



For the Record

Podcast transcript

Speakers: Sanaa Cockar, Isobel Corp, Stephanie-Rae Flicker, and Nicole Regan

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

There is a reason as to why we need to see people that look like us in these fields. We're not just saying it for the sake of it. It's because there is that relate-ability factor of, they potentially have gone through some similar hurdles. They have gone through some similar barriers. If you were to sit down and have a discussion with them, you know, you might find that there are some cultural similarities and there's other ways of connecting to that person and their upbringing. It's not just about where they've got to now, it's that whole journey up until the point that they've got to, that means something to you.

RCVS Knowledge:

Hello and welcome to For the Record, a new podcast series from RCVS Knowledge. For the Record will feature conversations between current and former members of the veterinary professions, highlighting voices and experiences historically underrepresented in our official archive. In this episode we hear from four veterinary medicine students who responded to our call via the British Veterinary Ethnicity & Diversity Society, for black, Asian or minority ethnic students to share their experiences of veterinary education and the profession so far. Together they discuss their inspirations and motivations for pursuing a career in veterinary medicine, their journeys into vet school, and what changes they would like to see in the future. This discussion was recorded in November 2020.

Isobel Corp:

Hi, I'm Isobel, I'm a fourth year vet student at Bristol University.

Nicole Regan:

Hi, I'm Nicole. I'm a final year vet student at Liverpool.

Sanaa Cockar:

Hi, I'm Sanaa. I'm a fourth year vet med student at Cambridge.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

Hi, I'm Stephanie-Rae and I'm a final year veterinary medicine student at the Royal Veterinary College. So I'll just talk a little bit about role models and relate-ability, because I think that was something that a lot of us have ended up discussing over the past few months. I think a big thing for me was that, reflecting upon things now, I kind of feel like you are somewhat managing the level of imposter syndrome that not everyone has. In a weird way. So, I think I remember my first thoughts when I started at RVC. So I grew up in North

London, and studied at a very, mixed, comprehensive state school, lots of different backgrounds and ethnicities, as you'd probably expect for North London. And then when I got to RVC, it was completely not what I was expecting, I think, in terms of level of diversity and things.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

But yeah, I just remember going and starting at RVC. And then I did some events where I went back to my school and I was still in contact with them - one of the advisors at my school that helped me with getting into vet school. And I think one of the first things I said to her was, I can't see anyone that looks like me. I haven't seen anyone that, you know, I can relate to on that level. And it's one of those things I feel - it's quite intrinsic and it's not something that you're always constantly seeking for, but there was a level of feeling a bit more of an outsider. Even though, I feel like I'm quite a sociable person, I can get on with people quite easily. But there's this slight discomfort of not seeing people that look like you and whether that's in the student population or within the teaching body as well. And that's always stuck with me a little bit.

Nicole Regan:

Yeah. I think I was quite oblivious to that. In the pre-Uni years. It's definitely been over the last few years when I'll be sat in a restaurant or in a hotel because I've gone on holiday, and every single person here is white. And there's nobody that looks like me. But I think, yeah, I happily bumbled through secondary school. Again in that very protected North London bubble, a very diverse school, very diverse area. But, it's only recently really moving up North, being in Liverpool. I definitely stick out like a sore thumb.

Isobel Corp:

That's interesting. Because I thought, Oh, if I had gone to another Uni, I would have had a completely different experience. But hearing it from you guys as well, actually wherever I went probably would have been the same experience, which is, I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing. I guess it's kind of reassuring, but not a nice thought as well.

Sanaa Cockar:

I think I kind of accepted it in terms of - subconsciously - because I always had a feeling. I always kind of knew that vet school wasn't diverse, but because I'd wanted to be a vet since I was really young. It hadn't really crossed my mind that that was a barrier, if that makes sense. I was just, Oh, you know, that's just the demographic, but it's not going to stop me obviously, but that's just a different story. But, it shouldn't impinge on me applying or anything like that. I never felt that that was a reason for me not to. But, I think you're right when you actually go there it's, I mean it's still fine, but it becomes more obvious that, especially as you progress, there actually aren't as many people like you. Because when you start to have to consider different things, like for example for me, I wear a headscarf, right? And, I think maybe before me, one other person has completed all six years and they had. So, just simple things that no one would ever think of, but I might have to second guess like, Oh, how do I scrub in? What should I wear in surgery? I don't want to be told when I'm in theatre or coming to theatre, Oh, you can't wear that. Because yes I do wear that, and you have to accommodate for me. So it's just simple things like this, that if you're one of very few people, it shouldn't be the case, but it's almost like you have to facilitate that path for other people, if any other people even do happen to come. Just make it more accessible, because it's those small things that add up and make it feel like it's not for you.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

Yeah. I felt like that with, it's probably not on the same level, but I felt like that with my hair. I've always had a bit of a battle, being mixed, with afro-y hair, but I feel like when I stick my

scrub cap on, is this actually going to fit into the scrub cap? It's a bit of a weird feeling. It's little things. I think it's quite good that you mentioned things like barriers and stuff. It definitely doesn't seem like it's a barrier when you're in that pool of people, where you're in such a melting pot of people and you're all aspiring to do different things anyway. And there are different barriers I think that you have when you're in school, versus to what you're facing then during the vet med program. Definitely.

