BVA policy position on good veterinary workplaces

Executive summary

There is general recognition that the veterinary profession has been challenged by recruitment and retention for a long time, with mounting efforts from a range of stakeholders to address the 'leaky bucket' and workforce shortages. The Covid-19 pandemic brought about further acute changes and challenges but showed how adaptable teams and workplaces could be. It is vital that the UK veterinary profession retains a thriving, engaged and sustainable workforce. A healthy workplace is vital to allow veterinary professionals to fulfil their professional oaths and continue to safeguard animal health and welfare, and public health. This document has been brought together to establish the basis for a good workplace that can endure challenges to the workforce, with practical recommendations to help all team members work towards this. Much of its content is aspirational, but we believe the core values underpinning it are essential for a good working environment.

All good veterinary workplaces should:

- support and facilitate veterinary professionals in upholding their respective oaths

- develop, establish and track good physical and mental wellbeing and be supportive of the needs of all team members

- provide fair and equal pay and benefits for all team members, relevant to their respective roles

- be fair and equitable for all members of the team, with no tolerance of prejudice, discrimination, bullying or harassment

- have clear career pathways that are an attractive, accessible and attainable professional route for those positioned across all socio-economic demographics

- Support, recognise and reward personal and professional development (both clinical and non-clinical) which is aligned with the business

- have appropriate recruitment processes and structures to support the retention of skilled team members, including regular mentoring and appraisal throughout their career

- have employers and employees who are aware of what is expected of them and share responsibility to fulfil those expectations

- acknowledge the importance of a positive working culture, with the organisation's own culture and values being well understood

Every member of the profession has a role to play in creating and maintaining good workplaces, no matter their role or chosen sector, and regardless of whether they are an employer or an employee.

Health and Wellbeing

A culture of good health and wellbeing

Good workplaces develop, establish and track good physical and mental wellbeing, and are supportive of the needs of all team members.

Recommendation 1: Employers should encourage good health and wellbeing in the workplace by fostering a culture which celebrates, supports and encourages good work/life balance. They should allocate time for and put

in place measures to ensure the prioritisation of physical and mental health which are appropriate and tailored to the workplace. Individuals should take responsibility for their own personal health and wellbeing, recognising their moral and legal obligations.

Recommendation 2: A good workplace should collectively have the awareness, knowledge and skills to effectively prevent and deal with physical and mental illness, injury and disability at work, or affecting work. This includes:

- employers being aware and acting on legal requirements, regardless of the size or type of business

- employers being aware of potential risks to physical and mental health, and actively working to reduce them

- training for all team members to give them the tools to look after their own wellbeing, and that of others

- clear signposting to helplines and support groups to ensure team members know who they can call when in need

- regular review of risks to health and wellbeing and measures introduced to help

Physical health and safety

Good workplaces ensure personal safety always takes precedence, including over professional responsibility.

Recommendation 3: Employers should promote a culture of active engagement with health and safety matters, support good practise and challenge unsafe practises. Limitations must be respected rather than worked through, especially when managing chronic illness and disabilities, taking advice from external services and groups where necessary.

Recommendation 4: Employees should discuss any concerns with their managers, engage fully with all health and safety discussions, and always follow the advice provided.

Sickness

Good workplaces have a culture of respecting personal health rather than one of "pushing through" illness or injury.

Recommendation 5: Employers and employees should foster and support a culture of respecting personal health, including respecting when appropriate sickness absence is for the benefit of all. Everyone should take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, and not attend work when they aren't well enough do so.

Stress

Good workplaces proactively manage workplace stress.

Recommendation 6: Employers and employees should work together to proactively manage workplace stress in a way that is appropriate to the veterinary workplace and takes account of the individual.

Mental health and wellbeing

Good workplaces foster and support a culture of psychological safety, in which all team members' mental health and wellbeing are supported.

Recommendation 7: Employers and employees should recognise that they have a joint responsibility to look after their own mental wellbeing and that of their colleagues. Employers should be aware of triggers and risk factors for all team members and work to reduce them.

Recommendation 8: Workplaces should foster and support a culture of psychological safety in which team members feel comfortable talking about honest mistakes and learning from them.

