

VetSurgeon.org Jobs

Maximising your chances of a successful job application.

On 30th March 2016, VetSurgeon.org carried out a survey amongst employers to try and help guide veterinary surgeons as to how they can maximise their chances of securing the job they want.

121 people took part, describing themselves as being responsible for hiring veterinary surgeons in general or referral practice.

At the time of conducting this survey, the UK veterinary jobs market seems characterised by a real shortage of veterinary surgeons, with some vacancies taking months to fill - particularly those in more out-of-the-way locations. One respondent's top tip for job-seekers was, simply: "Apply!"

It could be argued that in a seller's market, how a candidate presents is of less importance than whether they have a) a qualification, and b) a pulse.

However, the market will doubtless turn at some stage in the future, and 'presenting well' is a good life skill to develop, regardless.

With that in mind, these are the conclusions of the survey. It's worth pointing out that whilst some of them might seem a bit obvious, it is the order in which things were ranked that is perhaps more instructive.

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Make contact by e-mail *and* post

When asked how applicants should contact them in order to create the best impression, nearly 60% of employers said by e-mail, 31.4% by letter, 6.6% by telephone and 1.7% in person, unannounced.

We say: Employers may prefer e-mail, but there's perhaps more of a chance that it'll disappear in their spam folder, or just slip down the inbox. Letters, by contrast, command more of the reader's attention, if for no other reason than they have to open the envelope. So our recommendation is to e-mail *and* put a hard copy in the post.

Highlight experience

By some margin, veterinary employers said that 'previous experience' is what makes a CV stand out positively, with an engaging personal statement, CV layout and spelling / punctuation all scoring similarly high marks thereafter.

What makes a CV stand out positively for you?	Score
Previous work experience	745
An engaging personal statement	567
CV layout / presentation (i.e. ease with which you can scan key points)	561
Spelling and punctuation	504
References	415
Interests / achievements outside work	306
Which veterinary school they attended	209

We say: Straightforward if you have experience; just make sure it's presented early on, in a way that makes it easy for the reader to pick out the key facts quickly.

But what if you're relatively inexperienced? In that case, your personal statement really needs to shine.

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There is much good advice online about how to write an engaging personal statement. Our recommendations are:

- Write in the first person. ‘I’m a hard worker’ sounds so much more personal than ‘A hard worker’, and that’s important in a people profession like this.
- Use the first person sparingly. “I’m this, I’m that and I’m the other” soon becomes wearing, and in any event what the employer really wants to know is what you can do for them. Tell them.
- Don’t use clichés or management speak, however much of a ‘results-driven, motivated, dynamic team-worker’ you might think you are.
- Be concise. You have a limited time to create an impression. Don’t try and list all your attributes. Look at the job description and focus on the two or three that best meet the needs of your potential employer.
- Try and quantify any claim you make about yourself.
- If you feel uncomfortable highlighting some personality trait you think you possess (perhaps it smacks of blowing your own trumpet), consider closing your personal statement with a short quote about you from someone else, such as a previous employer. A mini endorsement. Get them to say what an easy-going but professional character you are. It’s more powerful coming from someone else, anyway.

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Smile!

We asked respondents to rank various candidate attributes by importance. This was a pre-selected list, so does not allow for the fact that there might be other, more important attributes or that the least highly ranked are almost completely unimportant.

Please rank the following attributes in terms of their importance when you are considering a new employee	Score
Likeable, affable, ready smile	738
Clinical skills and experience	719
Smart or tidy presentation	543
Punctuality	458
Demonstration of an understanding of business principles	379
Expresses ambition	329
Demonstration of an understanding of marketing principles	222

We say: No great surprise that being 'likeable' was a candidate attribute sought by employers, but perhaps remarkable that it came out just ahead of 'clinical skills and experience'.

Again, the important point is that you need to find ways to convey your character strengths in your CV, particularly if you're weak on experience.

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Desirable traits

We asked respondents to describe their perfect candidate in up to five adjectives or short sentences. We've used them to produce a 'word cloud' in which the most frequently used adjectives are the biggest (see next page).

