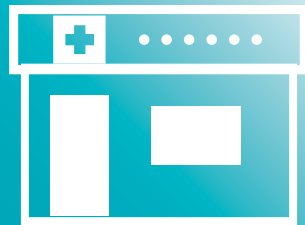


# Vets speaking up for animal welfare

## BVA animal welfare strategy



A strong voice for vets



**Publication date:**  
February 2016

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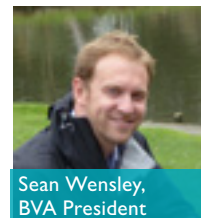
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# Foreword

For most people, veterinary surgeons and the public alike, protecting and promoting animal welfare is the veterinary profession's *raison d'être*. This primacy of animal welfare for veterinary surgeons is reflected in the declaration that each makes upon admission to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS):



*"...ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care."*

Veterinary surgeons have many roles across society and are involved in all areas of animal use, including for sport, scientific research, food production and those kept as companions. The familiar image of veterinary practitioners treating and preventing illness and injury conveys how the declaration is honoured in many veterinary surgeons' daily work.

Our understanding of animals is changing and so too are society's attitudes towards how animals should be used. Over the last 50 years novel scientific methods have been employed to help determine how animals perceive the world, and to better understand their needs, preferences, pleasures and pains. As society re-evaluates how it manages animals in light of this new information, the veterinary profession is also adapting. There is growing expectation that the profession will reflect this new scientific understanding in its policies and practices, and will use it to lead public debate on the acceptability of current animal husbandry methods. Concurrently, there is a requirement to interpret "animal welfare" in a contemporary way; that is, one that incorporates all key determinants of an animal's wellbeing, such as appropriate companionship and the ability to express important normal behaviour. Treating and preventing illness and injury is necessary but not, in itself, sufficient to safeguard animal welfare.

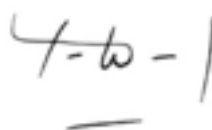
As the UK veterinary profession's national representative body, BVA supports veterinary surgeons through changing times and helps them fulfil their roles as effective animal advocates. Animal welfare has been identified as a top lobbying priority by our members, which initiated the development of this strategy. Through a series of questionnaires and meetings with representatives from across the veterinary profession and beyond we have produced a strategy that will help us develop tools and guides to assist veterinary surgeons, as well as policies on which to lobby.

It is recognised that, as in society at large, there are different attitudes towards different animal uses amongst veterinary professionals. It will be necessary to build consensus based on effective consultation and democratic decision-making, utilising a shared working definition of animal welfare and widespread recognition of the veterinary profession as an animal welfare-focused profession. This strategy lays out these principles, developed through consultation.

One consultee reflected that "the more that science assesses the nature of animals' interests, the more we find they are similar to us". It is because of this evolutionary commonality between humans and non-human animals that when considering animal welfare it is helpful to take animals' perspectives, guided by animal welfare science, in order to make judgements on their lot.

Consultees welcomed the development of the strategy and encouraged BVA to build on our recent high-profile campaigns, such as that to end slaughter without pre-stunning, to continue leading public animal welfare debates. I repeat thanks here to all those who gave time to provide their thoughtful and honest submissions.

Meaningful progress on animal welfare problems will be attained gradually, but this strategy will ensure BVA proceeds in line with our members', and society's, expectations. It sends a clear signal that the veterinary profession will be a considerable force for good, for animals and for an increasingly compassionate society, in the years ahead.



Sean Wensley BVSc MSc Grad.DMS MRCVS  
**President, British Veterinary Association**  
**February 2016**



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# Executive summary

Animal welfare relates to an animal's physical health and mental wellbeing, which are influenced by factors included in frameworks such as the five welfare needs. With the evolution of animal welfare science (elucidating how animals experience the world and what they need and want from their perspectives) over the past 50 years, we are now better able than ever to objectively assess animals' interests.

In part linked to this science and our improved understanding of animal cognition and sentience, animal welfare is a rapidly evolving social concern. The veterinary profession is part of an interdisciplinary community seeking to promote the best interests of animals and improve their treatment, wherever they are used or impacted by people. This is important to veterinary professional identity: animal welfare has consistently emerged as a top lobbying priority of BVA members in our most recent member research surveys, and veterinary leadership in animal health and welfare is one of six key "ambitions" for the profession within the Vet Futures project.

The primacy of animal welfare for veterinary surgeons is conveyed in the declaration that each makes upon admission to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons:

*"...ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care."*

Recent statements from veterinary professional associations have articulated society's expectation of the veterinary profession to advocate animals' interests (both within clinical interactions and in policy formulation) and a growing number of veterinary strategies, working groups and campaigns reflect the profession's response to these expectations.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a clear, coherent and consistent approach for BVA to advocate good animal welfare and to support members to maximise their animal advocacy potential and achieve good welfare outcomes for animals. The ultimate priority for the strategy is for BVA and our members to contribute to solutions for real-world animal welfare problems. It will also ensure that positive examples of veterinary contributions to animal welfare are identified and conveyed to the public, the media and decision-makers.

BVA has been increasingly active on animal welfare problems in recent years, with positive member feedback. To realise our potential on animal welfare for members, we have

consulted our committees and Council, divisions and wider membership, academics, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and animal-using industries to develop this animal welfare strategy.

BVA's animal welfare strategy will ultimately ensure that we are making meaningful contributions to real-world animal welfare *problems*. However, the consultation phase identified a need to develop some priority *areas* before animal welfare problems were addressed. These priority areas recognise that there are differences between BVA members in their interpretation and attitudes towards animal welfare, which may be due to various factors including their field of work and years since graduation. These priority areas are:

- Animal welfare assessment
- Ethics
- Legislation
- Education
- Advocacy
- International

**Animal welfare assessment** will review BVA's working definition of animal welfare and our approach to animal welfare assessment in light of widely used frameworks.

**Ethics** will consider issues such as how veterinary professionals balance their duties to clients, animals and employers, and will look to find ways of supporting members in ethical decision-making and moral reasoning.