Lone working and domiciliary visits

Good workplaces recognise the potential risks posed by lone working and domiciliary visits and take steps to mitigate those risks.

Recommendation 9: Employers should complete relevant risk and health assessments for lone working and domiciliary visits, which are regularly reviewed with employees and reflected upon by the whole team. There should be a system in place to actively check on team members.

Recommendation 10: Individuals should ensure they are aware of the risks associated with lone working and domiciliary visits, and follow advice provided by their employer, putting their personal safety before professional responsibility.

Recommendation 11: Employers and employees should encourage and implement initiatives to ensure team members feel part of a community.

Diversity, equality and fair treatment

Tackling discrimination

Good workplaces treat all members of the team fairly and equitably, with no tolerance of prejudice or discrimination.

Recommendation 12: Veterinary workplaces should be inclusive. A zero-tolerance policy for all forms of discrimination and inappropriate behaviour must be available and clearly communicated to everyone, including staff and members of the public. The policy must be acted on consistently by all employers and employees, and managers should know how to handle incidents related to discrimination, and where to seek advice.

Recommendation 13: Employers should have fair and transparent processes at all stages of recruitment and employment that can be audited for equality of treatment.

Recommendation 14: Incidents of discrimination should always be reported and recorded. To support this, guidance on reporting and reacting to incidents appropriately should be produced by professional associations.

Recommendation 15: Team members should know how to access support when they need it. Employers should signpost relevant helplines and guides, and individuals should consider joining support networks and groups.

Language

Good workplaces have no tolerance of prejudicial, discriminatory or offensive language.

Recommendation 16: Everyone should be prepared to call out inappropriate language, explaining why it is not acceptable, and report it where appropriate. Employers must have an enforceable zero-tolerance policy on using inappropriate language.

Respect from the public

Good workplaces expect fair and equal treatment of all team members from members of the public, and do not tolerate any inappropriate behaviour.

Recommendation 17: Employers must make their zero-tolerance policy clear to everyone they work with and be prepared to deal with any inappropriate behaviour. Employees should report all incidents of unacceptable behaviour to their managers. Workplaces should cease working with those who are repeatedly or wilfully discriminatory, abusive, or disrespectful to team members

Recommendation 18: The veterinary profession should work to educate the public that owning an animal is a privilege, to be realistic with their expectations regarding treatment, and to respect their vet. This may be through campaigns such as #Lovemyvet.

Diversity and inclusion

Good workplaces recognise the importance and value of diversity, at all levels.

Recommendation 19: Veterinary workplaces should recognise and champion the importance and value of diversity and inclusion at all levels.

Recommendation 20: The whole profession must encourage greater diversity and work to make the profession more accessible for underrepresented and minority groups.

Recommendation 21: BVA should work collaboratively with organisations such as the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS), British Veterinary LGBT+ (BVLGBT+), British Veterinary Chronic Illness Support (BVCIS) and RCVS Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Working Group. Together they should develop an engagement strategy and resources to raise awareness amongst underrepresented and minority groups of veterinary career paths and the different routes into veterinary education.

Recommendation 22: The profession and organisation should showcase role models, celebrate improvements and share publicity related to diversity and inclusion issues.

Awareness, knowledge and review

Good workplaces have teams which understand the barriers to equality and diversity, the consequences of discrimination in the workplace, and are empowered to challenge poor practise.

Recommendation 23: Employers and employees must understand and act on equality law and their responsibilities.

Recommendation 24: Everyone should work to increase their awareness and understanding of issues affecting anyone they work with that may lead to discrimination or offence. To support this, employers should invest in training and be able to signpost to resources on diversity matters, ensure that any knowledge gained is implemented, and develop an open culture of discussing equality issues in the workplace.

Recommendation 25: Employers should regularly review any strategies aimed at improving diversity and inclusion, and should appoint an equality, inclusivity and diversity champion.

Parental leave and pregnancy

Good workplaces treat all team members fairly and equally, including those requiring parental or adoption leave, and those who may be struggling to start a family.

Recommendation 26: Employers and employees should familiarise themselves with the legal requirements surrounding pregnancy, parental pay and leave, including in relation to miscarriage and stillbirth.

