

**Presidential address: John Fishwick**  
**BVA Members' Day, Thursday 20 September 2018**  
**National STEM Learning Centre, York**

**Welcome**

Thank you, David. It's great to hear about the biggest BVA stories from the past presidential year. It's particularly pleasing that the building project is now well underway and we will look forward to welcoming many of you to Mansfield Street Mark 2 in due course.

Having you all here together to celebrate the profession and its impact on society is a very special day and it is great that you are all here to join us.

**Presidential theme**

As I'm sure you know, my Presidential theme has been 'Team Vet, Working Together'. And over the past year and for the foreseeable future, working together is going to be critical to ensure that we speak with a strong and unified voice on the animal welfare and workforce issues that matter most to the profession.

## **The year at BVA**

I'd just like to start by saying a huge thank you to Dr Ryad Alsous for agreeing to share his inspirational story and insights into bee medicine and agriculture with us today; it is a great honour to host him here and we're looking forward to hearing from him shortly. And if I may segue from one bee topic to another, BVA has been a real hive of activity during my Presidential year, so I'd like to use my time speaking to you to go through key highlights and priorities, and how our members are at the centre of everything we set out to do.

## **Brexit**

If we're talking priorities, we probably need to start with another 'B' word! Whatever your political viewpoint, there is no doubt that Brexit will bring major change, challenges as well as, we hope, opportunities for the veterinary profession and animal welfare.

Since the referendum result, BVA has responded to no fewer than 40 consultations and coordinated four parliamentary committee appearances this year, engaging with members to help shape and spell out the veterinary view of Brexit and what needs to be considered across all the spheres where vets play an integral role. That work will continue well past 2019, as we along with everyone

else try to navigate a very different and unpredictable new policy landscape.

We are also working closely with RCVS, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, Food Standards Agency and the Chief Veterinary Officers through the Veterinary Capacity and Capability Project, which is exploring how to develop and sustain a flexible and skilled workforce which meets the UK's needs for both the immediate and longer term future. Stay tuned for an exciting workforce research output linked to this project due to be showcased at BVA Congress in November.

As you'll see from our graphic behind me, we see a strong veterinary workforce as being the key piece of the puzzle to ensure that all the other relevant matters relating to trade, agriculture, animal welfare, animal health and public health play out smoothly in a post-Brexit world.

Central to keeping the workforce strong is retaining the high proportion of EU vets working in the UK, and making sure that they feel valued and positive about their future career in the UK. With RCVS data indicating that 44 per cent of EU vets are fearful for their future, and one in five actively seeking work outside of the UK, BVA has really ramped up its calls to Government to safeguard the workforce against a crisis in capacity.

First and foremost we are asking for vets to be reinstated on the Shortage Occupation List. I'm pleased to say that Michael Gove seemed receptive to this call when we met with him over the summer, but we will have to wait until the Spring for the Home Office to make a decision, and in the meantime we'll continue to make the case as loudly as we can. As ever, your support in amplifying the message makes a huge difference to our campaigning efforts.

### **Animal Welfare**

When we met with Michael Gove, the animal welfare issues that matter most to BVA members also dominated the agenda, and we'll keep the pressure on for him to keep his promise to maintain and wherever possible improve standards in the UK after Brexit.

We were particularly keen to get answers on animal sentience; BVA and BVNA members have played such a huge role in propelling the issue up the agenda but legislation must be embedded before Brexit. While it's another 'watch this space' issue, we're at least pleased that the government has taken notice of the strength of feeling on the matter, and understands that recognising animals as sentient beings sends a strong signal to the global community that

the UK continues to be a world leader when it comes to animal welfare.

It's BVA members' support that fuels our success, and it's added up to some huge animal welfare wins in the UK and devolved policy over the last twelve months, including the introduction of CCTV in slaughterhouses, a consultation on the transportation of live animals and pledges to ban both shock collars and the use of wild animals in travelling circuses. We're clear that there is still more to do to ensure that positive action is consistent across the UK, and with welfare at slaughter hitting the headlines more than ever we will keep making the case for change in this difficult and emotive arena.

### **Spreading the word**

Team Vet is at its strongest when we unite to get our voices heard on the key issues from grassroots to the highest levels of government. Many of this year's biggest campaigning wins have hit the heights they have thanks to members spreading the word and engaging on the issues that matter most.

The clearest case of this has been the resounding success of the Breed to Breathe campaign, which is raising awareness of the serious and often life-limiting health problems suffered by flat-faced

dogs, cats and rabbits. The campaign is going from strength to strength as it educates the public on choosing health over looks and challenges brands who are using brachycephalic breeds in their advertising, and that's thanks in no small part to members who have really bought into the campaign's aims and want to help to get the word out in any way they can.