**Legislation** will provide guidance and support on animal welfare legislation and its practical applications.

**Education** will consider the need for ongoing veterinary education in animal welfare, ethics and law.

**Advocacy** will establish consensus on ways in which the veterinary profession feels it is appropriate to campaign for animal welfare improvements (following veterinary-led

campaigns on, for example, non-stun slaughter) and to provide guidance on being effective advocates for animals in clinical settings.

The **International** priority area recognises that animal welfare is a global issue, to be progressed within the context of many other global challenges. Partnership working with international veterinary and animal welfare organisations will promote the roles and status of sentient animals to advance sustainable development and One Health objectives.

Finding agreement in these priority areas may be considered as helpful “terms of engagement” before the veterinary profession collectively progresses its activities to address specific animal welfare problems across different animal use sectors (eg companion animals, farmed animals, animals in research, animals in sport and so on).

In order that the strategy is relevant to real-world animal welfare challenges, part of “Advocacy” will require identifying

and prioritising specific animal welfare *problems* in association with BVA members and specialist divisions. Developing policy statements and campaigns on these problems will build on recent BVA animal welfare campaigns, such as the campaign to end non-stun slaughter. There are many well-recognised animal welfare problems and it will not be possible to address them all at once. Resources are limited and it will be necessary to continue working collaboratively with animal welfare-focused partners. We also recognise that there is increasing investor, corporate and consumer interest in animal welfare, creating market opportunities that veterinary surgeons can help realise. For each specific animal welfare problem, we will assess our activities according to three key questions:

- (i) What does the veterinary profession think about this?
- (ii) What is the veterinary profession doing about this?
- (iii) Who are we working with to address this?

## Summary of actions:

### Animal welfare assessment

- Promote and apply animal welfare assessment frameworks and tools, including the five welfare needs, FAWC’s “good life” framework, practice-based quality of life assessment tools and pain assessment tools
- Disseminate animal welfare research findings to BVA members and promote the relevance and importance of animal sentience to the veterinary profession

### Ethics

- Develop guidance, facilitated discussions and CPD to assist members in ethical decision-making
- Identify or develop ethical frameworks to apply to BVA policy formulation

### Legislation

- Consult with local authorities and government veterinary surgeons on areas where updated guidance and refresher courses on current legislation would be useful

- Develop and promote guidance on reporting suspected animal welfare breaches, including suspected non-accidental injury
- Develop a strategic relationship with the local authorities’ National Animal Health and Welfare Panel to, for example, develop guidance on enforcement

### Advocacy

- Work closely with BVA specialist divisions, members and committees, to develop a list of specific animal welfare problems on which to develop positions and proactively campaign
- Work with BVA specialist divisions to develop a work programme to address the agreed priority welfare problems in each sector
- When appropriate, act on recommendations by credible animal welfare bodies such as independent advisory bodies (eg Farm Animal Welfare Committee, Companion Animal Welfare Council, Wild Animal Welfare Council)
- Develop media toolkits to support veterinary professionals in engaging with local and regional

media on topical animal welfare problems and BVA animal welfare campaigns

- Develop templates to assist members in engaging with politicians on BVA animal welfare campaigns
- Develop school packs to facilitate veterinary engagement with school children on animal welfare principles and concepts
- Continue supporting the Animal Welfare Education Alliance, including its campaign to include animal welfare in the national curriculum
- Explore options for promoting existing animal welfare advocacy training
- Gather positive case studies of veterinary professionals improving animal welfare for BVA to highlight to the media

#### Education

- Explore the ways in which animal welfare science, ethics and law (AWSEL) is currently delivered to veterinary undergraduates as a Day One competency and further developed through the Professional Development Phase (PDP)
- Map the availability of AWSEL CPD training and support the development of further courses
- Explore the development of a BVA online hub as a repository for AWSEL resources

#### International

- Develop closer relationships with the medical profession to advance One Health at an association level and to allow the roles and status of animals to be promoted
- Work with the British Medical Association to understand its policy position on meat consumption and explore joint messaging to link food demand management with human health, animal welfare and environmental protection
- Develop a position on the veterinary profession's response and commitment to addressing biodiversity loss, including preventing associated

animal welfare harms and promoting benefits of biodiversity to human wellbeing

- Develop a position on humane, sustainable animal agriculture that includes the importance of animal welfare in sustainable development, defines stakeholders that the veterinary profession should consistently account for (those whose interests would be affected by decisions made) and considers how their interests should be weighed by an animal welfare-focused profession
- Review BVA's own food procurement policy in light of an agreed position on humane, sustainable animal agriculture
- Link advocacy on priority animal welfare problems to increased consumer awareness of assurance schemes that seek to address these problems
- Assist BVA members to understand different farm animal assurance schemes and to signpost the public in a professional and ethically justifiable way towards those that promote higher animal welfare
- Examine the possible merits of a Welfare Stewardship Scheme and develop a position if deemed to be beneficial
- Explore the possible benefits of mandatory method of production labelling of food of animal origin and develop a position if deemed to be beneficial
- Offer further support to the campaign for a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare
- Develop and strengthen strategic relationships with international animal welfare-focused professional organisations



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# 1. Introduction



Photograph of Dr John Blakeway, The Cincinnati Horse & Mule Exchange Co, c.1915. Image supplied courtesy of RCVS Knowledge

## 1.1 Animal welfare science and an evolving social concern

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Animals are used for human benefit in many ways across the planet, including for food, entertainment, sport, scientific research, transport and companionship. How they ought to be used and our responsibilities towards them have been the subjects of moral concern since at least Ancient Greece to the present day<sup>1</sup>.

In 1964, Ruth Harrison's *Animal Machines*<sup>2</sup> highlighted some of the close confinement husbandry systems that had been developed for farm animals in the post-war period, such as battery cages and veal crates. In response to the ensuing public reaction, a Government-ordered review, chaired by Professor Rogers Brambell<sup>3</sup>, ultimately resulted in the Five Freedoms, and latterly their translation into the five welfare needs and the legal duty of care placed upon all animal keepers and owners under the UK Animal Welfare Acts<sup>4</sup>.

