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1 **Mobile Work, Veterinary Subjectivity and Brexit: Understanding the**  
2 **Migration of Veterinary Surgeons to the United Kingdom**

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23

24

25

26 **Abstract**

27

28 This paper extends studies of 'global work' by considering the mobility of  
29 veterinary surgeons in the global countryside. The paper develops the concept of  
30 'disease ecology': an assemblage of heterogenous actors and relations that  
31 inscribe and normalise mobility within professional subjectivities. Disruptions to  
32 these disease ecologies can contribute to new patterns of mobility. Drawing on  
33 biographical narrative interviews with 35 vets who have migrated to the United  
34 Kingdom to work, the paper shows how veterinary mobility is shaped by and  
35 emerges in response to these disease ecologies. Specifically, the paper describes  
36 how four narratives – 'the first job', 'escape and adventure', 'the lucky break' and  
37 'staying mobilities' – contribute to veterinary migration to the UK, and how the  
38 lived experiences of work and inscriptions of mobile veterinary subjectivities  
39 within disease ecologies lead vets to stay in the UK. However, the paper also  
40 considers the role of Brexit in disrupting established disease ecologies and  
41 creating new patterns of veterinary mobilities. In identifying how Brexit  
42 challenges vets' sense of place, the paper concludes by exploring Brexit's potential  
43 impact to the future of veterinary services in the UK.

44

45

46

47 **Keywords:** Brexit; mobility; globalisation; global-rural; migration; disease  
48 ecology; veterinary services; biographical narrative interviews; biosecurity;  
49 animal disease; neoliberalism.

50

51

52

53 **1. Introduction**

54

55 A central element of the globalisation of the countryside has been migration to and  
56 from rural areas ([Woods, 2007](#)). In the spaces of the global rural, migration  
57 reshapes rural practices, communities and environments as the local combines  
58 with the global to produce new identities for the countryside and those that live  
59 and work within it. Understandings of the global countryside have largely focused  
60 on amenity migration ([Perkins et al., 2015](#); [Woods, 2011](#)). However, other forms  
61 of international migration are significant, such as the migration required to fill low  
62 skilled, poorly paid, and precarious ‘occupational niches’ within the neoliberal  
63 agri-food system ([Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999](#); [Sporton, 2013](#)). Not only does this  
64 global migration transform the agricultural workforce, but migrants also reshape  
65 local communities through their engagement or isolation from local social and  
66 political structures ([Lever and Milbourne, 2015](#); [Woods, 2016](#)).

67

68 In these studies of the global-rural, however, there has been less consideration of  
69 the migration of highly skilled professions associated with countryside  
70 management and agriculture. This is surprising in two ways. Firstly, the  
71 globalisation of agriculture has always relied upon circulations of experts and  
72 expertise, developing and carrying new practices, technologies and natures from  
73 place to place ([Brooking and Pawson, 2011](#)). Secondly, recent work on  
74 globalisation has highlighted how the professions responsible for globalisation  
75 are themselves highly transient and mobile. Accompanying the rise of ‘global  
76 work’ ([Jones, 2008](#)), practices and processes normalise mobility by creating and  
77 inscribing it within professional subjectivities ([Cranston, 2016a](#)). However, whilst

78 some studies have considered the global mobility of farmers ([Cheshire and](#)  
79 [Woods, 2013](#)), studies of 'global work' have focused on migration between  
80 international cities ([Beaverstock and Smith, 1996](#)).

81

82 This paper extends examinations of 'global work' into the global countryside by  
83 considering the role of veterinary surgeons (hereafter: vets). Vets play a central  
84 role in the management of farm animal health, disease control, and the regulation  
85 of public health and food safety. However, these roles increasingly represent  
86 global work: in the United Kingdom (UK), over 50% of all new vets qualify outside  
87 of the UK, and these vets are disproportionately employed within public health  
88 roles ([BVA, 2017](#)). The questions the paper seeks to address are: why are there so  
89 many overseas vets in the UK? Why have they moved there? And how might the  
90 UK's decision to leave the European Union (EU) – commonly referred to as 'Brexit'  
91 – affect the lives of overseas vets in the UK?

92

93 To answer these questions, the paper conceptualises veterinary mobility within a  
94 'disease ecology'. Focusing on the complex assemblage of human and nonhuman  
95 actors that represent 'veterinary worlds of work', the paper argues that some  
96 veterinary mobilities are inscribed within these disease ecologies, whilst  
97 biological and political disruptions to disease ecologies may lead to new patterns  
98 of mobility. The paper therefore begins by introducing and describing the  
99 relationship between disease ecologies and veterinary mobility, focusing on the  
100 normalisation of mobility within professional subjectivities by international  
101 regulations and neoliberal forms of animal health governance. Subsequently, the  
102 paper presents a narrative analysis from 35 interviews with overseas vets

103 working in the UK to show how veterinary mobility emerges from the lived  
104 experience of disease ecologies and its inscriptions of veterinary subjectivity.  
105 Finally, the paper considers the potential disruption to these disease ecologies  
106 arising from Brexit and the future mobility of vets working in the UK.

107

## 108 **2. Veterinary Mobilities**

109

### 110 2.1 Conceptualising Veterinary Mobility and Migration

111

112 In this paper, the concept of a ‘disease ecology’ comprised of heterogeneous (i.e.  
113 social, natural, technological) relations and actors, is used to help explain  
114 veterinary mobility and migration. The idea of ‘disease ecology’ is developed from  
115 historical studies of the veterinary profession that analysed how place-specific  
116 veterinary cultures have developed. Focusing on colonial expansion, these studies  
117 show how the veterinary profession and its practices travel to, and become  
118 established in new countries ([Mishra, 2011](#)). These processes create a topology of  
119 veterinary professionalism, drawing distant places together through a shared  
120 veterinary vision, and facilitating movement between them. Central to these  
121 understandings of the global movement of vets is the creation of idealised  
122 professional subjectivities, based on the kind of work vets saw as normal. In  
123 practice, however, a range of different professional subjectivities emerged in  
124 relation to place specific social (e.g. forms of colonial rule), biological (e.g. disease  
125 severity and environmental factors) and technological actors and relations  
126 ([Gilfoyle, 2003](#); [Mishra, 2011](#)).

127

128 [Davis \(2008\)](#) sees these spatial variations in veterinary practice as emergent from  
129 a social and biological relational field which orders disease management in a  
130 localised 'disease ecology'. As a result, differences in the presence/absence of  
131 animals and diseases contribute to the creation of different roles for veterinary  
132 medicine in environmental policy in colonial India and North Africa. But what is  
133 also clear from Davis' work ([2008](#)) is that local disease ecologies and veterinary  
134 roles are configured by more than disease itself. Rather, Davis shows how the  
135 contribution of veterinary medicine to environmental policy is shaped by the  
136 relationships between pathogens, animals, approaches to veterinary education  
137 and styles of colonial administration.