Nicole Regan:

Yeah, definitely, the hair thing. I was chatting to my rotation group about that earlier. It's just little things like - just taking the time to think, Oh, I'm going to be scrubbing in. So, I'm going to braid my hair or I've got to put a riding hat on, so I've got to wear a low pony. And that's a consideration that can't just happen - well it could just happen on the day but it's a pain in the arse. But then also it's not really a barrier. It's an inconvenience. And I think a lot of people when we're then talking about the barriers into veterinary go, well, you've made it, you've got in.

Isobel Corp:

That's it, yeah, that's only the start.

Nicole Regan:

It's not a brick wall, but I'm saying it's a hurdle. There's different intensities to them.

Sanaa Cockar:

Yeah. I think what also doesn't help is that it can be quite common, right? Obviously, if it's not the demographic who are less likely to think about it, but for example, people from different walks of life will have different considerations that in the wider community are quite common. So like you said, for example, say you have thicker hair or afro-like or you wear a headscarf, you could incorporate these things into 'miscellaneous' in the lectures, for example. We just recently had a lecture - because I'm fourth year, so we're starting to learn about surgery and stuff. And we have lectures on how to scrub up and how to dress appropriately. And they were talking about, there was a section on head caps and the section on beard coverings. And, it would take literally one minute to add in another section for different groups of people, like say, Oh, if you have religious head coverings, like a turban or a headscarf do this. Or if you have thicker hair, consider this. I feel like it's so easy and those make it more open to conversation. Whereas if you struggle in silence and like you said, you feel like you're going to stick out, then you're going to be more shy about it and then it'll never get talked about and it just the vicious cycle.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

It's things like that. I think it affirms that you feel like you're entering a place or an organization or a body that wasn't constructed with you in mind. I think it really does. And that's the thing, you're not asking for much at all really, it's a minor thing that can be amended. And that could be said for a lot of things. But it does just reaffirm, I think, especially if you are identifying as a BAME student especially, that you're entering spaces that you had a different perception of when you get there. Yeah. It might not be what you thought it might be. Or you're then exposed to things that you may have not been actually prepared to be exposed to as well.

Isobel Corp:

Yeah. I feel like also, I guess, especially at Bristol, the staff aren't particularly diverse, so no one has ever come across that problem before and thought, Oh, maybe we should include this in a lecture. Or, I've come across this problem so this should be addressed. Whereas

they just don't know. Which is also a shame that the profession isn't very diverse, at a Uni level.

Sanaa Cockar:

That's true. Yeah. And I think that's actually an important point that you raised, because maybe it might not necessarily come into their minds. So for example, like I said about the lecture, I did email, to say maybe you could include this. Usually they're very receptive and willing to start making these small changes. So I had quite positive feedback when I asked about including things like that in future lectures maybe for upcoming years. And so I just think that could be a good way - it's obviously a really small step - but it's a good thing to start incorporating it, to just say it, no matter what. It doesn't matter if you have a person who needs that to be said in your year or you don't. It's going to be said, because somewhere in the world, people are like that. You know what I mean? Say someone in your group didn't have a beard, but you're still gonna mention you wear beard coverings. No one in our school has a beard, but you still say it because these things happen in life. So it should be acknowledged.

Isobel Corp:

I think also just raising awareness to other students as well. I've had students, peers, that didn't know what Eid was, didn't know what Diwali was. And I was shocked that they didn't know, because we learned that in primary school, if not secondary school, I'm sure. But just stuff like that. And I was shocked that people didn't know what those things were. And I don't know if you guys are the same, had friends and peers that just hadn't been exposed to stuff.

Nicole Regan:

Yeah. It is just a big cultural shift. When you move from somewhere like North London. And that also really started to get to me. Because I am very different with my uni mates to how I act when I was back home. And I went to - right before lockdown, when I went home at Easter - I went to a Caribbean music and comedy night with my mum and I came out the end of it and I was just like, I couldn't have taken most of my friends from Uni to that. Because they would've been just so uncomfortable and out of their comfort zone. Whereas, all my friends from back home. They'd be like, yeah, whatever. Yeah. Even though that's not their culture, even though that's not them. So yeah, I change a bit and I think I've been very aware about trying to not do that so much recently. But one of my best mentors has always said that it's sort of like a chameleon effect where you blend in.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

I think I felt a lot like that in first year, especially. And I think for me as well, I found that even though my expectations of still studying in London - so a lot of my friends still went to universities in London as well. So things like Brunel and Queen Mary and places like that, where they've got such a different populace of students, compared to the RVC, and I think, I guess it kind of then reaffirmed to me at that point that actually it wasn't about necessarily where I was, but it was the profession. It was just, you know, your having people that are coming in off the basis of coming, maybe more rural areas, more agricultural background as well. And if they're coming from smaller towns and cities outside of London. And coming down to London, then not necessarily, you know, it's a sort of a certain level of street smarts as well as just kind of understanding the cultures and where they're coming to. And so I felt the same, you'd have people that would say things or do things and you'd be like, "Uh, I don't know if that, like, if that kind of goes down here, but not really sure."

