academic standards and equality of achievement for numbers of years studied (compared with other parts on the University). However, it is important to acknowledge that (i) both Edinburgh and Liverpool University have recently introduced an intercalated MSc degree and (ii) one of our BVMS students has been successful in obtaining CVRT funding and is starting an MSc programme at Liverpool University this year. Therefore we could have the situation of our BVMS undergraduates undertaking an intercalated MSc at another University after 3 years study but not able to avail themselves of the same opportunity at their host institution.

I look forward to hearing from you and would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss the above.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Loughrey



Senate Office
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Glasgow
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27th September 2011

Dear Ms. Butcher,

Re: Letter to address the preliminary concerns raised by the chair of the ASC committee regarding the proposal of the School of Veterinary Medicine to introduce an intercalated degree programme at Masters level

Thank you for your preliminary consideration, dated 7th July 2011, on the proposal by the School of Veterinary Medicine to introduce an intercalated degree programme at Masters level for BVMS undergraduates. We have decided to submit to the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) meeting a proposal along with this accompanying letter for full consideration.

Response to concerns:

We are aware that a similar proposal was submitted to the Academic Standards Committee (ACS) in 2004 and thank you for bringing the reports of this prior decision to our attention. We would like to take this opportunity to address the objections (denoted in blue below) raised during the summer period.

1. *“The fundamental objections (then and now) are that an intercalated MSc degree would create at least two major anomalies.*

i) *“It would be achieved after 4 years of study, instead of 5”.*

Multidisciplinary research, income generation and internalization, are at present, key strategic priorities for the University of Glasgow (UG). In line with this strategy, a major goal of the School of Veterinary Medicine is to encourage veterinary undergraduates to consider a research career by exposing them to a research environment at an early stage in their undergraduate years. The opportunity for veterinary undergraduates to undertake an intercalated Masters degree programme would confer several advantages over an intercalated BSc degree by enabling:

- a)** intercalating opportunities for BVMS undergraduates who already have obtained a BSc prior to admission (~35% of BVMS undergraduates are international students). These students may wish to intercalate but do not want to qualify with a total of three Bachelors degrees.
- b)** BVMS students to be competitive for post-graduate placements with veterinary students who already have an MSc in addition to their veterinary qualification upon graduation from veterinary school.
- c)** BVMS students to choose from a wider range of research areas provided by the newly formed college of MVLS.
- d)** a full year of research with the benefits of comprehensive integration into the research environment laying the ground work with applications for PhD studentships after graduating with BVMS.
- e)** BVMS students to access funds from the Wellcome Trust Veterinary Training Programme for intercalated Masters degree to be undertaken at their own institution.

The decision reached in 2004 has prohibited the UG Veterinary School from competing for funding from the Wellcome Trust in the area of Intercalated Masters degrees. Other UK veterinary Schools including Edinburgh, who like us had a tradition of only permitting student to undertake Masters degree once they had completed 4 years of study, now permit their veterinary undergraduates to intercalate after 3 years of study. Edinburgh currently offers seven taught MSc degrees and three research based MSc courses all open to veterinary undergraduates after their 3rd year of the Veterinary degree. We have reached a point where we are permitted to send our BVMS students to other UK Veterinary Schools to intercalate with an MSc degree after 3 years but are prohibited from offering the same opportunities to our own students at the UG. Offering an intercalated Masters degree at UG would permit the School of Veterinary Medicine to advance internationalization, income generation and enhance the student environment as well as encouraging students into research careers.

My discussions with the Senate office have revealed an important point with regards to the objection raised by the ASC. The senate office have informed me that they: *“do not know of a rule that says that a student being admitted to a masters*



degree must have undertaken at least four years of study. Most students coming from England will only have undertaken three years of undergraduate study. Our generic PGT regulations, which apply to the vast majority of taught masters programmes at the University include the following provision: Admission: Before being considered for admission to study for an award to which these Regulations apply, a candidate must normally have obtained a degree or equivalent. **So, the requirement is not even for an Honours degree**". Therefore, there is no basis upon which to raise this objection other than to follow what has been a custom and practice of this University. This custom which is not backed up by any regulation, is an anomaly which at present is disadvantaging only our own UG students since we are happy to accept students from other institutions who have not spent 4 years in study. It is clear now that this 'custom' means we are out of line with other UK institutions including the University of Edinburgh and puts us at a disadvantage whilst also limiting the educational opportunities we can provide to our students.

ii) "It would be awarded only after completion of a BVMS, so in theory a student could meet all the requirements for the intercalated MSc degree but end up with nothing. (By contrast, a student who meets the requirements of an intercalated BSc degree can graduate immediately.)"

The University of Edinburgh currently has the policy that their veterinary students graduate with the Masters degree immediately at the end of their intercalating year, they don't have to wait until they finish BVM&S. Adopting a similar scheme at UG would negate this concern.

2. "There's nothing to stop an interested student from undertaking an MSc by research after completing the BVMS."

There is indeed nothing to stop an 'interested' student from undertaking an MSc by research after completing the BVMS but the idea is for academics that are currently in the research environment to encourage the students while they are within the University system. The financial support from the Wellcome Trust for *intercalated* degrees reiterates this point. Ensuring that the students are exposed to a research environment whilst within the undergraduate programme has proved the most successful way to stimulate veterinary graduates into a research career.

At the end of year 3 our BVMS students qualify for the exit degree of BSc Animal Health but not with honours. We have considered the model whereby BVMS students intercalate at the end of 4th year to avoid the 4 year UG custom but this is not ideal as the curriculum is such that the first three years comprise basic science training followed by a two year block of clinical and applied studies. The intercalated degree programme is therefore best suited for the end of third year.

We hope the committee is able to view the proposal favourably and enable the UG School of Veterinary Medicine to have an intercalated degree programme which is in line with other UK Veterinary Schools, supports the UG strategic priorities and provides our students with an enhanced educational experience.

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