138

139 In this historical work of the veterinary profession, disease ecology is less a  
140 theoretical and more a descriptive device. Outwardly, its emphasis on  
141 heterogeneous relations may appear broadly similar to assemblage thinking and  
142 the kind of relational theory found within post-structural analyses of animal  
143 health ([Latour, 1988](#); [Hinchliffe et al., 2016](#); [Law and Mol, 2011](#)). However, these  
144 similarities are coincidental, and there has been no attempt to link disease ecology  
145 to these perspectives in order to give it a firmer theoretical footing. Doing so,  
146 however, allows veterinary professionalism to be conceived of as a relational  
147 achievement, emergent from and produced by a range of human actors, animals,  
148 technologies and institutions that are held together in a 'veterinary world of  
149 work' ([cf. Becker, 1982](#)). The focus becomes one of understanding the processes  
150 and practices in which heterogeneous actors cohere. As [Wilkinson \(2011\)](#)  
151 describes, human and nonhuman actors configure different veterinary  
152 subjectivities which vary between times of disease crisis and 'peacetime'.

153 Assembling this veterinary world of work attends to the multiplicity of different  
154 forms of veterinary knowledge and subjectivity, the contests between them, and  
155 the characteristics and capabilities of different actors ([Enticott, 2017](#)).

156

157 It is also the case that mobility may be inscribed within these professional  
158 subjectivities. Studies of 'global work' ([Jones, 2008](#)) – in which professional labour  
159 flows routinely between world cities ([Smith, 2003](#); [Faulconbridge et al., 2009](#)) –  
160 show how spatial discourses of 'mobile professionalism' and of 'being on the  
161 move' are central to its creation ([Findlay et al., 2013](#); [Cranston, 2017a](#)). For  
162 example, expectations of mobility have become normalised within scientific work  
163 ([Ackers, 2005](#)). Mobility is enabled through institutional infrastructure, such as  
164 sabbatical programmes and exchanges ([Heffernan and Jöns, 2013](#)), which inscribe  
165 mobility as a sign of 'good science' through the circulation of ideas ([Jöns, 2015](#)).  
166 Thus, mobility is essential not just to the process of science but of being a 'good  
167 scientist' ([Mahroum, 2000](#)). Similarly, [Cranston \(2016a\)](#) shows how the processes  
168 and practices of human resources management have transformed mobility and  
169 distance from a place of hardship to an opportunity. Not only does the  
170 infrastructure of global work inscribe mobility into professionalism through  
171 conferences and trade shows, it also contributes to the characterisation of what  
172 counts as a 'good migrant' ([Cranston, 2017b](#); [Cranston, 2016b](#)). This mobilities  
173 perspective therefore assumes that migrants are produced relationally through  
174 their mobility, and the practices and process which inform their move ([Cranston,](#)  
175 [2016a](#)).

176



177 These processes are also relevant to the veterinary profession. [Enticott \(2018a\)](#)  
178 shows how heterogeneous actors shape present-day veterinary subjectivities, and  
179 inscribe different forms of veterinary mobility within disease ecologies. A central  
180 element is the role of professional ‘master narratives’ ([Nelson, 2001](#)) of veterinary  
181 subjectivity. The veterinary master narrative emphasises how conduct extends  
182 beyond technical expertise ([Grey, 1998](#)) and is constructed through cultural and  
183 institutional ‘discursive regimes’ ([Gill, 2015](#)) that prescribe the limits of  
184 professional identity, regulate professional behaviour and determine professional  
185 status. By reinforcing certain professional subjectivities, those on the margins are  
186 not recognised as legitimate and fail to fit within the dominant disease ecology. At  
187 the same time, however, [Enticott \(2018a\)](#) shows how these established orders are  
188 disrupted by biological incursions – disease outbreaks – resulting in forms of  
189 existential ‘status anxiety’ ([Burke, 1991](#); [Thomson and Jones, 2016](#)). This can  
190 inscribe new mobile veterinary subjectivities in which migration emerges as a  
191 professional survival strategy.

192

## 193 2.2 *Veterinary Mobility Across Europe*

194

195 Across Europe, 10% of vets do not share the nationality of the country in which  
196 they are registered to practice ([FVE, 2015](#)). However, there are significant  
197 variations between countries. Data from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons  
198 ([RCVS, 2017](#)) shows that annually, 48% of all newly registered veterinary  
199 surgeons in the UK qualified in other countries in the EU or EEA (European  
200 Economic Area). A further 8.4% qualified in third countries (e.g. New Zealand,  
201 Australia and South Africa). Registrations by UK qualified vets have been in

202 decline since 2010 when less than a third of newly qualified vets came from the  
203 EU. At the same time, there has been a slow decline in registrations from 'third'  
204 countries: in 2004 they comprised 26.4% of all new vets and 8.4% in 2016. The  
205 total number of EU/EEA vets registering in the UK has also increased from 362 in  
206 2004/5 to 890 in 2015/16. Overall, 24.6% of all vets in the UK qualified in EU/EEA  
207 countries and a further 6.7% from other countries. The UK currently attracts most  
208 of its non-UK vets from Spain (7.3%), Ireland (5.8%) and Italy (3.9%).

209

210 Recent surveys of the UK veterinary workforce suggest that most overseas  
211 qualified vets are female (59%) and qualified in the last 8 years ([IES., 2017](#)). Most  
212 (77%) of overseas-qualified vets work in clinical practice with the remainder in  
213 non-clinical practice such as government agencies (Food Standards Agency [FSA],  
214 Animal and Plant Health Agency [APHA], Defra, Welsh Government), academia,  
215 charities or industry. Between 90-95% of all official veterinarians working in  
216 abattoirs are not from the UK ([BVA, 2017](#)).

217

### 218 2.3 *Inscribing Mobility in the Governance of Animal Health*

219

220 Over the last 30 years, reforms to the governance of animal health in the UK have  
221 fundamentally changed who and how veterinary work is completed. Forms of  
222 neoliberal managerialism are central to these reforms, but they also inscribe  
223 mobility as a key practice of the modern veterinary labour force. Shifting the  
224 nature of veterinary work from local and static to global and mobile has been  
225 achieved through a mix of reorganisation and restructuring the delivery of

226 veterinary public health services, in response to the spread of old and new animals  
227 diseases.

228

229 Established in 1938, the State Veterinary Service (SVS) was a government  
230 department responsible for the management of animal health in the UK. Its  
231 activities included disease surveillance and meat inspection. These activities and  
232 the vets that worked for the SVS, were seen as distinct from the traditional and  
233 stereotypical role of a mixed practice vet popularised by the James Herriot 'master  
234 narrative' of veterinary subjectivity ([Enticott, 2018a](#)). Instead, the 'man from the  
235 ministry' was imagined as overly bureaucratic, representative of urban rather  
236 than rural life, distant and officious, and not a 'real' vet.

