Attendance

Liz Mullineaux (Chair)
Simon Doherty (BVA President)
Daniella Dos Santos (BVA JVP)
Sally Everitt
John Fishwick (BVA SVP)
Margaret Hosie
Fiona McFarland
Kate Sharpe
Huw Stacey
Jonathan Steele

BVA staff

Hayley Atkin
Sally Burnell
Amelia Findon
Megan Knowles-Bacon
Michael McGilligan
Adam Rawcliffe

Apologies: Danny Chambers

Minutes of the last meeting

1) The minutes of the meeting held 31 October 2018 were accepted as an accurate record.

2) Matters arising
   BVA had previously been invited by International Cat Care to support their International Declaration of responsibilities to cats. A decision was required, and the link would be circulated for Policy Committee comments.

   Action: Secretariat to check whether campaign support was still required and circulate details as appropriate

BVA Working Groups

3) Policy Committee reviewed and strongly supported the draft scoping documents for three new working groups, which would be taking forward the development of BVA positions on a number of priority areas. It was agreed that:

   Bovine TB Working Group
   • A practitioner with current first-hand experience would be a useful addition to the core group. It was noted that SPVS had been invited to nominate
   • Incentivising behaviour change could form part of the working group deliberations

   Action: L Mullineaux to forward any further minor amendments to the secretariat

   Good Workplace Working Group
   • The proposed composition of the core group was supported
   • It would be useful to capture the particular issues and solutions within the species sectors, and the proposal of a series of telephone interviews was supported
   • The impact of workplace bullying should be included in the scope (Vetsurgeon survey ‘Behaviour in practice’)
   • The various graduate schemes of the major employers should be considered

   Welfare at Slaughter Working Group
   • J Steele would be the Policy Committee representative on the working group

   The working groups would be convening regularly over the remainder of the year, and Policy Committee would be kept updated.
Immigration and veterinary salaries

4) The veterinary profession had been removed from the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) in 2011. Since the EU referendum BVA and RCVS had been calling for vets to be returned to the SOL, which represented a part of a possible solution to the acute recruitment shortfall as a result of the Brexit cliff-edge. In addition, there was the separate question of the Home Office White Paper and the proposed salary threshold of £30,000, subject to consultation. The post-Brexit end of free movement for EU graduates and extension of the current tier 2 system to all immigrants would mean that any agreed salary threshold would apply to all vets from outside the UK rather than just non-EU as at present. In discussion the following points were made:

- There was a worrying discourse in relation to remuneration and the value of vets, particularly from some employers and within certain sectors of the profession
- Salaries were not keeping up with the expectations of veterinary graduates and their sense of self-worth
- Remuneration could be part of the cause of the high attrition rate within the profession, but the issue was multifactorial
- It could be useful to compare attrition rates with US/Canada in relation to graduate debt
- It could be useful to review veterinary salary trends, and compare data with other professions
- The cost of providing veterinary care had increased, and it was important that clients understood higher fees did not necessarily translate into increased veterinary salaries
- It was not clear whether the proposed £30k threshold represented salary or the complete pay and benefits package
- It was understood the figure was a Treasury calculation related to the individual’s net contribution to society
- It would be entirely inappropriate to suggest that £30k was too high
- To date BVA had not taken a stance on £30k, but had set out the potential impact, particularly on public health
- There were potential unintended consequences of raising concerns regarding the impact of the threshold
- BVA should be clear that the desirable outcome was professional salaries for all vets
- BVA should call for government investment in FSA contracts
- Stakeholders needed to champion the value of public health work
- The ‘immigration skills charge’, an additional charge for each non-UK worker employed of £1k per person per year, was unlikely to be prohibitive for most veterinary employers. However, it seemed excessive and a lower annual re-registration fee would be preferred.

It was noted that the Migration Advisory Committee was expected to report on the SOL in the spring. A consultation on the proposed £30k threshold was expected although the timeframe was unclear. Policy Committee would be kept updated.