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

But then also it's whether or not you felt confident in saying something, if something was said or was done. Especially in first year, because everyone's just trying to be nice and

everyone just trying to get to know each other. And this isn't talking about anything that's so dramatic as, you know, people being overtly discriminatory or anything like that. But people might just make passing comments about things or try to be humorous. And you never really feel like, is it your place to say something because if I say something now, does this make me really stick out as being this person that's just trying to kind of cause trouble, or do I just kind of just fit in for the meantime? Because you know, in the long term it means I get to stay friends with these people. It means that I get to enjoy my first years of uni. But I'm similar to you Nicole. I think now, and I think especially with what's gone on in the past few months as well. And maybe just getting older and just kind of adapting to the course and things. Those sorts of things don't really bother me. You kind of have to remember what your values are and who you are as a person, and how you've been brought up and actually what is right. And how people should be treated, as well, from different walks of life. And also not being afraid to educate other people when they actually have said something wrong. I think that's something that everyone's hopefully - has probably got a lot better at, especially in the past few months.

Nicole Regan:

And people are a lot more receptive and open to it at the moment as well, which makes it a lot easier. Yeah.

Sanaa Cockar:

So I guess in light of all that, who did you guys - who kind of inspired you to become vets?

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

For me, so I grew up with a lot of weird and wonderful animals. My dad worked at a lot of pet shops and stuff when he was younger. And we kept a lot of animals. You had like a little set up in our back garden. So if you imagine like a mini zoo in a garden in North London. We kept all sorts of things as I was growing up. And so we had things like birds of prey and then we got reptiles. It was intense, but over the course of years as I was growing up, so I kind of had this animal gene, I think, as I was growing up. I always knew that I was interested in animals. I was also really, really interested in doing art and having a, more of a creative side of things as well.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

And so it kind of got to a point when I was in secondary school and in year seven, year eight and you'd see all these things, you're like, I can do absolutely anything I want. I could go and be in the West End one day, but then I could be a scientist the next day. So that sort of thing. And then eventually I kind of whittled it down to, I definitely want to work with animals. I really do like the sciences and also like my art. So I was kind of still deliberating a lot up until the point that I decided that I was going to do veterinary. But I think for me it was, it was semi that typical "I've liked animals since I was however many years old". But I think a big factor for me was the interactions I had when I was growing up with my dad.

Nicole Regan:

I definitely had that "I like animals" since being very young, but I never had that, "Oh, I wanted to be a vet since I was four, or since I was born, since I was a fetus, or whatever. [Laughs] And I definitely didn't grow up on James Herriot and stuff like that. My first actual memory of what I wanted to be when I was older, I wanted to be a social worker because that's what my mum does by trade. And she was like, absolutely not, it's horrific. [Laughs] And then I wanted to be a police officer. And then I wanted to be a backing dancer. And then I got really into music, I play saxophone, so I wanted to do that for a bit. And then I have absolutely no idea. I don't remember the point at which vet became an option, but it was probably in Year 10 when we had to pick what to do for work experience and it stuck. But

again, it was a similar, I like animals. I like the science. There was never any definitive role model for me. Obviously I had role models growing up, but there wasn't anyone vet-y. So yeah, I really don't know how I ended up here. Again, it's probably, like a lot of people say, out of stubbornness because somebody told me I couldn't get into vet school. [Laughs]

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

The driver!

Nicole Regan:

Yeah, exactly. My career advisor was like, no, your ASs aren't good enough. You shouldn't even bother applying. I was then like, nope! So, here we are.

Isobel Corp:

Yeah, I got a similar - I think I'm quite similar as well. Yeah. I've had a lot of pets growing up. I knew I really liked animals. And then when it got to about Year 10 or 11, when you have, I think Year 11, when you have to pick A Levels thinking, Oh, so what am I going to pick? I kind of like science and I definitely want to do something with animals. So I guess yeah, vet is all right. And then I got told, - yeah, we had a careers thing. I think they talked to you about, with your parents, what do you want to do at uni? What do you think you might apply for? And I said, veterinary, and the first thing they asked was, what's your backup plan? And I was like, I don't know, I said something else. And they're like, yeah, maybe you should apply for that instead. And then I thought about it. I was like, I don't think I want to do that, really. [Laughs] So, I think the same. I was very stubborn. I was like, right. I'm just going to get more and more work experience and basically prove them wrong. And also I did enjoy it.

Sanaa Cockar:

I guess for me it was - I'm not sure I really had a role model because yeah, there weren't that many people I knew who were vets. So I think mainly it was my parents, they were born in Kenya. So all my family is - basically lives in Kenya, my extended family and everything. So whenever we'd go back home, and visit home, that's where we'd go. And obviously Kenya is the wildlife capital of Africa. This amazing - so whenever we went, you know, I'd go to the giraffe feeding reserves and stuff and we'd go see the orphanage for the elephants. And we go on those mini - you know, not quite a Safari because those are really expensive. But the nature reserves that they have. The national parks. And we'd see zebra and everything, lions and yeah, it was amazing.

Sanaa Cockar:

And my dad, he loves - like my mum had so many pets growing up, she'd tell me about them. And my dad loves wildlife. Every time, if he wants to watch a documentary, he'll be watching something about the savannah or Okavango, things like that. So I'd watch it with him and I think, yeah, maybe you can tell that I love wildlife. I think especially the way it's captured nowadays and the photography and the stories and the documentaries that you can access. It's just there's nothing like it. And I feel like that really inspired me. I was like, nowhere will you find something this beautiful and you know, just have the privilege to be able to help these animals and do something for them. So yeah, I just thought it would be really cool. Again, I love science and I like to know how things work, but at the same time I also love animals. So I wanted to combine the academics with something practical. And I feel like being a vet surgeon is one of the best ways you can do that. So yeah, that was kind of my inspiration.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

I think it's quite good that we can see that there's a common theme that we didn't necessarily have a person that we looked up to. Whereas I think when you speak to some people and they have a vet that they did work experience with, that drove them to say that you should be doing this career. And I think similarly, we probably all then also had that someone in our school say to us, maybe you should consider something else. Maybe you should look at other options or, you know, we've had some sort of blip. And that it's kind of more of a drive of our own experiences rather than - and our own self willingness to push ourselves to do it, rather than someone saying you should be doing this career. Which I think is quite inspiring in itself.