237

238 Although public and private veterinary sectors may have appeared distinct, there  
239 were areas of overlap. Private vets have long acted as an *ad hoc* surveillance army  
240 at times of crisis (such as outbreaks of infectious diseases like Foot and Mouth),  
241 or endemic diseases such as bovine tuberculosis (TB). Moreover, veterinary  
242 inspection of abattoirs was contracted to local veterinary practices at a local level  
243 by SVS offices. Importantly, these relationships were very much informal: no  
244 formal contract existed, for example, between the SVS and private veterinary  
245 practices to conduct disease testing. Instead, a 'memorandum of understanding'  
246 acted as the basis of the employment of private sector vets for disease  
247 surveillance, rather than a process of competitive tendering. This informality was  
248 also reflected in the training provided for disease surveillance to private vets by  
249 the SVS: it was locally organised with no set national standards. Finally, whilst

250 meat inspection work was tendered, it was local veterinary practices rather than  
251 large national companies that won this work.

252

253 These arrangements began to change in the 1990s as the search for ‘value for  
254 money’ within government services introduced neoliberal techniques such as  
255 ‘agencification’ and privatisation into the management of public health ([Enticott](#)  
256 [et al., 2011](#)). Agencification was supposed to give these public sector units the  
257 freedom to manage their activities and improve the efficiency and quality of  
258 service delivery using the tools more commonly associated with the private  
259 sector. The first example of this in the management of food animal public health  
260 was the creation of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) in 1995, followed by the  
261 restructuring of the SVS as an agency in 2007.

262

263 The effect of these changes has been to inscribe mobility into the subjectivity of  
264 the veterinary profession. This has been achieved in the following ways. The  
265 creation of the MHS has resulted in the specialisation of veterinary public health  
266 work by separating it from everyday private veterinary work. From a situation  
267 where meat hygiene inspection was conducted by numerous small private  
268 veterinary practices, this work was rapidly concentrated into a handful of large  
269 veterinary organisations (e.g. Eville and Jones, Hallmark) established specifically  
270 to provide veterinary labour to the MHS. Other reforms – such as to TB testing in  
271 2014 – have further concentrated veterinary labour into a small number of large  
272 veterinary companies. For example, just one veterinary company (XL Farmcare)  
273 manages the delivery of TB testing across the UK. Crucially, these reforms reflect  
274 the challenge of ordering nature, i.e. disease agents, such that food safety and

275 animal health are manageable. The creation of the MHS can be seen a response to  
276 the problem of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) arising from the  
277 interaction of farming practices and the mutational agency of prions ([Hinchliffe,  
278 2001](#)). Similarly, the increasing demand for TB testing reflects the intractable  
279 relations between wildlife vectors (badgers), disease management practices,  
280 bacteria, farmers, the public and policy makers ([Grant, 2009](#); [Enticott, 2001](#)).

281

282 Just like those labour agencies associated with seasonal agricultural working  
283 schemes ([Sporton, 2013](#)), these new modes of organising veterinary labour have  
284 played a key role in mediating migration flows, and inscribing mobility within the  
285 profession. In order to provide sufficient veterinary labour to fulfill their  
286 contractual obligations, veterinary labour companies have turned to overseas  
287 veterinary graduates. In this, they have been facilitated by EU law: the veterinary  
288 profession is recognised in the EU's Mutual Recognition of Professional  
289 Qualifications (MRPQ) Directive allowing free movement of registered veterinary  
290 surgeons between European member states without additional entrance exams or  
291 language competency tests. As a result of the drive for efficiency within veterinary  
292 services and assisted by the MRPQ, companies such as Eville and Jones, and  
293 Hallmark have sought to recruit vets by holding recruitment fairs at European  
294 veterinary universities. Moreover, the need for European labour has also been  
295 driven by the reluctance of UK trained vets to undertake work 'dirty work'  
296 ([McCabe and Hamilton, 2015](#)) and the institutional delegitimation of public  
297 health veterinary subjectivities ([Enticott, 2018a](#)).

298

299 Mobility is inscribed into veterinary labour practices in other ways that are  
300 reminiscent of the hyperflexible and precarious working conditions of other forms  
301 of temporary agricultural labour ([Preibisch, 2010](#); [Lever and Milbourne, 2015](#)).  
302 Firstly, to conduct veterinary work, vets must attend training courses at their own  
303 expense to qualify as an 'official veterinarian' with no guarantee of work on  
304 completion, and may need to return to their home country to wait for work  
305 opportunities to arise. From the outset, public health vets are therefore required  
306 to commit to a mobile life, leaving behind family and friends, to start a new life in  
307 the UK. In fact, veterinary recruitment adverts can emphasise how mobility  
308 contributes not just to a veterinary career, but also to 'adventure' and a 'new  
309 challenge'. These discourses of veterinary professionalism therefore promote a  
310 neoliberal entrepreneurial-self, in which vets are encouraged to take risks in order  
311 to better themselves. Secondly, veterinary work itself can be highly mobile with  
312 vets required to visit a range of geographically dispersed sites. At the same time,  
313 however, mobility is set alongside immobility. In actively recruiting overseas vets,  
314 veterinary companies seek to retain their labour for as long as possible, providing  
315 long-term security for their contractual obligations. By paying for the training  
316 course on condition of two years of employment, return migration and career  
317 moves are restricted.

318

### 319 **3. Migration Methods**

320

321 The rest of this paper seeks to analyse how both mobility is inscribed within  
322 veterinary worlds of work that normalise veterinary migration, and how the lived  
323 experiences of disease ecologies lead to veterinary migration to the UK. To do this,

324 in-depth qualitative interviews with vets working in the UK were conducted.  
325 Migration research has frequently been criticised for relying on simplistic survey  
326 methods to account for migration motivations ([Stockdale, 2014](#)). Instead, there  
327 have been calls to reinvigorate migration research by developing new methods to  
328 capture the migration and mobilities of people ([Milbourne, 2007](#); [Smith, 2007](#)),  
329 including ethnographic studies to account for how mobility is inscribed into global  
330 work ([Cranston, 2014](#)). Others have argued for the use of biographical accounts of  
331 migration in order to go beyond the façade of simplistic ‘economic’ or ‘lifestyle’  
332 explanations to fully tease out migration motivations ([Halfacree and Boyle, 1993](#)).  
333 Biographical methods attempt to move beyond the ‘discursive consciousness’ and  
334 tap into the ‘practical consciousness’ – the taken for granted and difficult to  
335 explain reasons that underlie migration decisions. These approaches therefore  
336 offer one way to move beyond simple explanations of migration to show how  
337 mobility is inscribed within disease ecologies, and reveal how disruptions to  
338 veterinary worlds of work prompt circulations of veterinary experts.