We're also very grateful to everyone who supported the Choose Assured campaign on social media, sharing our farm assurance infographic and starting conversations about how animal welfare considerations should help steer your weekly shop. Thank you to the Farm Assurance Working Group for all your hard work bringing this into being.

## **AMR**

Another area where collaboration is key is the work to combat one of the most serious threats to human and animal health in our time: antimicrobial resistance. Ninety-one per cent of our members have fed back to us how concerned they are about AMR via our Voice of the Veterinary Profession Survey, and we've been very clear that a One Health approach both UK-wide and globally is the best way to make headway with tackling this extremely serious issue.

I'm particularly proud of BVA's work with the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance – RUMA - on this, and recent months have seen some major progress as farmers, industry, vets and government have joined forces to meet ambitious targets. This has already resulted in some dramatic reductions in the use of antibiotics in agriculture, most notably in the pig and poultry sectors. There is still much to do, but we can be proud of the energy and efforts that have gone in from all sides to date to achieve goals that may before have seemed out of reach.

### **Team Vet**

With so much uncertainty in the upcoming policy landscape, it's more imperative than ever to ensure that we have a thriving, motivated and valued veterinary workforce both now and for the future. A significant amount of work has gone in this year to looking at the needs of the workforce and putting support in place for vets at every stage in their career.

That's why the new partnership with Grads to Vets launched today is so essential. I'm sure we can all relate to how daunting it can feel when you first make the leap from university into practice, so we're really excited to be supporting a scheme that will help the next

generation of vets embark on their careers feeling inspired and confident.

The support doesn't end there. BVA's Young Vet Network is there to offer guidance and social opportunities to vets embarking on the early stages of their careers for up to eight years after they qualify. There are now 28 regional groups making up this dynamic community, with new and rebooted networks launching all the time, and I'm particularly delighted that the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire group, one very close to my heart after I set it up and led it back in 2009 is set for relaunch in the coming year.

## Careers

A veterinary career brings huge rewards and diverse opportunities, but each one of us is all too aware that it is also a difficult and demanding one, which can really put you through the wringer both physically and emotionally.

Conversations at our workforce roundtable in the summer together with wider member dialogue has really hit home how important it is to have clear information on veterinary careers for diverse audiences, including those school children who may be weighing up whether it's the right path for them to follow. We need to showcase



the amazing opportunities on offer in Team Vet, without glossing over the challenges.

I'm delighted to announce the output of these conversations. My Vet Future is an online hub that aims to provide the tools for people to feel inspired and informed at every stage in their veterinary career. Stay tuned for more information when we go live at London Vet Show.

### **Thank yous**

It would take me the rest of the afternoon to say some final thank yous to everyone who has supported BVA this year, whether it's through feeding into our policies, amplifying campaigns activity and relationship building or indeed scrutinising and challenging us when you don't agree with us on something. For the sake of our schedule and making sure you hear from our fabulous guest speaker shortly, I will keep things brief, but please rest assured that everyone's input is very much appreciated.

### **Divisions**

I am grateful to all of our specialist divisions for their positive engagement during my Presidential year. This year has seen some

great joint working on key animal welfare priorities across the whole spectrum of species.

We said last year that we wanted to explore solutions for real-world problems and the divisions have answered that call emphatically. Most recently, Goat Veterinary Society have teamed up with us on an important position on anaesthesia and pain relief during disbudding, and you'll hopefully have all seen the issue of Trojan Dogs hitting the headlines thanks to our Pet Travel Policy, produced jointly with the British Small Animal Veterinary Association.

Meanwhile, a veritable alphabet soup of divisions is helping to spearhead the important and influential work of the Vet-led Team Working Group: from **AGV** to **BVZS**, your involvement is very much appreciated.

Other Working Groups have delivered some fantastic outputs in the past twelve months including the Farm Assurance graphic you saw earlier and a comprehensive suite of materials on surveillance. Thank you to everyone for your scrutiny and inputs: your expertise is the beating heart of BVA's policy work.

## **Veterinary Animal Welfare Coalition**

A big thank you too to British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Zoological Society, British Veterinary Nursing Association, who are working with us alongside a number of vet-led charities as part of the Veterinary Animal Welfare Coalition.

Developed as one of the Vet Futures actions, this group is raising awareness of the five welfare needs with the pet-owning public through traditional and social media campaigns, and resources for members.

Keep an eye out for the pet advertising guidelines launching next month, which guide brands through how to avoid some of the common pitfalls and prioritise animal welfare in their advertising. We're delighted to say that a big name in high street banking has already approached us for a steer on how they can use happy and healthy breeds going forward in their promotional activity.

## **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 been 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.

### **Looking ahead**

Finally, I would like to add a few personal thank yous, not least for my BVA colleagues and my employers who have supported me throughout my presidential year.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, we are entering 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.