Welcome

Thank you, David. It’s amazing to reflect back on how much has been achieved at an operational level within BVA over the last twelve months.

It gives me great pleasure to address you all here today to celebrate vets and our impact on society. We’re really lucky to be marking such a special day in this beautiful venue: hopefully over lunch you spotted a menagerie of animals in the hall’s Brangwyn Panels, many of which were inspired by studies in London Zoo. Magnificent surroundings to reflect on the magnificent achievements of the veterinary profession over the past twelve months.
My presidential theme this year has been ‘One Veterinary Community’. In these three words, I tried to convey the vital and varied roles of vets and vet-led teams in securing good animal health and welfare and public health outcomes at local, national and global levels.

I see the One Health concept as being really central to this; there are huge opportunities for experts in human, animal and environmental health to work together to find innovative solutions to address challenges such as the spread of transboundary diseases, antimicrobial resistance and threats to wellbeing in a holistic, mutually beneficial way.

I’ve been really proud to get One Health firmly on the agenda this Association year thanks to BVA chairing the UK One Health Coordination Group, and I’ve been
heartened to see key players in human and environmental health joining forces with us on this crucial and exciting piece of work. Listen out for the launch of a key output from this group - our One Health in Action Report - later this year. And with Edinburgh hosting the sixth One Health Congress in June 2020, it’s great to see more and more people embracing the concept and giving it the spotlight it deserves.

Thank you to speaker

As a passionate advocate of One Health, I’m particularly delighted that this year’s Members’ Day speaker – our Chiron Award winner, Professor Abdul Rahman – will be sharing his insights and experiences of how this collaborative approach is helping to realise tangible animal and public health benefits in projects to eliminate rabies in Asia.

We feel truly honoured to be hearing from such a globally renowned and respected figure about collaborative efforts to control the spread of a
devastating but preventable disease. Thank you very much to Professor Rahman for joining us today, and we’ll look forward to hearing from you shortly.

The year at BVA

The Association year has been a rollercoaster ride of hard work and highlights brought to you by the letter ‘B’.

It’s been Busy: a year where BVA has ramped up our political engagement, secured some fantastic policy and campaigning wins, strengthened our membership, refreshed our brand and digital presence and forged new and exciting partnerships, among many other achievements. And all of this played out against a backdrop of an eight-month Southwark sabbatical when we relocated to temporary offices while our Mansfield Street base was renovated.

And it’s been Brilliant: when I donned the chain of office this time last year I don’t think I could ever have imagined how varied the role of BVA President could be.
From meeting vets in far-flung corners of the UK to giving parliamentary evidence on biosecurity to talking about Fluffy the frozen cat on air with Victoria Derbyshire, there’s never a dull moment!

**Brexit**

And of course, there’s that other ‘B word’ which has defined 2018/19 and will no doubt continue to dominate proceedings well into the next presidential year. Sorry, Daniella!

Since the referendum result, a huge amount of work has gone into keeping pace with changing timeframes, changing faces in government and changing implications for the veterinary workforce and animal health and welfare. We made it our mission this year to keep members and stakeholders informed of the challenges and opportunities presented by Brexit in any form, and this is something that we’ll continue to prioritise however things pan out politically over the coming months.
One key area of concern surrounding Brexit is how it may affect veterinary workforce capacity. Throughout the year we’ve repeatedly raised concerns about the potential impact on an already stretched profession, particularly in fields like public health where a significant proportion of vets hail from outside of the UK. And in a No Deal scenario, we could also see demand for some veterinary services spiralling, especially in terms of increased requirements for certification of animals and animal products, and extra health testing for pets who are going to be travelling.

While there is still a lot of work to do helping to safeguard future workforce capacity, one achievement that really stands out is the successful campaign to get vets back on the Shortage Occupation List. We were delighted when the Migration Advisory Committee heeded the joint call we made with the RCVS and Defra and made a recommendation for vets to be reinstated as of last week. It just goes to show what can be achieved
when the veterinary community unites behind a priority campaign.

BVA will continue to work hard to make sure that our members feel supported and have a strong voice as post-Brexit policy is negotiated and shaped. A key strand to this activity is close collaboration with Defra and the RCVS through the Future Veterinary Capability and Capacity Project, to ensure the development of a flexible, skilled and robust workforce that meets the UK’s needs for both the immediate future and in the longer term. We’re also really grateful in this regard to all four Chief Veterinary Officers, who have engaged with us really well over the last twelve months and kept us as closely informed as they can on critical issues.

And it’s equally important that government departments work together to make sure that vets and industry are supported through change and animal welfare is embedded from an early stage; we will be looking to Defra, DfID and DIT to make sure that they are working
together in an open and constructive way as we all navigate the uncertain months ahead.