5) Policy Committee recommended that the BVA position on the £30k threshold should go further than simply drawing attention to the consequences. In addition, BVA should state that vets should be paid a professional salary, the FSA should award contracts for OV work at rates that recognised this, and the government should increase the value of the tender accordingly. The Policy Committee recommendation would be made to BVA Council.

RVN prescriber position

6) The draft position broadly supported at the October meeting had subsequently been amended to incorporate some changes proposed by BVNA, and the broad principles had been supported by Council in December.

7) Policy Committee supported the position on VN prescribers, subject to the removal of “…at potentially lower cost…” (lines 113-114). It was also suggested that the reference to
veterinary supervision (Recommendation 7) should be “direction”, subject to approval by BVZS. The position would be circulated to Council for support in advance of the April meeting of the RCVS Legislation Working Party.

**Action: Secretariat to finalise the position and circulate to Council for sign-off**

**Veterinary Nursing Taskforce**

8) In September 2017 BVA and BVNA had announced a new strategic alliance in the signing of a new memorandum of understanding. The memorandum aimed to build on BVA and BVNA’s existing relationship and cement collaborative working whilst still recognising the strong identities of the two distinct Associations and their memberships. As part of the memorandum, BVA and BVNA had agreed to identify opportunities to work together to represent the views of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses to the media, policymakers and general public and to raise the profile of the veterinary professions and the wider veterinary team.

9) Following on from work on the joint position on VN Prescribers, and the agreement in principle to work together on a broader statement relating to the role and value of RVNs as part of the vet-led team, BVNA had recently proposed the formation of a Veterinary Nursing Taskforce and had invited BVA to take part. The aim was to provide a statement on veterinary nursing, provide clarity and guidance for regulators, professionals, partners and others, and set a direction of travel for the development of veterinary nursing. BVA had agreed in principle to take part, with BVNA providing the secretariat. BVNA were in the process of drafting a terms of reference for the group, and Policy Committee would be kept updated.

**Education funding and widening access**

10) At the October meeting Policy Committee had broadly supported the content of the principles document from the Education Funding and Widening Access Working Group (EFWAWG). Since then the group had met again and had developed the BVA response to the RCVS consultation on graduate outcomes, which had been co-badged by thirteen specialist divisions. The working group had also developed a draft position on education, funding, and widening access. Policy Committee supported the draft position, and in discussion the following points were made:

- The introduction should include reference to crucial role of vets in a wide range of settings, mirroring the language from the vet-led team position
- The availability of information about veterinary career options should extend beyond graduation and to all stages of the career pathway
- The number of vet schools was not important. The number of undergraduate places, quality of teaching, and the employability and resilience of graduates was key
- It was essential that graduates were employable, and the admissions process needed to evolve and adapt accordingly, recognising that there was no perfect ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution
- It was important to acknowledge that retention post-graduation was a critical element of the wider veterinary workforce picture
- It was not reasonable to expect that graduates would be omnicompetent, however, omni-potential was essential and the position should explicitly state this
- There should be a definition or explanation of “tracking” for clarity

11) It was noted that next steps included the incorporation of suggestions made by EWAP, and further consultation with the working group, with BVLGBT+, and with the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS). Policy Committee would be kept updated with a view to bringing the near final version back for sign off in June, in advance of the Council meeting in July.

**Electric containment fences**

12) At the October meeting Policy Committee had broadly supported a draft position on electric containment fences in livestock. Since then the position had been developed
further in liaison with the relevant species divisions. In discussion it was noted that:

- It was worrying that virtual fencing might be chosen primarily for aesthetic reasons, and there could be health and welfare concerns surrounding the use of collars on livestock. However, it was accepted that for the purposes of the position a call for further research was appropriate
- Batteries more generally represented an environmental hazard and the wording should be adjusted accordingly
- AHDB guidance related to cows and sheep only, and did not adequately cover correct and safe installation
- Installation should be in consultation with a vet
- There may be a need for specific guidance on safe installation of fences for equines
- Guidance from the National Equine Welfare Council could be referenced

Policy Committee supported the position, subject to the agreed minor amendments. The position would be recommended to Council in April. The refreshed position on aversive training devices in companion animals, developed in partnership with BSAVA was intended to complement and form a coherent package with the position on electric containment fences in livestock.

