Studying veterinary medicine in Warsaw

Katy Drummond is a few months from qualifying as a vet having studied at SGGW – Szkoła Główna Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego w Warszawie – the Warsaw University of Life Sciences

I was one of a group of veterinary students representing Warsaw vet school at this year’s seminar for final-year veterinary students – the Lancaster weekend – organised by the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons, and supported by the BVA and the RCVS (VR, July 25, 2015, vol 177, p 87). While I was there, I was lucky enough to meet a group of bright, friendly, soon-to-be-vets, as well as the hugely experienced experts and lecturers, sponsors and representatives from many organisations, including corporate practices who were looking to recruit new graduates on a variety of graduate schemes. All of them had one thing in common: they wanted to know who ‘Warsaw’ were.

As an English vet student studying at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences in Poland, many people’s first question to me when I turn up at their practice is: ‘Why Warsaw?’ For me, the answer is a mixture of having wanted to combine my university experience with travelling and an element of ‘a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush’ – we all know how hard vet school applications are, and Warsaw was the first school I was accepted into. For other students, it may be because they want to study in English, because the fees for postgraduate students are the same as those for undergraduates, or because they have Polish heritage; the list goes on.

The veterinary faculty at SGGW (which is how we know the school in Poland) is campus based, in a southern district of the country’s capital city.

Veterinary studies

Education is based on a five-and-a-half year format, with the first three years devoted to preclinical studies, and the final two-and-half-years to clinical studies – combining major subjects of surgery, reproduction, internal medicine and infectious diseases with practical courses and rotations, as well as summer practice in various fields, comparable to the UK’s EMS system.

Learning is module based, with continual assessment in the form of either oral exams, short written tests or practicals (ensuring students are keeping up with the course) followed by ‘finals’ in both the winter and the summer.

Having passed finals in the January of fifth year, students spend a semester on rotation, where they also get to travel around Poland: for example, large animal rotations take place in Dobrzyniewo, one of the last state farms in the north west of Poland, or near Kleczew, by the beautiful lakes in the central western region.

Looking back at my vet school experience, I am pleased I chose Warsaw: I have received an excellent education, and have also had the privilege of travelling with ease around a substantial part of eastern and central Europe. I have also have made friends with students from countries across the world, from South Africa to Ireland and Sweden to the USA.

Currently in my sixth year, I am beginning the process of my first job hunt, as I will be looking to start work in February 2016; right now, that feels a bit scary.

This period is both exciting and sad – I am finally at the point where I can fulfil my lifelong dream of being a vet; after having
passed my finals earlier this year. I am only a few electives away from graduating and making my dream a reality.

However, my elation is, of course, tinged with sadness. I will not only be leaving a university that I feel has taught me a huge amount and, most importantly, how to be a competent young vet, but also the country that has been my home for five-and-a-half years, and the amazing friends I have made along the way.

So, to all of you who come across or receive a CV from a ‘Warsaw’ vet, I hope I have enlightened you a little about us as people and our course . . . and I hope you will consider us as a potential asset to your team.

doi: 10.1136/vr.h4841
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Veterinary Record 2015 177: i-ii
doi: 10.1136/vr.h4841

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