Nicole Regan:

I heard a phrase. And it was, well, models doesn't necessarily fit everybody that well. And particularly I think for us to break it down into role maps and role mirrors. So you've got role mirrors, who look like you, who are literally people who, you can see them, they're there, they look like you, they've made it. And then role maps, who are a bit more flexible. And it's sort of like a way of following the path than more of a traditional role model. And I really liked that because I remember there was a discussion on a Facebook forum and it was basically saying, why do BAME vet students need role models that look like them? Female vets, there's been a huge increase in numbers. They now outweigh male vet students massively. And at some point there was no female vets to be role models for them. And I remember somebody made the comment of, Oh, my child really loves Rugby and would count a Rugby player as a role model whether they were black, white, looked like them, didn't, anything. And I think what that person really failed to grasp was that your kid has the option. You have the choice. They can have a role model that looks like them, or that doesn't, because they exist. And that just doesn't at the moment. And I think that's something that obviously is changing massively at the moment, and it's great. Especially for young young ones out there, with The Pets Factor and stuff like that. Actually seeing that representation on TV, but there's still this revamp of James Herriot and all the big names on mainstream TV when the general public and when teenagers who are choosing their A Levels are watching it. Well they're not watching CBBC. Right. They're not. The people that they're seeing are James Herriot, the Yorkshire Vet, and, SuperVet and that is not diverse, not even in gender.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

It's not representative of the vet schools now. And I agree, it's like trying to - I think you end up having this battle with people, which obviously has got a little bit easier now, but it was hard to get through to people before that there is a reason as to why, like you said, that we need to see people that look like us in these fields. You know, we're not just saying it because we just want someone up there. Who's like, who looks like us? We're not just saying it for the sake of it. It's because there is that relate-ability factor of, they potentially have gone through some similar hurdles. They have gone through some similar barriers. If you were to sit down and have a discussion with them, you know, you might find that there are some cultural similarities and there's other ways of connecting to that person and their upbringing.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

It's not just about where they've got to now, it's that whole journey up until the point that they've got to, that means something to you. And actually can be your level of motivation. And having to explain that to someone - you could say that to someone that has not had to worry about, you know, not fitting into places and that sort of thing. And they'll be like, okay, well, they will accept it. But you know, it's a whole sort of thing about accepting that you might not understand it. You might not actually ever feel that way about that situation, but

you should not invalidate someone else's experience and how someone else feels when they are trying to profess their lived experience of a situation.

Isobel Corp:

I think there's like a different level of experience being a person of colour or BAME student at university. There is a different experience that's really hard to explain. I've read it in a few books. I know 'The Fly Girl's Guide to Cambridge[sic]¹', I don't know if any of you guys have read that book, but that just explains it so well in a way that I would have never been able to word. Just like the experience of just feeling 'other'. But if I try to explain it to any white friends, I just don't think they'd understand. Just because it's a lived experience that I don't, I don't know how - because they will never experience that ever.

Nicole Regan:

It's so hard putting into words and people expect you to be so eloquent on what you've been through and how it's affected you, and reflect on it like it's a piece of coursework and you're like, I can't, I can't get this across to you. And a lot of the time I'm just too tired to. Especially over the summer, I was like, I don't know what I meant by that. I just did, OK.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

I was going to say as well, I think another point that I had down was about this sort of feeling inadequate about actually truly representing all the BAME students. Because I think, you know, we're battling with the fact that universities are realizing and have realized that their BAME student populations are low. But it then has fallen on a lot of us to be the voices, and trying to drive things, and drive change at the institutions and at the universities. But even then sometimes I feel like there should be someone else out there that, you know, I'm aware that I still potentially have had privileges more so than other people. Even within, in identifying as part of this BAME category. And so I don't always feel like I'm appropriate to be representing voices of other people and other people that potentially have had worse barriers to face than I have in certain situations as well. And it's unfortunate, obviously, that it's kind of one of those things where it's like, that's the way that things are at the moment. And they shouldn't, you know, we shouldn't be settling for it.

Nicole Regan:

Yeah, absolutely. I'm mixed. I grew up with my mum who's white and again it's a lot. They'll be like, you are the BAME speaker. No, no, I'm speaking for me and that's all I can do. Because that is all I've experienced. The same as I can't make you understand my experience. I certainly can't speak for other people's.

Sanaa Cockar:

Yeah, I think it's interesting point when you say that, to what extent this culture kind of not form a barrier, but more like an obstacle, to be a part of professions or study things that are not necessarily seen as conventional. Or to what extent is it the university's job to persuade people to apply? And I think it can be dangerous also to just assume that it's all, you know, cultural. There are some stereotypes where, okay, you know, maybe some - not even cultures, but even just the parents, they might not see veterinary medicine, even though it is, as a very difficult or distinguished profession or whatever. It's essentially medicine, but for animals, it's literally the same thing, you know, but it's not really like out there as much.