Perhaps more influential even than the Five Freedoms and subsequent animal protection legislation was Brambell's observation that, despite his committee's conclusions making intuitive sense, they lacked a strong scientific underpinning. This initiated the now thriving field of animal welfare science, which seeks to elucidate how animals experience the world and what they need and want from their perspectives.

In part due to the influence of that science, and the objectivity and credibility that it introduced, animal welfare is now a rapidly evolving social concern, following on from moral progress towards women, minority groups, people with disabilities, children and others.

“ I have spent my life fighting discrimination and injustice, whether the victims are blacks, women, or gays and lesbians. But there are other issues of justice – not only for human beings but also for the world's other sentient creatures. The matter of the abuse and cruelty we inflict on other animals has to fight for our attention in what sometimes seems an already overfull moral agenda. It is vital, however, that these instances of injustice not be overlooked.”

**Desmond Tutu, 2014<sup>5</sup>**



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## 1.2 The veterinary profession's role

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In considering who can act in the interests of animals, it is recognised that animal welfare is an interdisciplinary field and many have roles to play, including lawyers, economists, animal welfare scientists, politicians, industry, NGOs and consumers. Additionally, there are practical, scientifically trained and trusted professionals who have direct daily contact with animal owners: veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. Our opportunity to be advocates for animals may be the greatest of all and we have clear social, professional and legal responsibilities to do so. Ruth Harrison highlighted society's expectation of our animal advocacy role in 1964 when she asked in *Animal Machines*, "What do veterinary surgeons think of all this?"

These expectations have been clearly articulated in recent professional statements. In 2011 the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) released a joint statement<sup>6</sup> on the roles of vets in ensuring good animal welfare, concluding that:

*"Veterinarians are, and must continually strive to be, the leading advocates for the good welfare of animals in a continually evolving society."*

In 2012 the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) wrote<sup>7</sup>:

*"Veterinarians should be the leading advocates for the welfare of all animals [and]...provide leadership to society on ethical considerations involved in the use and care of animals by humans."*

In 2014, animal welfare was selected as the theme of World Veterinary Day, with a joint World Veterinary Association (WVA) and OIE statement<sup>8</sup>:

*"The societal expectation from the veterinary profession regarding animal welfare now expands well beyond simply individual veterinary daily practices."*

Also in 2014, the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) identified animal welfare as a key priority and announced a range of animal welfare initiatives at its World Congress<sup>9</sup>.



In 2015, the joint BVA and Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Vet Futures project<sup>10</sup> identified veterinary leadership in animal health and welfare as one of six key ambitions and work streams, espousing a vision: "That veterinary professionals are seen as a leading force for animal health and welfare science, policy and practice throughout society, and our unrivalled expertise and evidence base is valued by government, the public and other stakeholders".

These statements are set against a backdrop of global veterinary oaths<sup>11</sup>, including the UK RCVS declaration, which convey the primacy of animal welfare for veterinary surgeons.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a structured plan for BVA to advocate good animal welfare and to support members to maximise their animal advocacy potential and achieve good welfare outcomes for animals.

**“ I PROMISE AND SOLEMNLY DECLARE that I will pursue the work of my profession with integrity and accept my responsibilities to the public, my clients, the profession and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, and that, ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care.”**

**RCVS declaration on admission to the veterinary profession<sup>12</sup>**

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## 1.3 Opportunities and challenges for veterinary professionals

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Opportunities for veterinary surgeons to advocate the best interests of animals occur at different levels<sup>13</sup>:

- Through individual vets direct to animal keepers and owners;
- Through veterinary practices to the surrounding community; and
- Through professional associations to achieve political impact and challenge societal norms

These three levels – individual, practice and professional association – are linked. Through engagement and democratic debate, veterinary associations must continually achieve individual member input to their animal welfare policies and advocacy.

There are also challenges for veterinary professionals at each of these levels.

At the individual level, for example, in the late nineteenth century it was argued that treating animals ethically meant placing them under veterinary care, protected from lay intervention<sup>14</sup>. Today, the concept of good ethical treatment has expanded and simply being under veterinary care is no longer a sufficient assurance; veterinary professionals are expected to demonstrate scientific understanding of animal welfare, moral reasoning skills and an ability to competently respond to society's increasing concern for animal ethics.

Questions of animal ethics have shifted from an exclusive focus on prevention of suffering to promotion of animal wellbeing, as reflected in the legal duty of care introduced by the UK Animal Welfare Acts. The veterinary profession has been required to broaden its traditional view of animal welfare beyond physical health to incorporate equally important determinants such as behavioural opportunities and appropriate social contact, and our welfare assessments are required to draw upon available animal welfare science. As former BVA President Carl Padgett wrote<sup>15</sup>:

*“At practitioner level, concentrating on the immediacy of ill health as the prime indicator of good or bad welfare could almost be viewed as the course of least resistance and it is easy to see how the profession fell into this trap while [animal welfare] science moved on around it.”*

At the individual level, we have a unique and direct relationship with animal keepers and owners, and an authoritative and respected voice that we can use to help guide them towards good animal welfare decisions.

At the practice level, veterinary practices can serve as trusted and credible hubs of animal welfare information and advocacy, providing information through, for example, practice newsletters, websites, local media and engagement with local politicians.

At the societal level, the veterinary profession may have traditionally tended to pursue *proximate* welfare solutions – optimising welfare within the status quo – rather than *ultimate* solutions, providing societal leadership to change the status quo. We may have tended towards pragmatism and incrementalism rather than more aspirational goals, and we have historically been nervous or mistrustful around collaborating with other animal welfare organisations<sup>16</sup>.

More recently, BVA has provided clear and robust advocacy on problems such as puppy tail docking, performing wild animals in travelling circuses, welfare of non-traditional (“exotic”) companion animals and non-stun slaughter, working collaboratively with our specialist divisions and alongside NGOs including the Born Free Foundation, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and Compassion in World Farming.

Commercial advantage is increasingly being created through the marketing of animal welfare and other social attributes of products, providing opportunities for veterinary surgeons and our animal-owning clients. As part of this trend, investor assurances on animal welfare standards in supply chains are being developed through initiatives such as the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare<sup>17</sup>. In 2013, for example, McDonalds announced that all pork served in its UK restaurants would be RSPCA assured and in 2014 animal welfare commitments were announced by global brands including Unilever, Nestlé and Heinz.