One positive that I can take from all the work that Brexit has brought about is that understanding of the integral role vets have to play across multiple spheres within and beyond clinical practice really seems to be cutting through and getting noticed at senior political levels. If some parliamentarians didn’t know about the central role of vets in trade, food safety, public health and research before Brexit, they certainly do now.

**Workforce**

We’ve been clear that to address veterinary shortages and boost both recruitment and retention rates, it’s essential that the profession gets its own house in order, too.

We know that some of the brightest and best in the UK and beyond are attracted to a veterinary career. However, we also know from our research last year that
many in the profession are feeling demoralised, stressed or pessimistic about their future career progression and prospects. And our discrimination report this year uncovered seriously worrying indicators that even in 2019, many vets have recently witnessed or experienced discrimination from colleagues or clients.

As a profession, we must be willing to join forces to address and call out unacceptable behaviour and create a culture where everyone feels fairly rewarded and valued for the work they do. This activity has been a major priority this year, with a key focus on supporting graduates entering the workplace, tackling discrimination and ensuring that vets at all career stages have access to advice and wellbeing support whenever they need it. Daniella has already put a huge amount of drive and energy into this year’s diversity and discrimination activity and working with our Good Workplace Working Group, and I know that she will work hard to keep this crucial workstream at the top of BVA’s agenda in the Association year to come.
I’m also really proud that we’re reaching the anniversary of the launch of My Vet Future, our online hub with clear information on veterinary careers for diverse audiences. The Vet Futures Action Plan recommended the creation of a single portal where vets and would-be vets can click into resources to feel inspired and informed at every stage in their veterinary career. As someone who has been involved since this was a seed of an idea, it’s been fantastic to see that coming to fruition and adding value across the profession.

**Welfare at slaughter**

Animal health and welfare has also shot up the political agenda in the context of EU Exit.

Welfare at slaughter is another issue that continues to be a top concern for BVA members, particularly non-stun slaughter. Over the past twelve months, we have pushed further in our campaign for clear and relevant labelling of products by slaughter method to help
customers make informed choices about the meat that they buy and eat.

While our overarching call for an end to non-stun slaughter in the UK remains firmly in place, we acknowledge that our pragmatic asks is where we have the biggest scope for movement, including pushing for a ban on exports of non-stun meat from the UK.

Over the past year, we have worked closely with the RSPCA and made the case for reforms to non-stun slaughter practice in the UK at the highest political levels. In March, we talked through this important and sensitive issue with Michael Gove, and more recently the Secretary of State convened a roundtable event which we participated in, providing interested parties with a say in how we might move forwards.

This issue more than any other requires a respectful and collaborative approach, which is why it’s been especially encouraging to see so much expert engagement with our Welfare at Slaughter Working Group that will report
next year. We appreciate your continued support with this important campaign.

**Sustainable Animal Agriculture**

As I said earlier, there’s never been a dull moment during my presidency, and perhaps one of the most impactful but slightly surreal ones was recent wall-to-wall coverage on the BBC discussing the merits of insect protein in pet food. Behind the ‘grubs up’ headlines, there’s a serious message about how important it is that we as vets think about the crucial role we have in furthering the sustainable agriculture agenda and inspiring others to start having these conversations.

Whether it’s developing technologies to optimise animal health or advocating a ‘less and better’ approach to our animal protein consumption, asking people to choose farm assured and local produce, I firmly believe that this is an area where vets can lead from the front and make a lasting difference for both animal and environmental health. And it’s also really important that we give
thought to the role of sustainable production in the control of significant endemic diseases such as bTB. We have a wealth of expertise on our bTB working group, currently working up a revised BVA bTB policy that will be launched during the next association year.

**Animal sentience**

It might seem like BVA Presidents change frequently, but we’ve got nothing on the Government! While we’ve seen many changing faces at Defra over the Association year, we’ve nonetheless kept our engagement levels high, and have been pleased to see key pieces of animal welfare legislation cross the line, such as a long-awaited ban on the use of wild animals in travelling circuses in England. However, it’s hugely disappointing that we have yet to see animal sentience make its way into law, despite a longstanding campaign, significant professional and public support, and the Government itself voicing its commitment to the legislation and underpinning principles.
Parliamentary time may be tighter than ever before, but here was a golden opportunity to make the UK’s status as a global leader in animal welfare resoundingly clear. We will keep momentum up in our conversations with Government to ensure that this fundamental principle of animal welfare is embedded in law as soon as possible.

Breed to Breathe

Speaking of significant professional and public support, this has been a year where our Breed to Breathe campaign hit new heights, with more and more veterinary professionals and pet-lovers adding their voice to raise awareness of the often life-limiting health problems suffered by flat-faced dogs, cats and rabbits.

This has been the stand-out strand of a wider workstream to encourage both prospective owners and brands to choose health over looks when it comes to buying a pet or using a particular breed in advertising and media. Thank you to all of you who have lent your support and helped to amplify this crucial message.
We’re starting to see that big brands are willing to listen to our expert input as veterinary professionals.