339

340 For this study, Wengraf’s ([2001](#)) Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method  
341 (BNIM) was used to set veterinary migration into a personal and professional  
342 biography. [Wengraf \(2004: 1\)](#) argues that narrative expression conveys both  
343 conscious concerns and unconscious cultural, societal and individual  
344 presuppositions and processes. In doing so it is concerned with the ‘inner’ and the  
345 ‘outer’ worlds of ‘historical person-in-historical situation’ from which ‘grounded  
346 theorisation’ can develop. The approach follows three distinct stages: first, a  
347 ‘Single Question for Inducing Narrative’ (SQUIN) is posed to the interviewee. The  
348 SQUIN directs the participant to the subject matter but is deliberately broad

349 enough to allow participants to talk through their lived experiences. The  
350 participant is encouraged to talk for as long as possible without interruption until  
351 they can offer no more insight. In this case, the SQUIN was:

352 *“I’d like you to tell me the story of your veterinary career, from when you first*  
353 *realised what you wanted to become a vet through to now. Please talk about*  
354 *all the significant events, experiences you’ve had that have lead you to move*  
355 *to the UK and that you think have kept you here”.*

356 Secondly, whilst this story is being described, extensive notes are taken to identify  
357 ‘Particular Incident Narratives’ (PINs) which are then explored in the order raised  
358 by the participant. Finally, non-narrative questions are asked. In this case,  
359 questions about their reactions to and consequences of Brexit.

360

361 In total, 35 BNIM interviews were conducted. As there is no open-access register  
362 of the nationalities and contact details of all vets in the UK, participants were  
363 recruited using a variety of means. Firstly, vets who had participated in previous  
364 research with the author were contacted. Secondly, social media (LinkedIn and  
365 Twitter) were used to recruit additional migrant vets. Thirdly, snowball sampling  
366 was employed by asking all initial interviewees if they knew of any friends or  
367 colleagues who would be interested in participating in the research. Broadly  
368 reflecting the characteristics of all overseas vets working in the UK, Spanish vets  
369 made up over half (19) of all vets interviewed, whilst 17 were female (see table 1).  
370 At the time of the interviews, 20 worked for the Government but many  
371 respondents had worked in different sectors during their time in the UK. Similarly,  
372 whilst the focus of the research was on vets working in

<b>Table 1: Characteristics of Interviewees</b>
---



<b>Code No.</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Year of Arrival</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Work Category</b>
UK02	New Zealand	2016	Female	Private Practice
UK03	New Zealand	1995	Female	Private Practice
UK04	Spain	2002	Male	Government
UK05	Spain	2005	Male	Government
UK06	Norway	2004	Female	Private Practice
UK07	Italy	2008	Male	Private Practice
UK08	Spain	2006	Female	Government
UK09	Spain	1999	Female	Government
UK10	South Africa	1992	Male	University
UK11	France	2010	Female	University
UK12	Spain	2006	Male	Abattoir
UK13	Spain	1997	Male	Government
UK14	Finland	1994	Female	Government
UK15	Spain	2004	Male	Government
UK16	Poland	2006	Female	Government
UK17	Spain	2000	Male	Government
UK18	Norway	2002	Female	Government
UK19	Spain	2002	Male	Government
UK20	Spain	2014	Male	Abattoir
UK21	Spain	1998	Male	Government
UK22	Spain	2001	Female	Government
UK23	Greece	2012	Male	Government
UK24	Poland	2007	Male	Government
UK25	Spain	1996	Female	Government
UK26	Spain	2000	Male	Government
UK27	Spain	1998	Male	Government
UK28	Spain	2014	Female	Private Practice
UK29	Italy	2015	Female	Private Practice
UK30	Romania	2004	Male	Private Practice
UK31	Spain	2010	Female	Government
UK32	Spain	1993	Female	Government
UK33	Portugal	2016	Male	Private Practice
UK34	Ireland	1997	Male	Private Practice
UK35	Italy	2016	Female	Private Practice
UK36	Spain	2015	Female	Private Practice

374 the farm animal and food sectors, many vets interviewed also had experience of  
375 working in different sectors.

376

377 As the name indicates, analysis of BNIM interviews relies on comparing narratives  
378 of life as told in relation to the chronology of objective life events (i.e. events that  
379 can be checked using official records). The key analytical aim is, through  
380 interpretation, to answer why people ‘who lived their lives like *this*, tell their  
381 stories like *that*?’ ([Wengraf, 2004](#)). All but one interview was recorded, fully  
382 transcribed and entered into Nvivo to code the narrative interpretation. In what  
383 follows, the paper describes these narratives and reveals the different veterinary  
384 mobilities inscribed within disease ecologies in the UK and vets’ home countries.

385

#### 386 **4. Narratives of Veterinary Migration to the United Kingdom**

387

388 Having described the institutional contribution to veterinary mobility within the  
389 UK disease ecology (see section 2.3), this section identifies and connects four  
390 narratives of veterinary migration to show how vets lived experience of disease  
391 ecologies is linked to its inscriptions of veterinary mobility.

392

##### 393 *4.1 The First Job*

394

395 The narrative of the first job describes how the lived experiences of veterinary  
396 subjectivities inscribed within disease ecologies outside the UK fails to meet  
397 expectations. In research of vets emigrating *from* the UK, experiences of veterinary  
398 work in vets’ first job play a significant role in shaping career aspirations and

399 migration patterns ([Enticott, 2018a](#)). For vets moving to the UK, the same is also  
400 true but experienced in different ways. British vets are socialised into a master  
401 narrative of the veterinary profession based on the James Herriot books and  
402 television series in which vets perform a series of heroic roles, saving farm  
403 animals and pets alike, whilst simultaneously dealing with difficult clients and  
404 acting as respected permanent fixtures of the rural community. These master  
405 narratives are instrumental in choosing a veterinary career, guiding British vets  
406 towards mixed practice work, whilst creating a void into which mobile overseas  
407 labour occupies.

408

409 By contrast, such pervasive cultural master narratives of the veterinary profession  
410 are relatively absent from overseas vets' accounts of their careers. Spanish vets  
411 recalled the influence of Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente who featured in a series of  
412 Spanish TV programmes about nature conservation:

413 *"I remember being very little; I think I was about six when I did enjoy a*  
414 *particular programme on TV back in Spain, um, and... and I remember I*  
415 *wanted to be like the guy that was presenting the TV programme. It was... it*  
416 *was about wildlife in Spain, um, and it was very interesting, and I... at... at*  
417 *that point, I really thought I wanted to be like this guy, and then I work it out*  
418 *that this guy was a dentist, so I thought, well, but I don't want to be a dentist,*  
419 *and then I realise that the closer I was going to be to what I wanted to be was*  
420 *becoming a vet, so... so... so, er, it's... it's quite really weird but I think being*  
421 *seven or being eight, I kind of already had in mind I wanted to be a vet"*

422 [UK04, Spain, Male, Government Vet]

423

424 In general though, stories of choosing a veterinary career were marked by a desire  
425 to secure professional employment, and contact with the veterinary profession  
426 was limited to personal experience on family farms. In this narrative, overseas  
427 vets did not tend to dream of becoming a vet from a young age, like many British  
428 vets, and instead adopted an instrumental view of the profession, which would  
429 provide them with a secure career. This did not mean, however, that there were  
430 no master narratives, or versions of veterinary work that had more status than  
431 others. In countries such as Spain and Italy, working as a Government vet was held  
432 in high esteem: this work was hard to come by, well-paid and permanent, and  
433 required passing additional exams. For Spanish vets, this status was perhaps more  
434 attractive to their parents who, having endured poverty during Franco's reign,  
435 saw security and prosperity in the profession.