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## 1.4 Risks and benefits to the veterinary profession

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Highlighting animal welfare problems may sometimes be viewed as a threat by veterinary surgeons, especially if done in a way that alienates animal-owning clients. "Shifting spotlight" arguments are sometimes heard, when a different animal welfare issue, in a different sector, is cited as being more serious or more deserving of pressing attention than one that is being proposed. It can be easier to "get on with the job" each day than step back and question.

There are risks to the veterinary profession of not playing a full and visible role in the advancement of animal welfare. Reputationally, if we don't speak out about systemic animal welfare problems or if we only do so reactively once a critical mass of favourable public opinion has been achieved, then this can lead to accusations of weak morality and, worse, complicity in animal welfare problems<sup>18</sup>.

Welfare problems associated with the selective breeding of animals gives an example. Veterinary surgeons must, of course, treat breed-related health problems as they arise. But if we assist an animal to give birth, when the animal is otherwise incapable due to selective breeding, and we accept money for this without taking measures to address the underlying

problem (eg reporting Caesarean sections undertaken on pedigree dogs to the Kennel Club), then it has been suggested that as a profession we are enabling poor animal welfare to persist and we are simply facilitating the status quo.

Public accusations of overcharging, overtreatment, conflicting commercial interest with industry, focusing on welfare at slaughter to the exclusion of welfare during life, or failing somehow to properly stand up for animal welfare and instead following and thereby supporting the status quo – all need to be countered with, amongst other approaches, strong, demonstrable commitments by the veterinary profession to proximate *and* ultimate animal welfare solutions.

This strategy considers the veterinary profession as an animal welfare-focused profession, providing strong and visible leadership on animal welfare in society. Through the strategy, we will support our members by developing animal welfare resources and tools to assist individuals and practices as animal welfare ambassadors, we will continue to prompt ethical debate on the animal uses we see and deal with, and we will provide informed national advocacy on behalf of a concerned membership.



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## 2. How the strategy has been developed



Developing a BVA animal welfare strategy was first proposed at BVA Council in December 2014. Council members welcomed the idea and gave approval for it to be progressed.

A questionnaire was developed to map stakeholders' perceptions and expectations of BVA's role in promoting animal welfare. On progressing animal welfare, the questionnaire asked respondents what they felt was currently being done well by veterinary surgeons, practices and associations; what they felt could be done better by veterinary surgeons, practices and associations; and what more (if anything) they felt BVA could do to support individual veterinary surgeons and practices, and to be an effective association for championing animal welfare on behalf of members.

The questionnaire was distributed to 84 stakeholder organisations, including BVA divisions and branches, academic institutions, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and animal-using industries. Forty-five completed questionnaires were received from organisations and a further two from individuals (Appendix 2). In addition, informal interviews were conducted with representatives from specialist veterinary associations. Emergent themes and proposed actions arising from this research phase were presented to all BVA standing committees, with committee members invited to comment on the findings and prioritise

actions. BVA Council was updated on progress and consulted on proposed actions in July 2015. In December 2015 Council approved the final draft.



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## 3. Priority problems and priority areas

Animals may benefit from being under human stewardship, but the use of animals by humans is also associated with animal welfare costs. Sometimes these are due to deliberate harm, in other cases they are due to common husbandry, breeding and management practices.

Any animal welfare strategy will generally seek to identify, quantify, ethically appraise and act to resolve these animal welfare harms.

Given the involvement of BVA members in many different areas of animal use (eg animals used in research, for food or as companions), a BVA animal welfare strategy will assist members and the broader veterinary profession to address recognised harms in each of these areas. This will allow BVA members to contribute to finding solutions to priority animal welfare *problems*.

However, the consultation identified a need to develop some priority *areas* before animal welfare problems are addressed. This recognises that there are differences between BVA members in their interpretation and attitudes towards animal welfare, which may be due to various factors including their area of work and years since graduation.

The priority areas could be considered as “building blocks” for future action on priority problems: aiming to first reach consensus on a working animal welfare definition and assessment; ethical issues, such as how veterinary professionals balance their duties to clients and animals; and ways in which the veterinary profession feels it is appropriate to advocate, and campaign for, animal welfare improvements. Finding agreement in these priority areas may be considered as helpful “terms of engagement” before the veterinary profession then collectively progresses its activities to address animal welfare problems across different animal use sectors.

It should be emphasised that the ultimate priority for the strategy is for BVA and our members to contribute to solutions for real-world animal welfare problems. The first steps are to gain consensus in these linked priority areas.

The six priority areas identified through the consultation are:

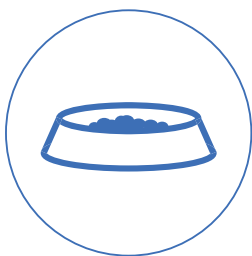
- Animal welfare assessment
- Ethics
- Legislation
- Education
- Advocacy
- International

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### The five welfare needs:



The need for a suitable environment



The need for a suitable diet



The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns



The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals



The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

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## 3.1 Priority areas

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The following priority areas were identified based on feedback received from consultees. The principle and aim of each is outlined, followed by an overview of the feedback that gave rise to each area.

### 3.1.1 Animal welfare assessment

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#### **Principle:**

Animal welfare concern arises as a result of welfare harms sustained by sentient animals. It is necessary to reliably identify and assess these harms in order to determine whether an animal's welfare is compromised. It is often necessary to attempt to quantify the scale of harm to inform ethical judgements on their acceptability.

#### **Aim:**

For BVA to assist in developing a profession-wide consensus on animal welfare concepts, definitions, and frameworks, including indicators of positive welfare. To assist with the dissemination of findings of animal welfare science to BVA members, the public and policy makers. To ensure BVA animal welfare policies are informed by available animal welfare science.

#### **BVA definition of animal welfare**

##### Introduction

The Lisbon Treaty states that 'in formulating ... policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals'. It is recognised that sentient animals are capable of experiencing positive and negative feelings such as pain, frustration and contentment and so deserve consideration and respect.

