

# Off the Record

NEWS FROM THE BVA

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## New support scheme allows recent graduates to share their experiences

**A new support scheme for recent graduates, to help ease what can be a stressful transition from vet school to working life, has been launched by the BVA and its territorial divisions.**

The BVA's divisions will be holding meetings specifically for recent graduates, which will be run by trained veterinary facilitators. The main aim of the meetings is to support new graduates, and to provide a forum where they can share their concerns.

The meetings will have a social element allowing recent graduates to meet others and establish links with people working in their area in an informal environment. These meetings are free for recent graduates and are supported by the BVA, the Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF) and divisions, in addition to the considerable support received from practices. The initiative has been developed in response to concerns raised by recent graduates through events such as the VDS recent graduate reunions.

### Open to all

The initiative is open to members and non-members of the BVA, and it is hoped that as many recent graduates as possible will attend a meeting in their area. BVA divisional secretaries will attempt to invite all recent graduates to give them the option of attending their local meeting.

Meetings will also be publicised in *The Veterinary Record*, *Off the Record*, on the BVA website and through direct e-mail alerts where possible. The RCVS has confirmed that attendance at these BVA regional support meetings for recent graduates will attract CPD points.

The BVA President, David Catlow, explains, 'The success of the scheme depends on all recent veterinary graduates being encouraged to attend their nearest meeting and for them to be prepared to share their work experiences with others.'

### Young Vet Network

Later this year, the BVA will launch the Young Vet Network (YVN), to provide additional support and services for BVA members in their first eight years after graduation.

The YVN will incorporate many different elements

in order to support recent graduates, such as a graduate handbook, online advice and representation on BVA Council.

The recent graduate support scheme is an invaluable medium for newly qualified vets to seek advice and support and,

coupled with the Young Vet Network, should go some way towards helping recent graduates through their early years.

For further information please contact Karin Johnson on 020 7636 6541 or e-mail [karinj@bva.co.uk](mailto:karinj@bva.co.uk)

- North Wales BVA young graduates will meet at the Bryn Tyrch Hotel (on the A5 near Capel Curig) on the evening of March 27. Contact Michaela at Bodriwnion 01407 720800, or Jill 01286 673026, if you want to book a meal.
- The Eastern Counties Veterinary Society is organising a meeting for recent graduates at The Bell Hotel, Thetford, on April 26. For more information contact Tricia Dennison at Eastgate Veterinary Group, telephone 01284 753961.
- Western Counties Veterinary Association will hold a meeting for recent graduates on March 22 at 1930, at the Devon Hotel, Matford, Exeter. Contact Peter Buckley [buckley866@btinternet.com](mailto:buckley866@btinternet.com). An evening meal is available at these meetings free of charge.

## Maintaining rural veterinary services

**The England Implementation Group (EIG) is charged with driving the Government's Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. With the decline of rural veterinary services, the group is concerned that, if private veterinary practices are not able to fulfil the aims of that strategy, it will have the difficult task of identifying alternative provision. The BVA President, David Catlow, reports on a recent meeting on this issue.**

On January 30, the BVA, along with the RCVS and Defra, was asked to report to the EIG on the progress made in addressing the concerns raised in 2003 by the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRACom) on the decline of rural veterinary services.

Deputy CVO, Fred Landeg, detailed Defra's current requirements for veterinary services and RCVS President, Sheila Crispin, gave an overview of veterinary manpower. She described the continuing

development of veterinary education, the challenges ahead and the urgent need to reconvene a revitalised working group to find solutions to the declining fortunes of the rural veterinary sector.

### BVA presentation

My own presentation focused on the way that farm animal practices are evolving and developing their services, often in collaboration with others. However, the significant efforts of the profession alone will not sustain practice in some regions, and I proposed further pragmatic solutions that the Government, in partnership with the profession, should consider if it wishes to maintain a meaningful veterinary presence across all regions of the UK.

There is an urgent need for the SVS to establish its future relationship with LVIs, not only on remuneration, but also where the private veterinary sector might perform tasks on behalf of the SVS, the MHS and local authorities, in order to maintain the private/state veterinary partnership.

Other suggestions included highlighting the eligibility of veterinary practices for rural business support; considering rate-relief for rural businesses; measures to address the level of student debt to encourage young vets to work in the rural sector; and a proposal that a survey should be commissioned to establish exactly what veterinary services are likely to be available across the UK in five and 10 years time.

The discussion that followed has given a new impetus to the debate and a reformed Vets and Veterinary Services Group is to be established with an independent chairman, representation from the farming community, practising veterinary surgeons familiar with the difficulties, as well as the RCVS and the BVA.

### Key issues

It is clear that the issue of vets and veterinary services is not about artificially supporting income for veterinary practice. It is about maintaining access to a meaningful veterinary presence for all animals in the UK, a pre-requisite if we are to develop the aims

of the Government's own Animal Health and Welfare Strategy successfully.

The BVA recently made a presentation to its parliamentary honorary associates in the House of Lords to update them on the BVA's concerns, and to emphasise the urgency with which solutions must be found before the veterinary infrastructure disappears in some regions and the country's surveillance system is deeply compromised.

It is interesting to see that the Scottish Executive's Rural Affairs Department's advisory group has recognised the essential contribution that veterinary practice makes to animal health, education, surveillance, and the rural community in general in Scotland, and has outlined as a matter of urgency proposals to ensure a viable veterinary sector is maintained.

■ **The BVA's presentation to the EIG can be downloaded from the members-only section of the BVA website, [www.bva.co.uk/members](http://www.bva.co.uk/members)**