EU Migrant Labour: the NI Veterinary Sector

1.   Introduction

There are around 24,000 farms in NI and the veterinary needs of these farms and the general public, as well as the needs of commercial breeders of horses, dogs and other animals, are met by around 820 Veterinarians in NI according to information available from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS).

The RCVS is the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons in the United Kingdom (UK) and is responsible for setting, monitoring and regulating the educational, ethical and clinical standards of the veterinary profession under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. Anyone wishing to practice as a vet in the United Kingdom must be registered with the RCVS and hold a veterinary degree approved by RCVS. The universities in the UK offering veterinary degrees approved by the RCVS are Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, London (the Royal Veterinary College) and Nottingham. In addition to these UK approved degrees the RCVS also approves degrees from around the world. In particular RCVS recognises degrees from citizens of other EU countries that have been approved by the European Association of Establishments of Veterinary Education (EAEVE) which is the body responsible for the quality and standard of veterinary practice across the European Union (EU).

This paper provides a summary of available data on the Veterinary profession in NI.

2.   Northern Ireland Registered Vets by Country of Practice and Country of Qualification

Table 1 illustrates that there are currently 837 RCVS practising veterinary surgeons registered at addresses in Northern Ireland (NI) and qualified to work in the UK. Out of these 837 veterinary surgeons there is currently 822 (98%) practicing in the UK. It cannot be discounted that some of the NI registered vets are working in GB (rather than NI) and that some veterinary surgeons registered outside NI are working in NI. Therefore, the figure of 822 cannot be taken as the true figure of veterinary surgeons working in NI. Given the numbers of NI registered vets working outside the UK is only 15, it is likely that the number working in GB is also small. Consequently, for the purposes of this paper it will be assumed that the figure of 822 is a reasonable estimate of the number of vets currently practicing in Northern Ireland (assumption A).

Table 1 Practising NI Registered Veterinary Surgeons

Country of Practice	Number	%
UK	822	98.2
Republic of Ireland	2	0.2
Rest of World	13	1.6
Total	837	100

As there are no veterinary colleges in Northern Ireland, it follows that all of the 822 Vets practising in NI received their qualifications and training elsewhere.

Table 2. Veterinary Surgeons Practising in NI who qualified in an EU Country outside UK

Country of qualification	Number	% Total NI Practicing Vets
UK	428	52
Ireland	303	37
Other EU	91	11
Total	822	100

Table 2 illustrates that 394 (48%) of NI vets received their qualifications from an EU country outside the UK with 303 (37%) receiving their qualifications in Ireland (IE) and 91 (11%) receiving their qualification from another EU country. It is well known that most students from NI seeking veterinary degrees will tend to go to universities in either IE or GB. Therefore, it is likely that many of NI registered vets with a degree from IE will have been born in NI rather than IE.

It is not certain that all 91 vets registered in NI who received their qualification from an EU country (other than UK or IE) will have been born outside the UK and IE, but it is assumed to be a reasonable approximation for the purposes this paper (assumption B). Based on assumption A and B, it is estimated that 11% of vets practicing in NI are born outside the UK and IE, while 48% of vets practicing in NI received their veterinary qualification outside the UK.

Summary

Based on RCVS databases, there are over 820 vets practising in NI. It is estimated that 11% of vets practicing in NI are born outside the UK and IE, while 48% of vets practicing in NI received their veterinary qualification from outside the UK.