Where animals are used for human benefit, including for food, clothing, entertainment, sport, scientific research, transport and companionship, BVA believes that this should be exercised with responsibility, and with consideration and compassion for the animals concerned.

##### Definition of animal welfare

BVA believes that animal welfare relates to both the physical health and mental wellbeing of the animal, as encapsulated by the five welfare needs:

- the need for a suitable environment
- the need for a suitable diet
- the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

There is a legal duty of care placed upon all animal keepers and owners under UK animal welfare legislation\*, and in line with this, BVA believes that the five welfare needs are essential to the welfare of any animal.

\*Animal Welfare Act 2006, Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

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### What we heard:

There is no single universally accepted definition of animal welfare. Widely accepted definitions, such as that used by the OIE<sup>7</sup>, define animal welfare as relating to an animal's state, which is influenced by factors included in frameworks such as the Five Freedoms and five welfare needs. It was noted that, in some cases, veterinary animal welfare assessment may put unequal emphasis on an animal's physical health than other important determinants of overall welfare. BVA's definition of animal welfare, taken from our recently reviewed position statement on animal welfare, counters this (see page 15). The full position statement can be found at Appendix 3.

This strategy also recognises the relevance of animal behaviour to animal welfare and the veterinary profession, both as an important welfare indicator and in relation to the importance of humanely and competently addressing clinical problem behaviour (see below).

#### Examples of the relevance of animal behaviour to animal welfare:

- As an animal welfare indicator, for example stereotypic behaviour, sustained/inescapable aggression, pain-related behaviour or play.
- As a welfare determinant: the ability to perform certain behaviours can be important for achieving good animal welfare, and frustrating highly motivated behaviour can result in compromised welfare.
- As a determinant of a good human-animal bond: undesirable animal behaviour that is problematic for animal owners can result in a breakdown of the human-animal bond, with negative impacts on animal welfare. Problem behaviour should be prevented through appropriate early life experiences and dealt with competently, humanely and safely using accredited behaviour practitioners.

Once animal welfare is defined it needs to be assessed for individuals and groups of animals. A comprehensive and reliable assessment will consider all factors that are important to animals, such as behavioural opportunities and appropriate social contact, as well as physical health outcomes. Consultees recommended that widely used assessment frameworks, such as the five welfare needs, should be promoted and applied by the veterinary profession when considering animal welfare problems.

It is increasingly recognised that in addition to an absence of negative states (eg anxiety, fear, frustration or pain), animals with good welfare will also experience positive states. The Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC)'s "good life" framework<sup>19</sup> requires assessment of an animal's positive experiences and is likely to be helpful in promoting further consideration and discussion about positive welfare amongst the veterinary profession. In this context, it should be included amongst welfare assessment frameworks that are promoted and applied by the profession.

Animal welfare, wellbeing and quality of life may be considered as synonymous. In clinical veterinary practice there is a need to assess patient quality of life, especially as advancements in veterinary medicine prompt growing ethical discussion around what *can* be done versus what *should be done*<sup>20</sup>. Similarly, discussions around end-of-life care for veterinary patients require reliable means of assessing animals' interests. Quality of life assessment tools should be reviewed and promoted to BVA members, especially those that have practical applicability in clinical practice. Similarly, consultees highlighted a need for veterinary leadership and consensus in pain management, and promotion of pain assessment tools.

Concern for animal welfare stems from the recognition that many non-human animals are sentient, ie they have the capacity to feel things and to be able to consciously experience feelings such as fear, hunger, pleasure and pain, as explicitly stated in European Union legislation<sup>21</sup>. There is growing scientific understanding of animal cognition and sentience, and of how to objectively assess animal interests, due to the growth of animal welfare science as a scientific discipline and to the growing number of universities, including veterinary schools, offering animal welfare courses. Consultees felt that we should keep our members updated on the latest animal welfare research findings and promote the relevance and importance of animal sentience to the veterinary profession.

#### BVA actions:

- Promote and apply animal welfare assessment frameworks and tools, including the five welfare needs, FAWC's "good life" framework, practice-based quality of life assessment tools and pain assessment tools
- Disseminate animal welfare research findings to BVA members and promote the relevance and importance of animal sentience to the veterinary profession



## 3.1.2 Ethics

### Principle:

Science tells us what is. Ethics and value judgements are required to guide us on what should be. Ethical decision-making and moral reasoning are relevant both in daily veterinary work (eg practice-based ethical dilemmas) and in veterinary policy formulation (eg on contentious animal welfare issues). Ethical appraisal should usually be undertaken using a structured approach that identifies and considers the interests of different legitimate stakeholders (ie those whose interests would be affected by decisions made). Taking a logical and analytical approach, ethics can be thought of as “the science of morals”.

### Aim:

For BVA to provide members with advice, guidance and support to assist in moral reasoning and ethical decision-making, which can improve both the quality and consistency of decisions as well as veterinary wellbeing (through resolving stressful ethical conflicts). For BVA to assist in developing a profession-wide consensus on principal ethical duties, recognising that veterinary surgeons' duties to animals, clients and other veterinary professionals may sometimes conflict. For BVA to promote consensus on which stakeholders to consider in policy formulation and to consistently account for their interests, for example by using ethical frameworks.



### An animal welfare-focused profession

Conceptually, being animal welfare-focused is distinct from being client-focused or vet-focused. It is a question of our primary motivation. If we are client-focused, we make our decisions (whether clinical or on animal welfare policy) in order to further or protect the interests of our clients (for example, withholding advice on obesity because it might offend a client); ie that is our primary motivator. If we are vet-focused, we make our decisions in order to further or protect our own interests (for example, recommending a treatment because it will make us more money than a reasonable alternative, or recommending a surgical procedure because it would be professionally interesting to perform).

Recent research for both Vet Futures and the BVA animal welfare strategy consultation suggested that many vets and vet nurses feel we ought, instead, to be animal welfare-focused. In this case, improving animal welfare is our explicit aim and motivator, which then requires us to work with our clients (which in many cases also furthers their own interests and wellbeing) and to be economically viable and rewarded (in order that we can continue in business and remain satisfied and motivated). But working with our clients and being economically viable are enablers for us to improve animal welfare.