¹ Olufemi, L., Younge, O., Sebatindira, W., Manzoor-Khan, S., *A Fly Girl's Guide to University: Being a Woman of Colour at Cambridge and Other Institutions of Elitism and Power*, (2019)

Sanaa Cockar:

So there's that to consider. And also the university will of course play a part in that because - I don't know, what do you guys think? I think it's a very tricky balance, because on the one hand, yeah, it really depends on the amount of support you get at home, for example. If your parents are encouraging you to apply or if they're discouraging you, or if you feel like it's not for you, but just simply because of your background. Or on the other hand, is it because you really don't see that inclusivity in the access that the vet schools do for example. And so that kind of reinforces what is being said at home, maybe, if you're kind of on the edge. So at what point, what tips the balance?

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

Universities have this responsibility, you know, they're actively recruiting students and they know who they're recruiting, they know who they're targeting. So they should be aware of these factors. And they should understand these things. And I guess it's hard to say that when actually you think of the makeup of the institutions and you'd question would they actually understand this? They would have to have someone external, or someone that identifies in these groups, to actually speak to them and say, well, this is what you need to be looking out for. And again universities, I think after everything that's happened in the past few months, are slowly becoming more aware. There are a lot of groups, so things like Animal Aspirations, which we set up at RVC. But again, that has been a student-led initiative to try and instill a change. And that's basically students that have experienced these things, understanding that these barriers exist, and then feel the need to ensure that it doesn't happen again to other people that would also be in that circumstance.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

And there was a lot that the institutions are then having to learn from us, I think, and from our experiences. But that also then means that they need to also be open to listening to the students and understanding those barriers. And that way they know that then when they do their outreach, and when they actually do events and they send out ambassadors and people, they are equipped to be able to speak to parents and students and teachers and other people at careers fairs and things, to have a better understanding of, okay, so this person wants to do Vet Med, what is their situation now? Take that, I guess holistically, into account as well, and figure out how that then ties into the application process and what more or less needs to be done to support someone. Because you know, the way that the demographic of the nation, the demographic of our institutions are changing constantly, and universities are going to have to learn to adapt to accommodate these people. You can't just turn a blind eye to it.

Isobel Corp:

Yeah. I agree. I think it's a mixture of both, I guess, parents and school and university outreach. I think there's a lot of misinformation about veterinary as a general subject or career, I think, you know, like you need 20 weeks of work experience and you're only allowed to apply two times and they don't like it if you've done this or that, you have to do this. I can't think of any examples off the top of my head, but yeah, just a lot of things that, I don't know, school will tell you, or you hear online. The universities just need to say, this is what we expect from applicants. Just so school pupils who are applying know what they're going to get at uni and what they need to do to get there.

Nicole Regan:

I think, yeah. I think Vet School Council is starting to address that with their guidebook, which is invaluable. I wish I had that, because the main reason that I got told not to apply was that my AS grades weren't great. And they were like, Oh, you won't get in with those. But in reality vet school's only go on predicted grades and if it wasn't for the fact my mum

was a bit like, are you sure, let's actually call them and ask, I would have gone home and gone well my career advisor, who clearly knows, has said this is the truth. And I would have followed that. So I think that's probably one of the fundamental failings of outreach up to now is that it's only ever targeted 'school child'. And in reality, just running a session for the career advisors who are going to be telling them what the truth is, and also trying to interact with parents. Because if you don't have that parental support, it does become a lot harder. But having a one-off hour session or afternoon session with a kid, who's like 15, isn't going to change much. You need to build up and have multiple sessions as they progress through school, as well as touching base with people who are going to affect their life, and affect their choices.

Sanaa Cockar:

Yeah. I was just going to say, I think it's a good point that you say that you should have vets there. Because I don't know about how it was in your school, but in my school I can't even remember if we ever had a vet come in even once. We were always grouped with the medics and the dentists, under healthcare. And I was the only person applying for Vet Med in my entire Sixth Form. So it's just like, well okay, if you want more people to get in, invite some vets or put a category, bother to do the research, it will take you and your team no time to add in an actual thing about veterinary medicine. And so they've just been like, 'and medicine' or 'and this' and oh yeah and vet med by the way. And you have to do the BMAT and UKCAT, oh yeah and Vet Med as well. And firstly, you know, you need to say properly what it is about, it's considered like a distinct option in its own right. You would never be like, oh yeah apply for medicine, oh yeah and dentistry. It's a thing of its own. So I just feel like, even though Vet Med it's such its own thing and it's so similar, it's not treated as such. It's still treated as a package, Oh yeah it's just part of the health care. And if you're interested in it, you basically have to go off and do your own research. I've never met anyone who's just passively falling into Vet Med. It's not even active, it's more than active, it's such a conscious decision. You could never just fall into it. Like some people are just passively going into medicine and stuff. It's such a choice. And I just feel like that's a good thing because it says something about everyone who turns out to be vets. But at the same time, there is a line, you know, it has to be more accessible so that more people can have that option, opportunity to make that decision. Instead of just, like you mentioned, Stephanie, we are all privileged in some manner to even be able to have applied and gotten in and felt like we could have.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