Recommendation 27: The profession should vocally challenge the outdated perception that raising a family is incompatible with maintaining and developing a veterinary career

Workload and flexibility

Working hours

Good workplaces have fair and anticipated working hours, recognising and rewarding work above contracted hours.

Recommendation 28: Workplaces should challenge the culture that endorses long hours. Working hours should be fair and anticipated, and any that are not anticipated should be infrequent and genuinely unforeseen.

Recommendation 29: Employees should raise concerns about working hours with their managers and work to find solutions to the problems. Employers should have a structure or process in place to listen to employees' concerns, and acknowledge and compensate for additional time worked through a formal, fair and equitable system, eg providing time off in lieu.

Breaks

Good workplaces ensure regular breaks are structured, protected and adhered to.

Recommendation 30: Individuals should take responsibility for, and realise the value of, their own time and make a conscious decision about taking breaks. Employers should support this by ensuring breaks are structured, protected and adhered to.

Flexible working

Good workplaces support requests for flexible working wherever possible, from all team members, regardless of the reason for their request.

Recommendation 31: Wherever possible, employers should support requests for flexible working from all team members, regardless of the reason for their request.

Recommendation 32: Employees should recognise that employers need to take into account the impacts of their request for flexible working on the wider team, and support each other in their needs for flexibility.

Vet-led team and delegation

Good workplaces delegate work effectively within a team to create fulfilling roles for all team members.

Recommendation 33: Employers should ensure they have read the BVA policy position on the vet-led team and consider how they can most effectively implement the recommendations within their organisation. The "Hub and Spoke" model should be used to coordinate the provision of services to clients and maintain oversight of animal health, animal welfare and public health.

Recommendation 34: All members of the vet-led team should be aware of what they are legally allowed to do so that work can be delegated appropriately. Employees should talk to their managers if they feel their role could be developed to make better use of their skills, or if they have concerns regarding tasks being delegated inappropriately.

Recommendation 35: Everyone should use opportunities throughout their career to develop teamworking, management and leadership skills.

Reward and Recognition

Pay

Good workplaces provide transparent, fair and equal pay for all employees, relevant to their respective roles.

Recommendation 36: Workplaces must provide fair and equal pay and benefits for all team members, relevant to their respective roles. They should be transparent, with pay bands for all roles advertised, and a regular review of pay should be carried out to ensure equality and fairness within the team.

Recommendation 37: The profession should challenge the culture that sees team members working for little reward or recognition.

Benefits and bonuses

Good workplaces offer fair and equal benefits, which contribute to a positive work culture, for all team members.

Recommendation 38: Employees should discuss suggestions for benefits with their managers without expectation. Employers should think creatively about benefits and take a 360º view, focusing on those which best help to create a positive work culture for their team.

Personal and career development

Encouraging progression

Good workplaces encourage career progression for all team members, with regular mentoring and appraisals throughout their career.

Recommendation 39: Everyone should take responsibility for their own career progression, encouraged and supported by structured personal and career development reviews in the workplace, with employers being transparent about all opportunities which arise.

Removing barriers

Good workplaces have clear career pathways that are an attractive, accessible and attainable professional route for those positioned across all socio-economic demographics.

Recommendation 40: The profession should seek to identify and remove barriers to career progression opportunities wherever possible, including financial, familial or geographical constraints.

Recommendation 41: Employers should create fair, clear and transparent structures for progression within their organisation and ensure that everyone knows how to seek out opportunities. When opportunities do arise, they must make the process for selection fair and truly open to all.

Recommendation 42: Workplaces should learn how to facilitate opportunities for progression from existing successful models, such as in corporate groups and the government sector.

Recommendation 43: Species and sector-specific veterinary associations should provide easily accessible information about career pathways in their sectors, including non-traditional career routes and post-graduate education opportunities.

Recognising different types of progression

Good workplaces recognise and reward both personal and professional development.

Recommendation 44: Employers should ensure that all employees have clear role descriptions, which are updated regularly to include any aspects of the role which have changed or developed.

Recommendation 45: Workplaces should encourage more opportunities for cross-sector working.