436

437 Despite these different career motivations, newly qualified overseas vets tell  
438 similar stories about the challenges of being a vet. The narrative of the first job in  
439 which vets are overworked and underpaid was a consistent theme that preceded  
440 their move to the UK. This narrative stresses the difficulty of getting onto the  
441 veterinary career ladder in vets' home country:

442

443 *“They won't give you a job, because you have no experience, but that's just an*  
444 *excuse because they want someone working for free doing the nurses' job,*  
445 *okay? So, that's the normal journey, normal path going out from university,*  
446 *and for one or two years earning no money. It's just going and try to see if you*  
447 *find a chance to learn something, the basics. You are really lucky if you find*  
448 *someone that teaches you how to do a... a cat spay, a dog spay, okay, and in*

449 *one year I'd never done [that]...because the main vet at the practice didn't*  
450 *want me to do it. The excuse was, "you've got no experience, we can't "afford*  
451 *to make any mistake, we can't afford to lose a client", but that's just an excuse.*  
452 *They don't give you the opportunity to improve your skills, and improve your*  
453 *abilities. Um, so for one year, I'd been doing just vaccinations, and helping*  
454 *with the operations, and... and that's it, that was the job. So, after one year,*  
455 *you're going to be frustrated' [UK07 Italy, Male, TB Tester Private Practice]*

456

457 As part of this narrative, some vets recalled instances of direct employment  
458 rejection to themselves or their friends and colleagues. For example, one recalled  
459 how additional qualifications such as a Ph.D. offered little benefit in the  
460 employment market with cheaper less experienced candidates preferred. In this  
461 narrative, the over-supply of veterinary labour was a key element of the local  
462 disease ecology. Spanish vets spoke of how every region in Spain wanted to have  
463 its own veterinary course as a result of inter-regional rivalry or status. However,  
464 in other countries, corruption was seen to be just as much a problem as the over-  
465 supply of veterinary labour such that only vets with the 'right connections' or  
466 family connections with the 'right people' would lead to secure employment as a  
467 government vet:

468 *"The best way in Italy to get money as a vet is to work for the Ministry, but*  
469 *unfortunately, in Italy there is a lot of corruption, so if you don't know the*  
470 *right people, you won't get the job" [UK07, Italy, Male, Private Practice]*

471

472 The narrative of the first job for overseas vets is therefore less about the  
473 experiences of veterinary work and more about the experience of *finding* work in

474 as part of the ongoing process of becoming a vet. In doing so, it hints less at the  
475 subjugating role of a master narrative of a particular kind of veterinary  
476 subjectivity as in Enticott's (2018a) analysis of UK vets' migration. Rather, it is that  
477 the employment market fails to match the most basic promises of professional  
478 employment. In this sense, mobility is written into local disease ecologies as a  
479 reaction to its exclusivity and the difficulty of becoming enrolled within it.

480

#### 481 4.2 *Escaping from home*

482

483 Sitting alongside the narrative of the first job are a set of complimentary  
484 narratives that provide a richer explanation of veterinary migration. One of these  
485 narratives is of escape. In migrants' accounts of their veterinary careers, escape  
486 featured in a number of different ways. Firstly, the escape narrative was a natural  
487 consequence of the employment conditions of the first job.

488

489 *'A friend of mine had just started working for Eville and Jones and she told*  
490 *me it was really good money and by then I was desperate [for work]! I*  
491 *thought it was a good opportunity – but for me, meat work was the way to*  
492 *escape Spain. It was very well paid – and I thought it was a way of buying*  
493 *time. The downside was the type of work – I had to compromise my principles.*  
494 *She said why don't you come on over – and I didn't really think too much*  
495 *about it. I knew that if I stayed in Spain, my life would suck. I wasn't happy*  
496 *and it was a way to escape' [UK32 Spain, Female, Government Vet]*

497

498 Escaping from the first job was also tied up with a range of personal factors. Some  
499 vets spoke about how their move was related to the desire to ‘have an adventure’,  
500 to learn English and experience something ‘new’. Learning English reinforced the  
501 idea that moves were not pre-planned as an attempt to pursue a specific kind of  
502 veterinary identity. Rather, vets’ English could often be of an insufficient standard,  
503 and they were told by employment agencies that they would need to improve  
504 before being eligible for work. Thus, private veterinary companies insistence on  
505 language competencies mediated the free movement of vets afforded by the MRPQ  
506 directive. Similarly, seeking out adventure was matched with an intention that the  
507 moves were expected to be short-term rather than permanent.

508

509 Vets who had arrived in the UK since the 1990s were likely to look back at their  
510 trip wondering how in a time without mobile phones they were able to cope. Some  
511 vets described chaotic travel plans, arriving in the UK with little money or job and  
512 just a telephone number. Others described how pre-arranged jobs fell through on  
513 arrival. Thus, whilst vets may have sought out an adventure, their journey became  
514 an adventure in itself:

515

516 *“My brother-in-law, his brother owns a haulage company, who brings two,*  
517 *three lorries a week [to the UK]...and he takes me to UK. The lorry was*  
518 *jammed full of lettuce...The journey took three days, or two and a half, I don’t*  
519 *remember. I only remember that I tried to sleep in that cabin which was like,*  
520 *er, when you die, you’re like a little thing, like, and I couldn’t, it’s*  
521 *claustrophobic, I couldn’t. [I’m like] the old man telling his stories. So I came*  
522 *in a lorry [laughs]” [UK17, Spain, Male, Government Vet]*

523

524 Secondly, for some vets, the escape narrative referred to their personal lives and  
525 the way they were intertwined with work. Relationship breakdowns (sometimes  
526 as a result of work) were key in creating an opportunity to move. This reflects the  
527 way migration was often an unplanned process (see next section) and the  
528 confluence of different circumstances. For example:

529

530 *'I wasn't happy professionally and, um, I decided to have a big change in my*  
531 *life, and, um, the opportunity to come over to the UK turned up [and] I decided*  
532 *to give it a go. It seemed to me like a very good option, the... the... to break*  
533 *with my life in Spain as it was, moving abroad sounded like a... okay... yeah,*  
534 *moving to a different country was a big time change, so it was a way of*  
535 *breaking all the things that were going wrong with my... not everything, but*  
536 *[certain] things that were going wrong at that time of my life...but that big*  
537 *change in my life seemed like the right thing to do, and then the country, [a*  
538 *different] country and, er, sort of start a new life personally' [UK05 Spain,*  
539 *Male, Government Vet]*

540

541 For others, escape was set against a culture of close-knit family life in which  
542 constant parental surveillance was seen as restricting. Escape became central to  
543 regaining one's personal freedom. Accounts of migration referred to 'friends who  
544 were still living with their parents' to highlight the kind of lifestyle that they had  
545 sought to escape. The narrative of escape therefore portrayed a movement to  
546 modernity, and a progressive society.

