Our Manifesto for 2015
A call to action for politicians and policymakers
Vets at the heart of a ‘One Health’ government agenda 2015–2020

The British Veterinary Association is the largest representative body for the veterinary profession in the UK and we speak up for vets on the issues that matter most. We promote evidence-led policy drawn from science and the expertise and experiences of our members working in all areas of the veterinary profession.

Veterinary surgeons are on the frontline caring for animals, detecting and treating disease, and undertaking pioneering research into animal and public health. Our members work at the cutting edge of science and at the heart of the communities in which they practise. As such they are in a unique position from which to offer the next Government evidence-based and informed advice and policy recommendations. After all, it is vets on the ground who detect and test for disease, it is vets who provide preventive healthcare and emergency aid to well-loved pets, and it is vets who monitor and protect the welfare of livestock from birth to slaughter.

The veterinary profession is relatively small but our reach is significant and our role is critical to the health and welfare of not only animals, but the rest of society too. The next Government must champion the concept of ‘One Health’ – recognising that the health of humans is inextricably linked with the health of animals – and listen to the strong veterinary voice in developing policy.

The policy recommendations set out in this manifesto provide a clear pathway to improving animal health and welfare and we look forward to working with the next Government to develop and implement them.

John Blackwell BVSc MRCVS
BVA President
Promoting animal welfare

The 2006 Animal Welfare Act was a landmark piece of legislation that enshrined in law the five welfare needs of all animals and established a duty of care on people to not only prevent suffering but to actively provide for welfare.

Veterinary surgeons work day and night to help clients understand the needs of their animals and to fulfil their duties as owners. Vets and veterinary nurses are often the first port of call for advice on animal welfare within the community, and the whole profession champions measures to improve the welfare of all species.

The UK enjoys some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world, and we should be proud of that achievement. But we must ensure existing legislation is enforced effectively and keeps pace with changes in society, for example the growth in the use of the internet to advertise and sell pets. We must utilise regulation, advice and education to continue to improve and promote better animal welfare.

Safeguarding animal health

Safeguarding animal health is vital to the UK economy, to securing public health, and to ensuring the highest standards of animal welfare. Neglecting the health of our herds and flocks has an unacceptable impact on welfare and drives up the cost of British agriculture. For example, bovine TB is expected to cost the taxpayer £1 billion over the next decade. At the same time, companion animals play a valuable role in the lives of their owners and contribute to improving human health and wellbeing.

Veterinary surgeons play a frontline and strategic role in protecting and promoting the health of all animals, from ensuring pets are effectively protected from, and treated for, illness to ensuring that livestock receive appropriate care and treatment to reduce and eliminate disease. In order to do that we need access to veterinary medicines, a strong surveillance network across the UK and Europe, and a legislative and regulatory framework that supports animal health.

The next Government should:

• Improve the welfare of millions of animals by requiring all animals to be stunned before slaughter to ensure they are insensible to pain. In the short term the Government should reduce the welfare harm of non-stun slaughter by introducing immediate post-cut stunning and clearer labelling of meat as stunned or non-stunned to allow consumers to make an informed choice.

• Overhaul legislation on the sale of pets to reflect the internet age and update dog breeding and licensing laws to ensure best practice in the production and sale of companion animals.

• Implement legislation to tackle the problem of fly grazing and horse abandonment, mirroring the Control of Horses (Wales) Act to provide a consistent approach across the border. Update the current horse passport system, including a central equine database.

• Ban the use of wild animals in travelling circuses, bring forward legislation to stop the keeping of primates as pets, and review legislation and guidance on the sale and ownership of exotic species to ensure their health and welfare needs can be met at the right level. Support calls for an EU-wide ban on the importation of wild-caught reptiles and amphibians.

• Provide adequate resources to local authorities to enforce animal welfare, animal disease and food safety legislation effectively.

• Lobby in Europe to protect the veterinary surgeon’s right to prescribe and privilege to dispense veterinary medicines, to ensure the internet sale of medicines is safe, responsible and accredited, and continue to support the responsible use of antimicrobials to safeguard their future use in animals and humans, as part of the Europe-wide negotiations on new veterinary medicines legislation.

• Recognise the societal benefits of companion animals to the health and wellbeing of their owners and others by committing more resources to companion animal health issues and research within Defra.

• Protect the UK from exotic disease through better enforcement of pet travel rules, and maintaining a robust and coordinated surveillance network.

• Support vets and farmers to combat endemic livestock diseases and maintain a comprehensive approach to tackling bovine TB including risk-based biosecurity and cattle controls, targeted and humane culling of badgers, badger vaccination where appropriate, and investment in research into diagnostics and vaccine delivery.

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Recognising the vital role of veterinary surgeons

Veterinary surgeons carry out their roles for the public good – from disease surveillance and eradication to service delivery and education in the community to frontline research. Without veterinary surgeons there would be no trade in animals and animal products. Many private vets also carry out work on behalf of the government as Official Veterinarians (OVs), including testing for bovine TB and other diseases, inspecting animals for export or import, and providing pet passports. A positive relationship between vets and government is therefore vital.

In recent years BVA has raised concerns that measures to reduce government costs could undermine the UK’s network of veterinary practices and the associated impact on animal health and welfare and disease preparedness. The closure of veterinary laboratories, tendering for OV services, and the use of unregulated paraprofessionals on farms and in stables could all have the potential for unintended consequences which ultimately risk compromising both animal and public health.

The next Government should:

- Maintain and promote veterinary expertise within government departments and agencies, for example, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, the Food Standards Agency and Home Office, and recognising the value of veterinary input to both policy development and implementation.
- Ensure the provision of OV services under the new tendering arrangements recognises the expertise and knowledge that local veterinary surgeons have within their local areas and that the system does not negatively impact upon the UK’s veterinary practice infrastructure creating black holes of service provision.
- Ensure that paraprofessionals working in the animal care sector are well regulated and are working alongside veterinary surgeons as part of the veterinary-led team to protect animal welfare.
- Embrace partnership working between government and the veterinary profession, recognising the unique skills, knowledge and expertise of veterinary surgeons across animal health and welfare and public health.