**Action: Secretariat to adjust wording and share with J Steele**

**Surplus male animals**

13) At the October meeting Policy Committee had broadly supported a draft position on surplus male animals. Since then the position had been developed further in liaison with the relevant species divisions. In discussion it was noted that:

- The 3Rs approach was strongly supported
- The BVA position on non-stun slaughter should be referenced
- Uptake of practical methods for reducing the number of unwanted male offspring produced should be encouraged, where appropriate (Recommendation 4)
- Farmers considering exporting live animals should “…ensure compliance with existing legislative requirements…” in addition to considering the further recommendations of the BVA position on the welfare of livestock during transport (Recommendation 7)
- The position should open with “The specialisation of breeds…” and then go on to “Sentient animals…”

Policy Committee supported the position, subject to the agreed minor amendments. The position would be recommended to Council in April.

**Action: Secretariat to adjust wording**

**Housing rabbits in compatible pairs or groups**

14) Policy Committee considered a draft position on housing rabbits in compatible pairs or groups, which had been developed with BSAVA and BVZS, and in liaison with LAVA. The position was intended to address a range of health and welfare issues identified as priority welfare problems in rabbits as part of the BVA Animal Welfare Strategy, including: solitary living, inappropriate living environment, undesirable animal behaviour, and inappropriate socialisation. In discussion the following points were made:

- The position was not strong enough and the use of “where appropriate” and “where possible” should be removed
- It should be explicit that the position referred to pet rabbits, and did not include lab rabbits or those farmed for food
- The position could provide more detail in relation to guinea pig welfare
- The position should be stronger regarding vendors (Recommendation 7)
It was agreed that the position should be reviewed and reorganised, making it stronger and removing exceptions from the recommendations.

**Action: Secretariat to rework position and liaise with divisions**

**Abnormal behaviour – species specific positions**

15) A position on feather pecking, cannibalism and beak trimming was currently under development with the British Veterinary Poultry Association (BVPA). A position on fin-nipping in fish was being developed in partnership with the Fish Veterinary Society (FVS). Both positions would be brought to Policy Committee in due course with the intention of developing a package of positions under the broader cross-species position on abnormal behaviours, already produced by Policy Committee and approved by Council. The related draft position on tail-biting in pigs was currently on hold at the request of Pig Veterinary Society (PVS) but could be revisited, if necessary via the Pig Health and Welfare Council. It was noted that PVS had committed in principle to developing a joint position on farrowing.

**Fireworks**

16) The existing BVA position on fireworks and animal welfare had been developed in 2016 and called for fireworks legislation to be revised to reduce noise levels. There had recently been a range of stakeholder activity including a parliamentary event coordinated by Dogs Trust, a petition to ban the sale of fireworks to the public, a parliamentary debate, and a Scottish Government consultation. Although not currently minded to support a ban, Policy Committee agreed that it would be useful to review the science and evidence in relation to decibels and pitch, as well as reviewing the wider one health issues associated with fireworks.

**Action: Secretariat to research and circulate available evidence for review**

**Horizon scanning**

17) Policy Committee reviewed the rolling list of issues which BVA might need to prepare to respond to. Suggested additions included welfare in horse racing, and greyhound racing and the role/authority of track vets. It was noted that NTCAs were on the programme for the AWF Discussion Forum in June, after which Policy Committee could review possible next steps.

**Any other business**

18) **Declaration of interest and confidentiality agreement**

Policy Committee were asked to complete and return the forms at the earliest opportunity.

**Action: All**

19) **Surveillance**

APHA were currently drafting a scanning surveillance engagement and communications strategy, which heavily referenced the BVA position. K Sharpe would be presenting at the workshop in April.

20) The next meeting would be held Wednesday 12 June 2019 at BVA HQ, 7 Mansfield Street, London W1G 9NQ