547



548 4.3 *The Lucky Break*

549

550 Related to escape narratives were accounts of luck, coincidence and chance.

551 Narratives of luck were expressed in two different ways. Firstly, the narrative of

552 the lucky break, revealed how migration was not pre-planned, but became

553 possible through circumstances and social contacts. In these accounts, friends or

554 relatives passed on information about opportunities that were available in other

555 countries. Overseas opportunities came from University (such as Erasmus or

556 Leonardo da Vinci Scholarships), or recruitment opportunities in the local area.

557

558 The chance of employment dispels any notion that European vets are somehow

559 predisposed to working in veterinary public health due to specialist options taken

560 during the degree course and therefore seek out this professional identity by

561 migrating to the UK. This identity is often applied to migrant vets working in the

562 UK, but it is mistaken. Whilst the job of a government vet was high status, it was

563 mostly unachievable. Instead, becoming a government met and its professional

564 identity was achieved through vets' mobility, rather than preceding it.

565

566 Secondly, narratives of luck were associated with the experience of living and

567 working in the UK. These accounts frequently referenced their own good fortune

568 in relation to others who had not and returned home. In relation to living, luck was

569 invoked by vets when describing how they had been cared for and shown how to

570 open bank accounts by new colleagues or old friends that they had by chance

571 ended up living with. For example, in this quote, a Romanian vet described his luck

572 in finding somewhere to live that not only helped him find work, and not  
573 discriminating against him:

574

575 *I was lucky enough to find a farm in which, er, the people were English people*  
576 *or...I don't think it's English people but they were speaking English like first*  
577 *language, not Welsh. Because I don't know Welsh....and to be honest, my*  
578 *English when I arrived, it was very limited. But they help me a lot and I*  
579 *learned a lot from them...They accepted me, I didn't have ever problems being*  
580 *from East European countries, ever. Other people, I understand that they*  
581 *weren't so lucky. Yeah, it was part of the family pretty much... I was lucky.*  
582 *Yeah, lucky from this point of view because they helped me and they accepted*  
583 *me' [UK30 Romania, Male, Private Vet]*

584

585 Similarly, narratives of luck in the workplace emphasised how good fortune  
586 allowed vets to adapt to and learn in the workplace by distinguishing between the  
587 'good' and 'bad' abattoir. Tales of 'bad' abattoirs revolved around 'dodgy' owners,  
588 criminality within the workforce, violence and aggression towards staff, and  
589 sexism towards female vets. On the other hand, 'good' abattoirs provided learning  
590 opportunities in a safe, friendly environment. They could not be chosen in advance  
591 as vets' choice of work was restricted. Vets quickly developed their own  
592 geography of good and bad (mostly in urban areas) abattoirs, but ending up in a  
593 good abattoir was simply a matter of luck:

594 *"it's, um, an industry that you can get into trouble very easily, and also it is a*  
595 *bit misogynist so if you are a woman, er, if you're in on your own, you have to*

596 *be careful because there's a lot of lies going around, , but I was lucky with the*  
597 *plants I've been to" [UK22, Spain, Female, Government Vet].*

598

#### 599 4.4 *Staying Mobilities*

600

601 Migration can be a continuous processes of mobility between multiple locations  
602 ([Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014](#)) therefore requiring an understanding of what  
603 happens to migrants after they move and the reasons why they stay or move on  
604 ([Halfacree and Rivera, 2012](#)). The final narrative of 'staying mobility' captures  
605 both these elements, encapsulating how mobility was part of a veterinary  
606 migrant's life, such that staying also meant moving within the UK.

607

608 This narrative was described in a number of ways. Firstly, migration was not  
609 portrayed as a one-off event. Whilst taking their veterinary degree, some vets had  
610 already travelled abroad as part of their studies or worked as unpaid interns after  
611 qualification. For others, work fluctuated between the UK and their home  
612 countries, before settling in the UK on a permanent basis. When there was a  
613 choice, work locations close to airports with cheap air flights to their home  
614 countries to visit friends and family were preferred. In this way, constant mobility,  
615 or flow between countries was normalised within vets' lives.

616

617 Secondly, whilst overseas vets resolve the challenge of finding work by working  
618 in veterinary public health, this does not mean that they had no aspirations to  
619 work in clinical practice (i.e. in a private veterinary clinic). Instead, working in  
620 public health was seen as the first step on a career ladder beginning in an abattoir,

621 leading to work in farm animal work as a TB tester, before reaching a career high  
622 as an assistant vet in a private practice. Each step of the ladder provided the  
623 experience to secure subsequent employment. However, for those vets that  
624 remain in the UK and do not return following their first dispiriting experiences of  
625 public health work, movement up this ladder is more imagined than real. Some  
626 vets, suggested that the expertise they gained from working in public health roles,  
627 combined with the lack of challenge they receive within the labour force from UK  
628 vets, reluctantly casts them as experts from which it is difficult to escape. For  
629 example:

630

631 *'I was sucked into the world of bovine TB, and because bovine TB is a long-*  
632 *term problem, and the more you work in that field the more...well, I suppose*  
633 *it's just, er, the whole thing snowballs and the more, er, the more you dive into*  
634 *a subject, the more, I don't know, the harder it gets to depart from it or to*  
635 *disassociate yourself from that and you start to...yeah, to... become a*  
636 *specialist and once you become a specialist in that field, it gets difficult for*  
637 *you to explore other [areas], to get out of your comfort zone' [UK27 Spain,*  
638 *Male, Government Vet]*

639

640 As a result, the career ladder appears less mobile than imagined. Instead of moving  
641 into private practice, a more common career route was from an abattoir to a  
642 managerial role within one of the government agencies responsible for public  
643 health, such as the FSA or the APHA, contributing to a blurring of the lines between  
644 these public and private veterinary sectors. More generally, it contributes to the  
645 increasing separation and lack of mobility between different branches of the

646 veterinary sector, and distances the vast majority of practicing vets from a public  
647 good role.