But even then I think, you've made brilliant points about it because I do question - because when you speak to other people and sometimes it actually is regardless of your gender or race or anything, but someone's had some adviser or some teacher that actually says to them, at a crucial point of your studies and more often than not, it is at your A levels. I was similar to Nicole, like my AS levels, I had a bit of a tumble with those and I just had to buck up my grades if I actually was going to consider doing Vet Med. And I was quite lucky that I had teachers in particular that were really willing to help me. Even if I was doing this research off my own back, I could go to them and just talk it through with them because, I was the first person in my family to go to university. My parents were supporting me, but probably could only do so much. And I had one teacher in particular that would say, Oh, I've got an email through from RVC, they've got this event on, do you want to go to it? And you know, that's one person that cares, but it was enough to give me the confidence to keep pushing and progressing for it. It's a shame because I guess it does depend on your schools and it does depend on the areas and where you go, whether or not these support systems are there for students. And that's, in some cases, regardless of career, but even I had to recognize at a point that, when we were all sent this template about how to write a personal statement, that wasn't going to fit what I needed to write for Vet Med. I needed it to be 70% about my work experience and the other 30% about what my interests were.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

I couldn't do it, this sort of whole wishy-washy, look these are all the books I've read, and then this is all my transferable skills. I had to talk about my lambing and all these other things that needed to be relevant and find all this work experience as well. Work experience is a really big thing for Vet Med obviously. And you know, where you're spending your holidays going off and finding placements whilst your friends are kind of kicking it back or doing other things, you've got to make those sacrifices. I'm not saying that we need all the credit in the world, but when you're 15 or 16, there are big decisions that you're having to make for yourself. And I felt quite under pressure when I had that conversation with my Head of Year being like, am I actually going to do Vet Med? Is it going to happen? I don't know. And you kind of have to have a pair and be like, actually I do want to do this. I will do the work. You just have to let me try. And I think when you're in that weird stage of being semi - considered an adult, but not quite, and having to battle with your school about what you're doing. I was lucky, I felt lucky that I didn't actually have to battle with my parents so much about it. But it was just with certain teachers that you would have to try and profess that my predicted grades say one thing, but my mind is saying another thing and I'm actually gonna go and try and prove you wrong.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

But then again, you shouldn't have to be saying that you're trying to prove people wrong. You should be doing it for your own benefit, but it feels like you're putting your fists up and having to have this battle. So it's really, really important that I think universities don't also realize that schools are going to be different. And there's going to be a level of where you will have schools that will want to come to you and it be absolutely amazing and interact with you, but you're going to have ones that you're just not going to reach, unless you step foot in, like you say, having a vet come in. I've gone back and done talks at my secondary school. And I love it because I don't care that those kids - if none of those kids want to be a vet by the end of the talk, you know what fine, but at least they've now considered a career that potentially they could see themselves doing. They've been spoken to by a previous student of that school. And even then if they are considering medicine and stuff, that's still feasible. The same way that if kids want to go to Oxbridge universities as well, you know, that's still feasible. You shouldn't be setting yourself any lower than anyone else for any other reason.

Sanaa Cockar:

Actually I did want to say something about the role that schools have. We have spoken about it a bit, but what do you guys think in terms of - how important is it? Because you mentioned that a lot of you guys have student run things and often it's the students that have to take the initiative time and time again, just to get the ball rolling. And that's all well and good. And then maybe if it happens from the roots up, that's also great. But at what point does it become something that's like a realization. That the people in charge or the people in governing roles or the people that are the higher academics. At what point does it become not enough for everything to be student led and them to have some sort of a paradigm shift, maybe? Because it's not even like we need to. It's not like we should be encouraging access from all backgrounds, just for diversity. It's more like we need people from different diversities because of what this profession is. It's literally like you're being a doctor for clients from all walks of life and you have to be - it's not even an option. You have to be a diverse group of doctors because otherwise, how could you ever think that you could communicate with everyone properly? How do you ever think that you could understand, everyone you're ever going to be dealing with, if you're largely one demographic? I don't know what do you guys think? It's more like, not just diversity for diversity's sake, but even just because, you know, it has to be that way. If all human doctors were one demographic, it would never work.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

Yeah. It's kind of like, why do we even question it? Why do we even think it's not the norm?

Nicole Regan:

I think Unis, from my experience, can be quite reactive. And that's really frustrating. So it's like, Oh, somebody got kicked, so we now have to wear hard hats. Or a girl in my year committed suicide, so now we're going to have counseling on site. Or George Floyd gets killed, so now we're going to talk about diversity. And it's like, why couldn't that have happened first?

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

Yeah. Prevention.

Nicole Regan:

Exactly. So everything's a reaction to an event and it's really frustrating to see because it's not like it didn't exist before.