Recommendation 46: Everyone should recognise the importance of personal development, which may be non-veterinary related, on employee satisfaction and motivation.

Training and CPD

Good workplaces encourage personal and professional development (both clinical and non-clinical) that is aligned with the business.

Recommendation 47: All managers should receive training in key leadership skills. All members of the profession should appreciate the value of non-clinical training, recognising that it is as important as clinical CPD.

Recommendation 48: Employees should identify specific areas of interest and seek opportunities to develop skills in these areas, using them to benefit the organisation where appropriate. Employers should support this by encouraging employees to learn new skills and pursue areas of interest, providing enough time for training and learning, and working to create opportunities for team members to use and share new skills at work.

Management and HR processes

Investment in human resources

Good workplaces invest time and money into improving human resources.

Recommendation 49: Organisations should invest time and money into improving and reviewing HR processes, including seeking advice from HR professionals to improve their management and recruitment processes where necessary.

Recommendation 50: Employees should highlight any concerns with HR processes to their managers, discuss suggestions for solutions and seek advice from the **BVA legal helpline** if needed.

Recruitment

Good workplaces recruit appropriately, in a transparent and objective manner.

Recommendation 51: To ensure expectations match reality, employers should be transparent and honest about the role when hiring new team members, including any difficult aspects.

Recommendation 52: Employers should make sure that anyone new to the organisation receives appropriate support to carry out their role, and that they are regularly seeking feedback and reviewing the performance of new team members in the first few months of employment.

Recommendation 53: Employees should discuss concerns regarding recruitment and new team members with their managers and recognise both the difficulties they face in recruitment and the importance of finding the right team member.

Managing performance

Good workplaces are proactive in managing the performance of team members.

Recommendation 54: Employers should provide written contracts to all employees to ensure everyone is aware of expectations and obligations.

Recommendation 55: Managers should be pro-active in managing poor behaviour of team members, initially through education and training and if needed, by changing the team members. Employees should use their regular review meetings to raise any concerns and request support.

Recommendation 56: Employers should have a good understanding of legal requirements and processes for ending employment, to give them the confidence and skills to manage this appropriately and fairly.

Dealing with complaints

Good workplaces have clear and transparent complaints processes in place which give security to both employees and the public.

Recommendation 57: Employers should make sure there are clear and transparent complaints processes in place for dealing with complaints from the public and for dealing with internal concerns. This process should be supportive and well documented for all involved. Employees should familiarise themselves with this procedure so that they are aware of what to do when anyone has a concern.

Culture

Understanding workplace culture

Good workplaces foster a positive workplace culture by communicating and promoting shared values and attitudes to improve teamwork, raise morale, increase productivity and efficiency, and enhance retention.

Recommendation 58: Individuals should consider what they do personally, professionally and organisationally to show their values, and should repeatedly challenge negative behaviours and processes.

Recommendation 59: Organisations should recognise the importance of creating a positive culture that reflects the values of the team who work there, and use this to mandate how the organisation operates.

Recommendation 60: Employers should make sure policies are specific to their workplace and embedded within team behaviours.

Recommendation 61: The profession should challenge new and established practises which may cause harm to members of the vet-led team or animal welfare, discussing and calling out bad behaviours rather than normalising them. Professional associations should showcase case studies of good practise.

Driving change – measuring, reviewing and benchmarking

Good workplaces regularly assess, manage, monitor and review their culture.

Recommendation 62: All individuals should recognise that they have a role to play in creating a positive workplace culture. Employers should constantly assess, manage, monitor and review their culture, actively listening to and seeking feedback from team members at all levels of the organisation on a regular basis, and acting upon any issues which are highlighted. Employees should suggest ideas and actively engage with new initiatives designed to improve the workplace.

Social responsibility

Good workplaces are aware of their impacts on wider communities and consider the role of social responsibility in their workplace.

Recommendation 63: Individuals should be aware of their impacts on the wider community and engage with the sustainability and One Health agendas. Organisations should do their best not to have a negative effect on people, planet, animals, and should review, measure and mitigate their impacts wherever possible.

Recommendation 64: Employers should consider where social responsibility lies within the organisation's culture and, when possible, support employees in their additional efforts to make a positive contribution to the wider community.