648

649 Thirdly, in their narratives of staying in the UK, vets described how mobility is  
650 inscribed into the nature of public health veterinary work. This is manifested in  
651 two clear ways. The first is through the abusive and misogynistic cultures  
652 prevalent within abattoirs. Vets who arrived in the UK in the 1990s described how  
653 they were initially seen as 'exotic' and different to traditional UK veterinary  
654 inspectors. As newly arrived marginal figures, they were in some ways similar to  
655 other migrant workers in abattoirs, but over time the increasing number of  
656 overseas vets has diminished this sense of difference. At the same time, vets  
657 recalled tensions with the management of abattoirs as part of a narrative of  
658 'challenging work'. Mobility is a central element to this narrative of 'challenging  
659 work', providing a temporal and spatial rhythm to veterinary work. On the one  
660 hand, veterinary work with its constant movement between different abattoirs  
661 challenged vets' own personal lives:

662

663 *'I wasn't actually living; I didn't have a central place where I lived. I was just*  
664 *living in bed and breakfast. I didn't... I didn't live in a house for months*  
665 *after...coming to this country' [UK05, Spain, Male, Government Vet]*

666

667 On the other hand, challenging work, according to vets could not be sustained  
668 forever: it had a time limit after which vets needed to move on to the next  
669 challenge. Even when they secured a fixed working site, it was recognised that  
670 further mobility was inevitable because of the nature of the regulatory work they

671 were engaged in. For example, vets posted to 'problem' or 'bad' abattoirs saw it as  
672 an opportunity to be solved, before moving on to the next 'challenge' – also  
673 reflected in the discursive construction of veterinary subjectivity in recruitment  
674 adverts. Alternatively, vets saw these abattoirs as short-term employment  
675 opportunities, places from which to get away from as soon as possible. The nature  
676 of regulation meant that there was effectively a time-limit on working in an  
677 abattoir: staying too long could compromise the effectiveness of regulation.  
678 Sometimes these challenges were completed by vets themselves, resulting in  
679 career progression and satisfaction. This mobile subjectivity therefore is reflective  
680 of a broader neoliberal entrepreneurial self: mobility represents a risk to the  
681 established-self and ones socio-spatial relations, but it appears necessary and part  
682 of modern veterinary work. For example:

683

684 *'so I work as a vet in slaughterhouses for several years. I move around: I*  
685 *started working in England, then I went to Wales, then I went to Scotland for*  
686 *about five years. At some point I decided to come back to Wales, and I actually*  
687 *leave Meat Hygiene Service, but I wasn't really unhappy about the job I was*  
688 *doing; it's just I found that I'd kind of achieved the challenges I wanted to*  
689 *achieve, so I just wanted to move on to something else where I had a new*  
690 *challenge again. Not that I knew everything about everything, ...but I thought*  
691 *that I was ready to just move on to new pastures, and since I came to work*  
692 *with APHA, I have to say that, er, there is some beautiful challenges, some*  
693 *long term beautiful challenges....I think that one of the things that is keeping*  
694 *me here is the challenges...and once you take on some challenges...it's hard*

695 *to let them go when you haven't achieved them' [UK04 Spain, Male,*  
696 *Government Vet]*

697

698 Amongst the narrative of challenging work are examples of vets who returned  
699 quickly to their home country because the challenge was too great, and the  
700 working conditions too poor for them or, as mentioned above, unlucky enough not  
701 to have the right support when required. Other times, 'challenging work' was  
702 never completed and vets were moved according to or against their wishes. In this  
703 way, these narratives of veterinary life describe how mobility is inscribed within  
704 veterinary labour practices themselves. Migrating to the UK may therefore be just  
705 the start of a period of constant veterinary mobility.

706

## 707 **5. Brexit and the Future of the Veterinary Profession in the UK**

708

709 Mobility is the defining characteristic of the master narrative of the migrant  
710 veterinary subjectivity, inscribed within the disease ecologies that shape migrant  
711 vets' lives and careers. However, the UK's decision to leave the EU threatens to  
712 radically disrupt the relations that construct these disease ecologies. In seeking to  
713 'regain control' of policy areas such as trade and immigration, the free movement  
714 of overseas qualified vets to the UK may be curtailed. This section analyses vets'  
715 immediate reactions to the Brexit vote and their perceptions on how it has already  
716 and will affect their personal and professional lives. To do this, the section  
717 supplements interview data with survey data of overseas vets working in Wales  
718 undertaken by the British Veterinary Association ([IES., 2017](#); [Enticott, 2018b](#)).

719

720 5.1 *Anger and Betrayal*

721

722 There was widespread agreement amongst vets that Brexit cast uncertainty over  
723 their personal and professional lives and that overall its effect was negative.  
724 Survey data showed that the vast majority of vets (85%) viewed the Brexit vote as  
725 a matter of sadness. Whilst most (72%) wanted to stay in the UK, a majority felt  
726 less welcome (60%), and were finding the situation difficult (68%). These feelings  
727 were also evident in interviews. Vets spoke about how ‘things felt different’ at  
728 work and in everyday life such that they felt out of place. For example:

729

730 *“The night before the referendum I couldn't sleep. I was in shock. It was a*  
731 *huge shock. I couldn't believe it, I was so disappointed, angry, I had all the*  
732 *emotions. I no longer feel free, at ease. Id thought there'd always been respect*  
733 *and civility. But now its like a lid has been opened and a genie has escaped*  
734 *and the genie has a rotten smell. All of a sudden, I do not feel comfortable*  
735 *being here anymore” [UK32 Spain, Female, Government Vet]*

736

737 At work, this discomfort expressed itself in awkward conversations between  
738 clients and colleagues. For example, knowing that a majority of farmers had voted  
739 for Brexit meant that conversations between them could be stilted. At TB tests  
740 conversations between farmers and vets would usually encompass the latest  
741 political and cultural news. Brexit seemed to be one topic neither seemed  
742 comfortable talking about. This did not mean that vets did not experience  
743 discrimination. Survey data shows that 10% of vets reported that work was less  
744 friendly and 15% had directly experienced prejudice. Prejudice was experienced,



745 for example, on farms through remarks such as ‘when are you going back?’ or ‘so  
746 you’re still here then?’. Vets working with endemic diseases such as TB, however,  
747 suggested that these remarks were not necessarily pro-Brexit affirmations, but  
748 were channeling farmers’ frustration with the management of animal disease.  
749 Equally, low staff morale in agencies like APHA was not simply due to Brexit, but  
750 connected to ongoing managerial reforms and failures in disease management.

751

752 Interestingly, survey data shows that those vets working in non-clinical roles, i.e.  
753 Government vets, abattoir vets and researchers, were more likely to report  
754 negative feelings following Brexit. Almost half (48%) said their job security had  
755 declined, compared to a third of vets working in private practice. Non-clinical vets  
756 were also more likely to have observed (37%) or experienced (27%) prejudice in  
757 the workplace following the referendum. Similarly, they reported feeling less  
758 welcome (67%), more stressed (31%) and pessimistic about their future (31%).

