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Douglas Ross MSP
Convener
Education, Children and Young People
Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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13 March 2026

Dear Convener,

SCOTTISH BUDGET SCRUTINY 2026-27 — EVIDENCE SESSION 21 JANUARY — FURTHER INFORMATION

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence at the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 21 January 2026 in relation to the Budget 2026-27. During this session I was asked questions relating to the provision of funded undergraduate veterinary student places, and this letter provides further information in response to this question.

Recruiting and retaining veterinary surgeons is challenging across the UK, particularly in rural and remote areas and within large-animal, mixed-practice and Government work.

The Scottish Government recognises the challenges caused by the shortage of veterinary surgeons and is working with universities, employers and the industry to alleviate the pressure. The opening of the SRUC Veterinary School, with a focus on mixed and rural practice, is welcome and should help to increase the supply of veterinarians. This is a complex problem where supply or new graduates, but also profession abandonment, increased demand for veterinary services, and changes to immigration rules, play a part, with no easy solutions.

These challenges are of course felt most acutely in Scotland's rural and island communities, where veterinary provision can depend on single practices covering large areas. To help mitigate this, the Scottish Government provides targeted support through the Highlands and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme. This makes an impact by ensuring large animal veterinary practices are financially supported to deliver services to crofters in remote areas of the Highlands and Islands for a modest maximum charge, without which many would not be

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viable. This ensures animal health and welfare is supported through identification and prevention of animal disease, in our remotest areas.

Yours sincerely,

BEN MACPHERSON MSP
Minister for Higher and Further Education

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