I had always wanted to be a vet, at least for as long as I can remember. I grew up in Ireland in a suburb of North Dublin. My father was a civil servant, as was my mother until she was compelled to resign once she married. We had no animals growing up and, apart from occasional visits to relatives ‘in the country’, I had no real exposure to the life of a vet. My parents were passionate about education; neither had been to university but they were hugely supportive of ‘whatever I wanted to do’, as were my school teachers who nurtured ambition and possibility.

In 1975 there were two veterinary schools in Ireland, Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin. I was offered a place at both, but decided to join Trinity College Dublin (I liked the campus and my brother was there) and joined a class of just 13 students. In 1977 the two schools merged and my class expanded to just over 50. Most of our education and training was undertaken at facilities in Ballsbridge, where behind red brick walls in the heart of Dublin were operating theatres, small animal, farm animal and equine clinics, lecture theatres and a postmortem examination room. I enjoyed my student days; I was a fairly good student in terms of academic attainment, not exceptional. I spent all my vacations ‘seeing practice’ in large animal veterinary practices in Cavan and in Mayo, with four-week spells in Oxfordshire and in an equine practice in Newmarket. I balanced this with a vacation job as a domestic in a Dublin hospital where I worked to support my student life, and while at university I studied piano at the Royal Irish Academy of Music; music has always been a passion.

My first job after graduation in 1980 was in a small mixed practice in Oxfordshire. It was a very steep learning curve as I was launched straight into the life and work of a vet, with significant responsibility. I learned a lot, and to this day remember with great fondness the clients and the community and the high regard in which the local vets were held. I left after nine months to take up a post as a research assistant in the University of Cambridge. This was a turning point for me, although I did not recognise it at the time. Reflecting on why I applied for the role, I had really enjoyed physiology and pharmacology as a student and I was curious about research. The project was to develop a total intravenous anaesthetic technique for horses. I surmised that anaesthesia was effectively applied physiology/pharmacology, and I would be able to learn about research while remaining connected with veterinary practice. I was offered the job despite being an hour late for the interview after I got lost around Cambridge city; I think I was the only applicant.

I loved that role; I worked with a ‘legend’ in the veterinary anaesthesia community – Leslie Hall, studied for the diploma in veterinary anaesthesia and awakened a passion for research. I was hooked. Funded by a Wellcome Veterinary Training Scholarship, I undertook a PhD at the University of Bristol, working with Avril Waterman-Pearson and the late Alex Livingston, both vets who were driving forward research on understanding and alleviating animal pain. At that time it was a hugely neglected area: they enthused me with their passion for what people would now term ‘translational research’ – using the most up-to-date scientific techniques and approaches to tackle challenges relevant to the practise of veterinary medicine. I was awarded a PhD in 1986 and, after working in the Technical University of Munich for nine months, I returned to the University of Cambridge as a Wellcome Veterinary Fellow in the department of phar-
Rosie Perrett is moving to Liverpool today to begin her first year studying veterinary science, something that she says still hasn’t really sunk in. Rosie is going to share her experiences with VR Careers.

From the age of about 14 being a vet was what I aspired to; or should I say, it was the plan, but plans don’t always follow through. I have been through plan A, B, C and D before finally making it. There was a quick realisation after my AS levels that I needed A and A* in all subjects was a big ask even to qualify for an application to vet school. So, I decided to study BSc Zoology at Swansea university and apply for vet school with a degree, a decent set of A levels and maturity on my side.

Last year I made my first application to vet school with a hopeful 2:1. My chemistry A level result (my weakest), meant I was immediately rejected by a couple of universities, but on January 6 (it was a Monday), I received an e-mail inviting me to interview at Liverpool. The interview was a series of seven, five-minute stations, and was over before I knew it; and I came out far less nervous than when I went in. Then there was a long wait ...

I received my rejection on March 28, it wasn’t a great day and quite a few tears were shed but I came round to the idea, eventually, that maybe it just wasn’t my year and that I would retry.

So, it was a complete shock when on August 14, while I was in Barcelona on holiday with friends, I got a call from the University of Liverpool asking me for my degree classification, and then saying they were offering me a place on their five-year veterinary science programme starting this month. I was in utter shock. It was such a privilege to receive the news with my friends who knew how badly I wanted it and had been with me on the journey to get here.

My planned year out had turned into a month and now I had plenty to do. I started busying myself with applying for accommodation, setting up my university account and profile, applying for a maintenance loan, getting membership for the university’s veterinary society and filling out various forms, including a health questionnaire. Despite having been to university before, there is so much to do and I’ve been feeling underprepared for my moving in date, which is today. In the past year I have been through so many emotions and feelings – anticipation, excitement, disappointment and ecstacy – now I just have a mixture of nerves and excitement and I genuinely cannot wait to start.

I can’t pinpoint the moment I wanted to be a vet, although I could well have been the first time I sat on a pony, but I’ve always been an active horse rider – out and about in all weathers and getting my hands dirty. Working with animals has always come so naturally to me and now it’s happening in reality.
First-year student diary

Rosie Perrett

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