759

## 760 5.2 *Vets from Nowhere*

761

762 In response to Brexit, the survey revealed conflicting feelings about vets’ futures.  
763 On the one hand, 37% of non-clinical vets were considering a move back ‘home’  
764 with 21% actively looking for new employment. On the other hand, 78% of non-  
765 clinical vets said they were waiting to see how things unfolded before making any  
766 decision, whilst 46% had put any major decisions (such as buying a house) on  
767 hold. These feelings describe the state of ‘limbo’ that many EU citizens living in the  
768 UK have expressed following the referendum ([Remigi, 2017](#)). Limbo was  
769 expressed in relation to the continuation of future employment rights, but also the

770 inequity and value that migrant vets had brought to the UK. At the same time,  
771 limbo was also expressed in relation to vets' nationality and sense of identity.  
772 Many vets had either already become UK citizens or had started to think about  
773 doing so. Yet whilst this may have resolved any issues over their rights to work, it  
774 had created an internal tension about who they were and where they were from.  
775 For example:

776

777 *'This is why it's even harder. Your world is upside down, you know, just*  
778 *turning on the television one day and seeing...home is here, for me. My life is*  
779 *here. Everything what I have as an individual, material and almost*  
780 *immaterial, is... is now in this country. ... when you speak a second language,*  
781 *you not only speak a language but you are able to accumulate to*  
782 *communicate and to observe the culture. And I... for me, there are lots of very*  
783 *positive elements of the British culture. So, sometimes when I go back to*  
784 *Spain, I get annoyed with some of the things I see there. And again, this*  
785 *creates a conflict because you feel like a citizen of nowhere. So, you feel*  
786 *rejected here and you feel like you are not really fitting with what is there, in*  
787 *a way?' [UK21 Spain, Male, Government Vet]*

788

789 Being a 'citizen of nowhere' created a conflict between mobility and permanence:  
790 whereas the ambiguities of mobility could be lived with, Brexit required vets to fix  
791 their claims to a single identity by claiming British citizenship. Some vets found  
792 resolving this tension relatively easy. For those without children or strong ties to  
793 the area in which they were living, the answer lay in leaving the UK and finding a  
794 job elsewhere. By contrast, those that had lived in the UK a long time had

795 developed strong connections within their local communities. Through their  
796 children they contributed to local schools, and their own businesses contributed  
797 to the local economy. These vets had become embedded within their local  
798 communities, such that moving become unthinkable:

799 *“Because we’re with four kids, um, two of them were born at home. We’re*  
800 *two home birds. The last two are home birds. So, you know, it...we could*  
801 *never sell that house. Even if we did move on, we’d never sell that house*  
802 *because that’s a part of us and part of our family.” [UK35 Ireland, Male,*  
803 *Private Vet]*

804

805 At the same time, however, vets also expressed a kind of ‘Brexit Realpolitik’ in  
806 which they understood their importance within the food system and its  
807 regulation. Without public health vets, the vast majority of whom came from  
808 outside the UK, food production and agricultural exports would be impossible.  
809 Thus, despite their mobile professional subjectivity, being recognised as fixed  
810 economic assets would secure their future.

811 *“I don’t know what’s going to happen. They’re not...I don’t think they’re going*  
812 *to kick us out of the country, especially people that are working there...are*  
813 *working here with a permanent job, paying taxes. Like...! I mean the*  
814 *mortgage and everything, I don’t think they’re going to throw us away. But*  
815 *if they do, well, tough on them” [UK28 Spain, Female, Private Vet].*

816

817 **6. Conclusion**

818

819 Vets are vital actors for rural economies and societies, and essential to the  
820 regulation of food safety and animal health. This paper has sought to highlight the  
821 global nature of the veterinary profession: it represents an example of the kinds  
822 of 'global work' that, through its mobilities, contributes to the globalisation of  
823 rural areas. To understand the global mobility of the veterinary profession, the  
824 paper has developed the concept of disease ecology: an assemblage of  
825 heterogeneous actors and relations that constitute 'veterinary worlds of work'.  
826 These ecologies establish expected and appropriate conduct for vets, but within  
827 these master narratives of veterinary subjectivity, mobility is both inscribed and  
828 emergent. Governmental rationalities, such as privatisation and deregulation,  
829 help to normalise the mobile vet by demanding a flexible and competitive labour  
830 force. Equally, the lived experience of these disease ecologies and disruptions to  
831 them from disease outbreaks contribute to the re-inscription of new patterns of  
832 veterinary mobility.

833

834 The biographical narrative method used for this research also reveals the complex  
835 nature of veterinary migration. Migration emerges from the rupturing of expected  
836 veterinary worlds of work, but is facilitated by biographical factors such as  
837 relationship breakdowns and luck. Whilst migration can be frequently unplanned,  
838 it is also temporally expansive with a permanent sense of mobility to veterinary  
839 careers. Whilst this can reveal elements of a neoliberal entrepreneurial self,  
840 mobility may also be circumvented by becoming an expert in a specific veterinary  
841 field viewed as undesirable by British vets. However, if migration eventually leads  
842 to a new settled veterinary world of work, Brexit threatens to disrupt these new  
843 orders, bringing a sense of placelessness and uncertainty to the fore.

844

845 The paper also highlights the global inter-relationship between different disease  
846 ecologies. Inscriptions of mobility that contribute to the normalisation of  
847 veterinary mobility may be developed at a regional level, but its effects unequally  
848 distributed in space. Thus, in the UK, the impact of changes to the organisation of  
849 veterinary services have travelled across international boundaries and into the  
850 veterinary profession of distant countries. Brexit questions the extent to which  
851 mobility can be normalised in other countries. This should highlight concerns  
852 about the resilience of biosecurity, food safety and animal health services in the  
853 UK. However, rather than the UK government seek out replacement sources of  
854 cheap flexible veterinary labour, a better response might be to question why are  
855 these aspects of work marginalised within the veterinary profession, and what can  
856 be done to normalise these careers amongst UK vets?

857

858 Finally, there remains a need to conduct further research on veterinary mobility.  
859 Globalisation is not one-way traffic: rather it results in the hybridisation of  
860 practices and places as the global and the local interact. This should draw  
861 attention to the possibility that veterinary practices may evolve, either through a  
862 process of 'brain-drain' or the arrival and domination of overseas vets in  
863 particular areas of veterinary work in the UK. At the same time, sites of veterinary  
864 practice may undergo further change arising from return migration of vets as a  
865 consequence of Brexit, or otherwise. The way these changes and adaptations are  
866 played out has the potential to explore not just why veterinary migration occurs,  
867 but also the ways in which rural professions, practices and places evolve and  
868 emerge from the processes of globalisation.

869

870

871

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