The veterinary surgeon's trilemma (arising from our duties to animals, clients and our employers) will never be far away but BVA, in considering veterinary surgeons' primary motivation, will provide leadership on the principle of the veterinary profession being animal welfare-focused.

### What we heard:

Practising veterinary surgeons are frequently faced with ethical dilemmas<sup>22</sup> and it was suggested that BVA support to deal with such dilemmas would be valuable. This could take the form of moderated online discussions, facilitated face-to-face discussions and signposting to ethical decision-making tools and resources. A 2015 paper by Bachelor and McKeegan<sup>23</sup> reported that veterinary surgeons frequently encounter stressful ethical dilemmas, which can contribute to poor veterinary wellbeing. They found that vets' moral

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reasoning abilities may be underdeveloped to adequately cope with ethical dilemmas and that veterinary medicine could benefit from adapting and utilising research and teaching methods already applied in other professions (such as nursing and medicine), as well as from continuing professional development (CPD) in ethical decision-making. They also propose the introduction of a minimum standard of ethical reasoning that represents a fitness to practice and could be recorded as a 'Day One skill'. These ideas could be explored and potentially progressed by BVA in association with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons where appropriate.

Within an interdisciplinary community of animal welfare professionals and advocates, veterinary professionals hold a position of considerable trust and influence. Unlike many non-veterinary colleagues, we have duties to our animal-owning clients which, it is well recognised, may not always align with our duties to animals. Questions include: where does our primary duty lie? And how do we balance the interests of clients and animals? In this context we have asked, as part of the strategy consultation, whether the

veterinary profession is animal welfare-focused<sup>15</sup>. When the veterinary profession addresses questions of animal ethics for policy formulation (for example, whether primates should be kept as pets, or whether CCTV should be mandatory in slaughterhouses), a comprehensive range of stakeholders should be considered in each case and then established ethical principles and frameworks should be applied to improve the quality and consistency of decisions. BVA can help to develop agreement on which stakeholders ought to be regularly considered in animal ethics policy-making (including animals, those working in animal-use industries, citizens, and the living environment) and to consistently account for their interests without giving undue influence to one or another. Frameworks such as the ethical matrix<sup>24</sup> can be used to achieve this.

**BVA actions:**

- Develop guidance, facilitated discussions and CPD to assist members in ethical decision-making
- Identify or develop ethical frameworks to apply to BVA policy formulation

### 3.1.3 Legislation

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**Principle:**

Moral consensus in society can result in legislation when what *should* be done becomes what *must* be done. Veterinary professionals are required to have a working understanding of animal welfare legislation and to play roles in education and enforcement.

**Aim:**

For BVA members to be supported and guided on animal welfare legislation and its enforcement.

**What we heard:**

Some veterinary surgeons with animal welfare enforcement responsibilities would appreciate updated guidance and refresher courses on current legislation. Others felt that veterinary surgeons in enforcement roles would appreciate professional support to help ensure their advice is heeded. The benefit of guidance around reporting suspected animal welfare breaches (eg suspected animal welfare offences or non-accidental injury) was also identified, which could

add to existing guidance (for example the Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) practitioner guidance on the approach to the tail-docked puppy<sup>25</sup>). Veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses should also be assisted in promoting to animal keepers and owners the legal duty of care arising from the UK Animal Welfare Acts.

**BVA actions:**

- Consult with local authorities and government veterinary surgeons on areas where updated guidance and refresher courses on current legislation would be useful
- Develop and promote guidance on reporting suspected animal welfare breaches, including suspected non-accidental injury
- Develop a strategic relationship with the local authorities' National Animal Health and Welfare Panel to, for example, develop guidance on enforcement





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## 3.1.4 Advocacy

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### Principle:

Veterinary leadership in animal welfare requires that veterinary surgeons promote the best interests of animals in their direct interactions with animal keepers and owners, and advocate policies to improve animal welfare. Veterinary views on animal welfare are currently trusted and credible and the public expects veterinary professionals to be advocates for animals and to promote animal welfare-focused positions. Professionalism requires that the acceptability of current animal-using practices is constantly reviewed and that proposals for evidence-based improvements are made by the veterinary profession.

### Aim:

For BVA and BVA specialist divisions to develop policy positions and campaigns to raise awareness of animal welfare problems and to promote evidence-based improvements. For BVA to help ensure that animal owners and policy makers understand the animal welfare costs associated with different types of animal use to inform ethical appraisal and debate. For BVA to assist veterinary professionals to be effective animal advocates. For veterinary leadership in animal welfare to be recognised by the public.

### What we heard:

Advocating the best interests of animals is required in clinical settings, veterinary policies and animal welfare campaigns.

In clinical contexts it is the mainstay of animal welfare-focused practice (see section 3.1.2). A comparison with paediatricians is relevant: we do not expect a doctor to approach questions of a young child's health and welfare with a parent's wishes, or the doctor's career development, as the focus of decision-making. We expect a paediatrician to prioritise the best interests of their young patients, enabled by the child's parents/guardians and the doctor's skills and resource. Promoting a patient's best interests sometimes requires ethically appropriate influencing of animal owners. AWF is currently funding a research project on this topic, which BVA is supporting.

In policy formulation, as emphasised previously, the ultimate priority of this strategy is for BVA and our members to advocate solutions to real-world animal welfare problems. Identifying and prioritising these problems, in association with BVA specialist divisions, and developing policy statements and campaigns will build on recent BVA animal welfare campaigns, such as the campaign to end the use of performing wild animals in travelling circuses. There are many well-recognised animal welfare problems and it

will not be possible to address them all at once. Resources are limited and it will be necessary to continue working collaboratively with animal welfare-focused partners. BVA will assess its activities on specific animal welfare problems according to three key questions:

- (i) What does the veterinary profession think about this?
- (ii) What is the veterinary profession doing about this?
- (iii) Who are we working with to address this?