The top twenty of 145 adjectives were:

Friendly	32
Enthusiastic	24
Experienced	22
Confident	17
Hard-Working	16
Personable	15
Competent	14
Team-Player	14
Likeable	12
Honest	11
Empathetic	10
Keen	9
Communicator	9
Engaging	8
Caring	8
Positive	8
Skilled	8
Punctual	8
Smart	7
Ambitious	6

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Tips from the horse's mouth

We asked employers to share any tips they have for veterinary surgeons that want to come and work with them. This is how they replied:

- Attend interview on time and ask questions. Listen.
- Be friendly.
- Be a competent good communicator.
- Be clear with your experience. Show enthusiasm and interest in my practice.
- Be enthusiastic about your prospective job.
- Be enthusiastic and show that you really care about being a veterinary surgeon.
- Be flexible and open minded.
- Be honest.
- Be honest about what you are looking for and your positives and not so positives.
- Be honest and open.
- Be honest.
- Be proactive.
- Be yourself.
- Do mixed work.
- Do not lie on your CV.
- Don't clock watch - wrong profession!
- Don't sneer at what you may perceive as our shortcomings
- Ensure your resume is only a single page (use manager-tools.com method)
- Good command of the English language
- Good/excellent grades always win!
- Have a good up-to-date CPD record
- Just apply!
- Keep cv short
- Make enquires about how previous employees have got on or been treated
- Need to be a people person
- Personable
- Personality and communication are everything!
- Positivity is what we need
- Provide a short resume of why you should get the job, as well as an attached fuller CV

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- Sense of humour, efficient, good communicator, someone who leaves private life at home!
- Show motivation, and interest in working for us
- Speak English as 1st language
- Strive to achieve both your potential and everyone else who works in the business
- Tailor your cover letter to why you want to work for that employer
- Visit us first
- Willing to be constantly learning to improve their skills
- Write a cover letter!
- Be flexible and positive
- Be honest about what you are capable of doing
- Be realistic about what you can offer!
- Be truthful. Do not embellish
- Be yourself, but make sure 'yourself' is likeable, communicative and enthusiastic
- Demonstrate an ability to laugh at yourself and not take yourself too seriously
- Demonstrate your ability to communicate with a positive personality
- Do a locum with us for a week??
- Do not turn up with a list of surgical procedures you cannot do and need to refer
- Do your homework and understand what we do and what you can contribute
- Don't be dogmatic, be willing to learn and contribute and be part of a team
- Dress as smartly to your interview as you would be reasonably expected to appear at work
- Find out about the practice via website/facebook and interact with us
- Focus on customer service
- Make sure you know about the practice you are applying to
- Make sure you know something about the business
- Need to be enthusiastic and willing to learn and be part of a team
- Pleasant manner not too confident
- Read the job application and find out about the practice
- Talk lots but tell the truth. Be yourself.
- Think about what you can offer the practice not just about how good the job will be for you
- Want to work in general practice

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- If a new graduate, good placements for EMS which have provided an opportunity to get basic practical skills and a reasonable level of confidence. If more experienced, need to be interested in doing good case work ups with reasonable efficiency.
- Make sure you have basic skills at least. Don't expect a big salary until you can perform a basic role.
- You must be passionate about being a veterinary surgeon and keen to develop your clinical and professional skills and show a commitment to patient and client care
- Demonstrate an attitude of enthusiasm, passion, humbleness, awareness of the human side that accompanies practice
- Show me that you work well as part of a team - friendly, cooperative, able to manage/lead others when necessary
- Customer experience and excellent consult manner is vital; you can be a brilliant surgeon but I won't hire an asshole.
- Dress well, don't be late, hide tattoos, remove piercings, be interested, have an opinion, ask questions (not just about how many days off do you get or salary packages), work out in advance what you think you can bring to this practice, do some research on the practice and area.
- Must actually be interested in the profession and providing excellent care for patients and clients not just say it!
- Appear smartly dressed, on time, use the spellcheck on your CV and don't tell me that you are the best thing since sliced bread!
- Personality and attitude are more important than experience and skills - this is learnt as you go.
- Enthusiasm, interest in the practice (ie. done a little homework) and desire to 'have a go' and realise the learning has just started.
- Always research the job you are applying to. Make the employer feel you are applying specifically to their job
- My business works because of the clients. I need to see and hear how they are important to applicants and want to have that feel that they will go the extra mile.
- Dress smartly, arrive on time or early, engage with lay staff, or clients while waiting and prepare questions about the employment.
- A CV with multiple previous experience/jobs abroad discourages me as they are unlikely to want to stay in one job for any length of time
- Don't lie about your capabilities. We're not looking for supersurgeon but a capable, sensible vet with common sense.