Isobel Corp:

Yeah. I think recently as well. And with George Floyd especially and Black Lives Matter. Then the uni kind of thought, Oh, something needs to happen. And at Bristol we did an anonymous survey just asking for responses from students about racist experiences and the results we got back were so shocking and all the staff were so shocked. They were like, we didn't realize that this was happening. It was happening all along. And no one knew. No one had asked, that was the thing, which is such a shame because I guess I probably thought it was kind of normal, like standard. You know, didn't think that, Oh, actually I can do something and we can change something that happens. But also the point that you said about staff helping and students helping. I feel like, because I'm on the vet society committee at Bristol for EDI, so equality, diversity and inclusion. So I do a lot of stuff with that, but then there has to be a point where - I'm studying for a degree, we're all studying for a degree! That's why we're at uni. There has to be a point where staff need to be able to help us a bit to implement some changes higher up. Because we can suggest ideas as much as we want, but if no one then forwards them on higher up, what can we do? There's nothing that we can do as students to make those changes higher up that will affect future years lower down.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

And it should also even just, you know, it's for current students and students beyond. We're all in the final years of our degrees now, and there's going to be an expectation of what support did we get that when we are moving and becoming alums of our respective universities and we're actually going and facing the careers as well. I put a little note here, because I think when universities - they have relied on us, a lot as students to share our experiences because we had a need to fulfil this intrinsic sense of belonging that we wanted. And we've shared that. And a lot of us have shared that, especially with respected E & D committees and other groups and people higher up. And now it's this asking of right, well, we've shared all that we can share. What are you going to do about it now? Which is really, really important. And it can feel a little bit frustrating when these things aren't getting through to them. But like you said, Isobel, we did a similar thing and we surveyed people and a lot of the stuff came back, especially about placements, and discrimination faced in placements and how seriously a lot of this stuff is dealt with as well as some things that have occurred within the universities themselves.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

And universities have policies on discrimination, in general anyway, for workplaces. It just seems that the veterinary profession as a whole, it just seems, things are just a little, that little step behind other professions. And it's just now that we're taking those little baby steps, and like Nicole was saying, it has been a lot. It has been really, really reactive in the first instances. And it's just this slow learning curve now of, okay, right now we're going to try and put our foot down and have these sort of preventative measures in place. But it's kind of like, it seems like it's a little too late, but then also actually, if it means it's going to be better for students to come in the future, then fine. And the fingers crossed that it does stay for as long as it needs to. And it's run effectively as well. There's no point putting these things in place if there's no one to man them effectively, or they've not had the right research.

Isobel Corp:

Yeah. I agree. I do see how the Unis are quite reactive, but then at least, yeah, it will benefit someone, a lot of students in the future. So it is a positive thing that they are at least listening now to students. Especially for placements. Because I feel like placements are such a big one for vet students specifically.

Sanaa Cockar:

Did you guys find it difficult getting work experience/EMS and stuff? Based on where you live or...?

Nicole Regan:

Yeah. There aren't many farms in North London, I'm not gonna lie! You've got to be inventive with it. I think, yeah, I think it does prep you. You do have to be inventive. I went on a lambing course for farmers that was a two day course, and I was like this'll do! It's like a short sharp course on how to do it all rather than spending two weeks freezing in a shed.

Sanaa Cockar:

That's a good idea!

Isobel Corp:

That's so cool!

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

I did a similar thing. I did the lambing day, at RVC when they did up at the farm. And I managed to arrange it and it's literally just the day. And I was like, well, at least it was experience, you know, it's fine. I'm not going to be able to - I was similar. I'm not gonna be able to go to a farm. I'd have to get my parents to drive me probably. And then how comfortable do you feel if you have to stay somewhere?

Nicole Regan:

You don't have those networks already set up.

Isobel Corp:

It's always someone who knows someone, who will lend you a hand.

Sanaa Cockar:

Or like you own a farm yourself.

Isobel Corp:

The farm down the road also needs help. Yeah.

Sanaa Cockar:

I literally had to look in the Yellow Pages when I was lining up in work experience because nothing would even come up on Google. I'm not even joking! I would Google places, Dairy farm, blah blah blah, nothing will come up. Then one day I looked in the Yellow Pages and they were all there and I was like, Oh wow. So I just called up. And, it was just such - I've never had to be more inventive than when I'm looking for work experience. And obviously then when, you know, it's there, it's like, Oh my God, it was there that whole time. And it's thriving and this is a great place, but it's just finding, digging up these places that it's another hurdle that maybe it was also kind of like unnoticed. But only when you start to actually do the work, then you realize, Oh wait, there's something else. I don't actually have all these contacts. But that's the great thing then about having people obviously that you can go back and talk to you, is that if you've done it or other people have done it, then you know, you can pass it down and you can be like yep, I know this great farm here and this here. It just makes things so much more easier and accessible and like it's not every step is like hard work.

Nicole Regan:

Yeah. Yeah. But it also gets you some great placements.

Sanaa Cockar:

It does, yeah.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

It's strange now because I think about the experience, how I felt going to placements and things when I was younger and had less inhibition about just turning up somewhere and being like, hello, I've come to do work experience with you, I'm looking forward to it. Versus in vet school as well, where obviously there's obviously a bit more pressure, you're in a bit more demand because you're seemingly more useful with your knowledge and that sort of thing. And you also have like different expectations of what's needed to be done of you. But then I think, touching on the stuff that had come out of those surveys about people's experience of discrimination and things on placement. From my perspective, I feel that I've gone to placements and I've not worried. So I've not had to worry so much about - I can't think of times where I've actually been outrightly discriminated against in my placements, but it doesn't stop me from thinking that something might happen.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

And this is something that I've always kind of questioned in terms of when we talk about reporting systems and things like that. There isn't anyone that I can speak to, probably other than my mother, who could probably relate to these sort of things, about what happens if I turn up and they treat me differently. Or I expect, or I think that they might say something about me, because this brown girl's stepped on their doorstep. You know, might not look like their typical student. Are they going to treat me differently, even though I might have the same work ethic, I've got the same training as someone else. And even though it probably - I don't feel like it's happened yet. It doesn't stop that feeling of, you know, is something going to be said here?