There are risks if veterinary professionals are not seen to be advocates for animal interests when the rest of society is increasingly willing to be and increasingly expects veterinary leadership. These risks can play out in consulting rooms (for example, accusations of overtreatment and unjustifiable profiteering) and in societal debates (for example, accusations of cherry-picking issues like non-stun slaughter, which do not affect the interests of our most influential stakeholders). Advocating the best interests of animals is required by the RCVS declaration<sup>12</sup> made by veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses upon entering the professions (see section 1.2).

Veterinary professionals are promoting the best interests of animals daily and BVA will continue to highlight positive examples of animal welfare-focused veterinary practice to the public, the media and decision-makers.

### BVA actions:

- Work closely with BVA specialist divisions, members and committees, to develop a list of specific animal welfare problems on which to develop positions and proactively campaign
- Work with BVA specialist divisions to develop a work programme to address the agreed priority welfare problems in each sector
- When appropriate, act on recommendations by credible animal welfare bodies such as independent advisory bodies (eg Farm Animal Welfare Committee, Companion Animal Welfare Council, Wild Animal Welfare Council)
- Develop media toolkits to support veterinary professionals in engaging with local and regional media on topical animal welfare problems and BVA animal welfare campaigns





- Develop templates to assist members in engaging with politicians on BVA animal welfare campaigns
- Develop school packs to facilitate veterinary engagement with school children on animal welfare principles and concepts
- Continue supporting the Animal Welfare Education Alliance, including its campaign to include animal welfare in the national curriculum
- Explore options for promoting existing animal welfare advocacy training
- Gather positive case studies of veterinary professionals improving animal welfare for BVA to highlight to the media

### 3.1.5 Education

#### Principle:

Animal welfare assessment, ethics and law are RCVS Day One Competences<sup>26</sup>. Ongoing education is necessary for veterinary professionals to remain updated on current themes and issues in animal welfare science, ethics and law (AWSEL).

#### Aim:

For BVA to assist veterinary professionals in undertaking CPD related to AWSEL and to promote inclusion of AWSEL in under- and postgraduate veterinary education.

#### What we heard:

BVA support for providing accessible CPD on AWSEL to veterinary professionals, promoting the inclusion of AWSEL within veterinary courses and congresses, and signposting to existing courses were all highlighted as desirable. It was noted that AWSEL is an established veterinary specialism, with a cohort of veterinary surgeons holding RCVS

postgraduate qualifications in AWSEL and/or qualified as Diplomates of the European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine. These veterinary surgeons could provide useful assistance and guidance to BVA when developing educational initiatives.

#### BVA actions:

- Explore the ways in which animal welfare science, ethics and law (AWSEL) is currently delivered to veterinary undergraduates as a Day One competency and further developed through the Professional Development Phase (PDP)
- Map the availability of AWSEL CPD training and support the development of further courses
- Explore the development of a BVA online hub as a repository for AWSEL resources.

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## 3.1.6 International

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### Principle:

Animal welfare is a global concern amongst other pressing concerns including climate change, biodiversity loss, antimicrobial resistance and food security for a growing human population. Ensuring the health and welfare of sentient animals is important as a marker of social progress, as well as for the role it plays in achieving other sustainability objectives. The veterinary profession should promote good animal welfare as an important sustainable development goal.

Improving animal welfare is a strategic objective of several international veterinary and other professional organisations, including the World Veterinary Association and Federation of Veterinarians of Europe. Global animal welfare initiatives should be collaborative and coordinated whenever possible for maximum impact.

### Aim:

For BVA to develop and maintain close links with appropriate international animal welfare initiatives and groups for two-way collaboration, coordination and knowledge transfer. To ensure that animal welfare is recognised as a sustainable development goal, and to explore and promote the links between animal welfare and other One Health<sup>27</sup> objectives such as biodiversity loss and rising global meat consumption.

### What we heard:

With the development of animal welfare science over the last 50 years, more is understood about animals' interests than ever in history. At the same time, we are increasingly recognising the pressures and impacts caused by a growing human population on a planet with finite space and resources. Global consumption of animal-derived foods (meat, milk, eggs) is projected to double by 2050<sup>28</sup>. It is recognised that global animal agriculture is a significant driver of climate change and environmental degradation<sup>29</sup>, creating pressures to further intensify animal breeding and management systems to reduce their environmental impacts, with associated risks to animal welfare. Biodiversity is also being lost through human-induced factors at an unprecedented rate<sup>30</sup>.

Strategies to address global problems fall within the general framework of sustainable development (SD). Some have noted that achieving good welfare for sentient animals is rarely advanced as a policy objective in this context, despite a growing moral imperative to do so and the utility value of healthy and happy animals in helping to achieve other SD objectives. It is

felt that BVA can help advance the roles and status of animals within these global debates.

Within the context of One Health, BVA should explore joint messaging with the British Medical Association<sup>31</sup> to link food demand management with human health, animal welfare and environmental protection. The veterinary profession can help educate the public to value animal-derived food and humane, sustainable farming practices. Vets should explore collaborating with medics to highlight the benefits of healthy consumption levels, while maintaining the same proportional spend to purchase milk, meat and eggs that are of higher quality, where quality incorporates animal welfare, affordability, safety, environmental protection and fair trade.

Expanding our roles in these areas and debates is consistent with an ambition and workstream arising from Vet Futures<sup>10</sup>, as well as helping to meet the need for increasing career diversity amongst veterinary graduates. Doing so may require a cultural shift, where the health and wellbeing of animals and citizens, and stewardship of the living environment, are given explicit and equal veterinary consideration alongside animal productivity and the interests of those who work in the food industry. In seeking to reconcile each of these goals, veterinary professionals, as animal welfare-focused professionals (see 3.1.2), are likely to agree to give greater weighting to animal health and wellbeing and stewardship of the living environment, while recognising that all progress must be economically sustainable. Agreed criteria should then be reflected in BVA's own food procurement policy, which should be reviewed.