**Responsible pet ownership**

Staying on responsible sourcing and ownership, a key priority for BVA is helping to educate the public about what a big commitment it is to take on a pet, and how to ensure that prospective owners know how to find a happy, healthy pet. And keep them that way.

We’re delighted to endorse The Puppy Contract – a one-stop guide for buying a healthy puppy from a responsible breeder produced jointly by BVA’s charity the Animal Welfare Foundation and RSPCA. We’ll be adding equal support to The Kitten Checklist, which launches next week, so that cat lovers also have expert advice at their fingertips.

**Thank yous**
In such a busy year there’s inevitably a bumper crop of people to thank. I’d like to begin by saying a big thank you to BVA’s brilliant staff. The fact that so much has been achieved this year is testament to how hard this small team works, and even in a year of upheaval with a temporary office move and the continuing vagaries of Brexit they have been resilient, proactive and passionate about BVA and the issues that matter most to our members.

If I may, I’d like to single out two staff members for a very special note of thanks. Between them, our Finance Director Derek Thorpe and Public Affairs Manager Helena Cotton have clocked up no fewer than 60 years of service to BVA. Many of you will have got to know them over the decades as they’ve played an integral role in helping to shape and grow the association, and both of them have been an absolute joy to work alongside throughout. Please do join me in congratulating them for their loyal and longstanding support to the veterinary community.
[Ask Helena and Derek to stand]
[Pause for applause]

Divisions

A big thank you to all of our specialist divisions for their positive engagement during my Presidential year, including some great joint working on key animal welfare priorities across the whole spectrum of species. It’s been a real honour to meet up with as many divisions as possible over the past twelve months and talk to specialist vets about your views, concerns and insights.

We’re grateful to all our volunteers who provided the knowledge and resource that gives a vital steer to our working groups this year. We’ve also worked bilaterally on the priority welfare issues identified by Council, for example on rabbit housing, feather pecking and surplus male production animals. And in a shining example of collaborative working, 13 divisions gave sterling support to our input to the RCVS Graduate Outcomes project – a critical piece of work for the future of our profession.
To all our divisions, Council and Committee Members, thank you to you all for your time, scrutiny and expert insights; it’s thanks to you that our policy work is so well crafted, well considered and respected.

**Branches**

BVA could not achieve a fraction of what it does across the UK without the efforts and energies of our Branches and regional representatives. I want to pay a special tribute to everyone who has played a part this year in spreading the word about BVA’s work at grassroots and engaging frontline vets across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in amplifying the veterinary voice and ensuring that we can look at devolved policies and regional engagement through a local lens. As an officer team we continue to strive to get out to the UK regions to meet our members and it wasn’t lost on me that at the end of my presidency, I will have visited all four regions in a week, the second time that’s happened
this year! Thanks to you, our branches are the go-to resource for parliamentarians and policy-makers.

I’ve also been particularly keen this year to strengthen our overseas links – with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), the Commonwealth Veterinary Association (CVA) and had the opportunity to travel to the World Veterinary Association (WVA) Congress and the International Veterinary Officers Coalition (IVOC) meeting in Costa Rica and to the World Health Organisation for Animals (OIE) General Session in Paris – and I’d particularly like to thank all of our BVA representatives to each of these organisations. It is testament to our standing within FVE – a pan-European regional organisation – that we have been selected to host the FVE General Assembly in June 2020.
I’ve been lucky over the past year and prior to that to have several senior veterinary colleagues who have always been happy to offer advice and support. You all know who you are, and for the sake of you hearing from our wonderful guest speaker soon I will keep things brief. Special thanks to Lord Trees, Des Thompson, Julie Fitzpatrick, Marian McLaughlin, John Hill, Des Rice, and many BVA Past Presidents who have always been happy to lend an ear and expertise.

I would like to thank my fellow officers John Fishwick and Daniella Dos Santos for all their support, wisdom and that crucial sense of humour over the last twelve months! I have the utmost confidence that Daniella will be a brilliant BVA President; she is absolutely ready to take on the wide-ranging challenges and opportunities presented by the year ahead and I know she will do this with energy, compassion and vast experience.
Finally, I’d like to thank my ‘home team’ – my family, colleagues at Queen’s University Belfast and friends at VetNI, NIVA and AVSPNI who have been a constant source of support and encouragement this year – and particularly to Callum, Lewis and Isla who’ve seen more of me on FaceTime than they have in person!

As I said at the beginning of my speech, we are in an unprecedented period of change, challenge and uncertainty. What is clear, however, is that Team Vet is a small but hugely passionate and valued profession that will equip itself as well as it can to support animal and public health and welfare in the months ahead. BVA will keep working hard on your behalf and championing our members in everything we do. Thank you to you all.