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

And especially, I think there was a lot of feedback from people that had gone on to farm placements particularly, or if you're with people that have maybe more traditional views on things, you know, or are not quite in the 21st century with things. And that could be

something that I think you're quite naive to when your pre-Uni work experience. It doesn't seem like such a problem, because I think they probably just think, because you're quite young. But it's definitely a different dynamic when you're in vet school and then maybe you're attending placements and things as well.

Nicole Regan:

Also you just made me think about names. Because I think when you were like, Oh, a brown girl's just walked onto our doorstep. I feel like the shock gets people sometimes as well. Because like my name's Nicole Regan, and I've got a London accent. And it's nothing suspect on a CV. [Laughs]

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

I don't send a picture beforehand either. I know we used to do for placements. They'd be like send a picture.

Isobel Corp:

I don't send a picture.

Nicole Regan:

I really consider it, because I'm like, should I give you warning? Let you adapt in time. [Laughs] So yeah, I'm always in two minds about it.

Isobel Corp:

I've always thought, are they surprised when I turn up, because obviously my name, the same as you, doesn't seem particularly of any ethnicity. So I don't know if they kind of get a shock, like, Oh, okay. That wasn't what I expected from the email.

Nicole Regan:

I also find people are really shocked that my mum's white as well. I don't know why.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

Yeah. What's the fascination? [Laughs]

Nicole Regan:

And I think maybe it's because my surname is my mum's name, and they expect it to be my dad's name.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

No it's strange. And I think also it does just depend on where you do experience because I'm talking of experience that I've done more in and around London. I think the furthest I went for placements, I did a pig placement in Glastonbury. And the family that we stayed with were super lovely. And we went round, me and my friend went and we stayed around the area, and it was so, so nice and was absolutely fine. Versus I did - a lot of my lambing was done at a farm in Epping, in Nazeing. And I felt like that farmer because of where he is, he probably would have been exposed to lots of students from all walks of life being in that location, maybe versus a placement a bit further afield than London, obviously. And so the conversations, maybe expectations at certain places might be different as well. But then, you don't necessarily have that pre-warning of, this is how you should - not that you should have to go into places and be like, this is how you should act, and this is how you should sound, and this is how you need to present yourself to be taken seriously. You shouldn't have to be educated in that before you turn up somewhere. You're there to do your job, make up your

AHEMS or EMS, and trying to do well and further your learning. You shouldn't also have to face these other things as well.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

I think it would be nice if we maybe said what we want from the profession or what we want to see. I think considering that - seeing as we're at the points that we're at particularly. Because, you know, we're almost finishing and we probably have expectations of what it's going to be like when we actually go into Vet Med and actually start working. What can institutions do, and the RCVS and other organizational bodies do, to support diversity? So I think a big thing for me is that we have these projects and things that are starting and there's a lot of student led stuff that's happening now to support students that are considering Vet Med as a career and trying to get people in.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

But I think the big thing that we're not, we can't necessarily focus on because we are students and, you know, we have to devote our energy to certain things, is that what is happening for current students and what is happening for students, especially going on into the world of work. And we know that a lot of things have changed, policies, things like that in the BVA and RCVS and Vet Schools Council. And it's great that these discussions are happening, but it's just not forgetting that you're now having to figure out the systems that are in place and are they adequate? Are they supporting the people that are currently going through these courses and what can be learned from speaking to people and speaking to students like ourselves. And even academics in the profession as well that identify as BAME. What can be learned from their experiences and how can we translate that into effective action so that we don't fall into these hurdles. And also that we don't lose momentum with this as well, because it's really, really important that this keeps going on this upward trend that it's going on at the moment.

Nicole Regan:

Yeah, absolutely. It's great to see talk and stuff from RCVS and BVA. And I don't know about everyone else, but I'm quite tired of talking. [Laughs] I feel like, okay, the profession as a whole, why not? We can talk about. I think those of us who are actually affected by it have been talking and trying to make our voices heard for a lot longer. It really is time to actually see some action, and I think it's going to be fab with Mandisa, I can't wait.

Stephanie-Rae Flicker:

Agreed.

Nicole Regan:

But yeah, to actually see some tangible results would be great. But it's been, I think this summer has been a kick in the arse for a lot of groups. And it's been really nice, even just to see my peers and people in my year actually come out in support. And just like send a message and be like, how are you doing or go on a little BLM march. And it's just like revitalizing.

Sanaa Cockar:

Yeah. I think I would really like to see visibly a more diverse kind of profession. So, you know, like in the prospectuses and on the website and everything that you look at when you're applying or when you're progressing. It would be - I would love to be able to see people that look like me and from my background as well. It would just be - because I probably know one or two people in the whole of the profession, the whole of the academics and everything. And even that is just because we're the minority, that's why I know them. So

that would be really great. And also obviously leading on from that, more people in general, a more diverse body coming into vet school would be great as well.

Isobel Corp:

Yeah. I think everything that you guys have said, I definitely agree with all of that. I think. Yeah, definitely keeping momentum, especially within vet schools. Because all of us won't be at vet school for much longer. So having more students who are keen to do stuff within the uni to keep it going. But also at a higher level. More representation and just awareness of it, especially within the veterinary profession.

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