BVA can help to stimulate market demand for higher welfare foods of animal origin by raising awareness of animal welfare problems in farm animal production and educating citizens on how different food assurance schemes address these problems. BVA can also provide tools to help members raise this awareness. Additionally, BVA could investigate the merits of a publically funded Welfare Stewardship Scheme, as proposed by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee<sup>32</sup>, as well as mandatory method of production labelling.

The NGO World Animal Protection continues to lead global calls for a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare for adoption at the United Nations. BVA signed up to the campaign in 2008 and should determine whether further support could be offered.



As outlined in section 1.2, various professional associations have recently published statements on the responsibility of veterinary professionals as advocates for good animal welfare, and formed working groups and strategies to advance this objective, including: OIE Animal Welfare Platform; FVE Animal Welfare Working Group; AVMA Animal Welfare Division; WVA Animal Welfare Working Group; and World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) Animal Wellness and Welfare Committee. BVA is encouraged to develop strategic relationships on animal welfare with these groups. In addition, BVA is a member of the International Veterinary Officers Coalition, comprised of the national veterinary associations of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and the USA. Animal welfare is a priority for several of these associations (for example, the New Zealand Veterinary Association has an animal welfare strategy, AVMA an animal welfare division, and “animal welfare advocacy” is one of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association’s three strategic priorities) and BVA should collaborate, coordinate and exchange knowledge with these organisations to achieve shared animal welfare objectives.

**BVA actions:**

- Develop closer relationships with the medical profession to advance One Health at an association level and to allow the roles and status of animals to be promoted
- Work with the British Medical Association to understand its policy position on meat consumption and explore joint messaging to link food demand management with human health, animal welfare and environmental protection
- Develop a position on the veterinary profession’s response and commitment to addressing biodiversity loss, including preventing associated animal welfare harms and promoting benefits of biodiversity to human wellbeing

- Develop a position on humane, sustainable animal agriculture that includes the importance of animal welfare in sustainable development, defines stakeholders that the veterinary profession should consistently account for (those whose interests would be affected by decisions made) and considers how their interests should be weighed by an animal welfare-focused profession
- Review BVA’s own food procurement policy in light of an agreed position on humane, sustainable animal agriculture
- Link advocacy on priority animal welfare problems to increased consumer awareness of assurance schemes that seek to address these problems
- Assist BVA members to understand different farm animal assurance schemes and to signpost the public in a professional and ethically justifiable way towards those that promote higher animal welfare
- Examine the possible merits of a Welfare Stewardship Scheme and develop a position if deemed to be beneficial
- Explore the possible benefits of mandatory method of production labelling of food of animal origin and develop a position if deemed to be beneficial
- Offer further support to the campaign for a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare
- Develop and strengthen strategic relationships with international animal welfare-focused professional organisations

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## APPENDIX 1

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## APPENDIX 2

# Organisations and individuals who responded to the consultation

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BVA is grateful to all those organisations and individuals who supported the development of this strategy, in particular those who responded to the questionnaire:

- Animal Behaviour and Training Council
- Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors
- Association of Veterinary Students
- Association for Veterinary Teaching and Research Work
- British Cattle Veterinary Association
- British Equine Veterinary Association
- British Small Animal Veterinary Association
- British Veterinary Association South East Region
- British Veterinary Poultry Association
- British Veterinary Zoological Society
- Cats Protection
- Compassion in World Farming
- Chief Veterinary Officer for Northern Ireland
- Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland
- Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales
- Dogs Trust
- Dr Sophia Hepple
- Farmers' Union of Wales
- Federation of Veterinarians of Europe
- Goat Veterinary Society
- Local authorities (Companion Animal Focus Group)
- Local authorities (National Animal Health and Welfare Panel)
- Medivet
- National Farmers' Union
- National Farmers' Union Cymru
- North of England Veterinary Association
- North of Ireland Veterinary Association
- People's Dispensary for Sick Animals
- Pets at Home
- Pig Veterinary Society
- Professor David Morton
- Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Society of Greyhound Veterinarians
- Shropshire Veterinary Association
- Soil Association
- Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons
- Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Sheep Veterinary Society
- Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
- University of Bristol
- University of Lincoln
- Veterinary Deer Society
- Veterinary Public Health Association
- Wood Green, The Animals Charity
- World Animal Protection
- World Horse Welfare

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## APPENDIX 3

# BVA Position statement on animal welfare

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### Introduction

The Lisbon Treaty states that 'in formulating ... policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals'. It is recognised that sentient animals are capable of experiencing positive and negative feelings such as pain, frustration and contentment and so deserve consideration and respect.

Where animals are used for human benefit, including for food, clothing, entertainment, sport, scientific research, transport and companionship, BVA believes that this should be exercised with responsibility, and with consideration and compassion for the animals concerned.

### Definition of animal welfare

BVA believes that animal welfare relates to both the physical health and mental wellbeing of the animal, as encapsulated by the five welfare needs:

- the need for a suitable environment
- the need for a suitable diet
- the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

There is a legal duty of care placed upon all animal keepers and owners under UK animal welfare legislation, and in line with this, BVA believes that the five welfare needs are essential to the welfare of any animal.

### The role of the veterinary profession in relation to animal welfare

The veterinary profession is part of an interdisciplinary community seeking to promote the best interests of animals and improve their treatment, wherever they are used or impacted on by people. Indeed, veterinary surgeons in the UK make a declaration upon registration that '*ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care.*'

Veterinary surgeons have opportunities and responsibilities to advocate for animals' best interests at the level of the individual, having direct contact with animal keepers and owners; at the community level, for example veterinary practices offering animal welfare expertise through local media and outreach activities; and at the national level, through veterinary associations formulating policies and lobbying.

It is recognised that neither sentiment nor economic factors can be entirely divorced from animal welfare considerations, yet they should never be paramount in its consideration. BVA considers that improving animal welfare should be the profession's primary aim and motivation.

### Taking a lead on animal welfare

BVA regards the veterinary profession as an animal welfare-focused profession, providing strong and visible leadership on animal welfare. Of course after animal welfare, vets also need to take their and their clients' needs into account as all three are interlinked. By working with their clients and ensuring their veterinary activities are economically viable, veterinary surgeons are able to achieve their primary aim of improving animal welfare.

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