



IRISH  
**NATURA & HILL FARMERS**  
ASSOCIATION (INHFA)

*Representing Sheep and Suckler Farmers*

*[www.inhfa.ie](http://www.inhfa.ie)*

**Submission to Joint Oireachtas Committee of Agriculture  
on new School of Veterinary Medicine in Ireland**

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## **Introduction**

The Irish Natura & Hill Farmers Association (INHFA) welcomes the decision to develop a new School of Veterinary Medicine. The requirement for the new school is clearly evidenced by the increasing number of Irish students travelling to other EU countries to train in veterinary practice. Once established the school will we hope ensure these students will have a viable option to study in Ireland.

However, this option will also be dependent on entry requirements. On this basis, it is vital that entry to the school will encompass both Leaving Cert points and other options such as a student portfolio relevant to veterinary requirements. Moreover, we also believe that the needs of the farming community are listened to and acted on.

## **Large Farm Animal Vets**

In many parts of Ireland and especially across our western seaboard counties there is growing challenge to encourage new vets into the larger farm animal practice. This trend has been ongoing for some time and has reached a point in 2021 that 70% of vets going on the register were educated outside of Ireland of which 45% are non-Irish. This is not sustainable which is why we are asking that the new school prioritises developing vets to engage in large farm animal practices.

Currently, access to the veterinary course in UCD is based entirely on the points. However, circa 600 needed to study vet medicine may not always guarantee the best outcome in terms of qualification and ensuring that those who qualify, stay in the large animal practice. It is our view, while a points based system should be part of the entry requirements we also need to look at additional options.

In Britain, which has a similar retention problem they have recognised how it is much more likely that a student who has attended an agricultural college like Gurteen Ballyhaise or Mountbellew will understand what they are signing up for and last the tough life demanded of a farm vet calving cows or lambing ewes. Harper Adams Keele vet school in England has moved to favour such agricultural students in its admission process and we suggest the new vet school emulates their model.



Following on from this model, we are proposing that the new vet school requires a minimum of 400 points for admission and then allocates five entrance places to the top five students from each of the countries agricultural and veterinary courses. In allocating these places, interested students will also need to provide a relevant portfolio detailing their work and ability. By following such a model, we will produce farm animal vets who will stay in farm animal practice.

### **Conclusion**

As outlined, it is vital that the new school will cater for students who want to work with farm animals as this is critical for our agri-food sector. These students can be found in secondary schools throughout rural Ireland and it is vital that those with the ability and interested are given a route into veterinary practice.

Students from a farming background are more likely to work in the large farm animal practice and critically are more likely to stay working there as they are more aware of the demands. By working through our Agricultural Colleges (as we have outlined) we can provide a viable alternative to help deliver these vets.

We truly hope you take our proposals on board and implement a programme that will incorporate the real talent of our Irish students rather than risk losing them abroad where our human capital is utilised by other countries.