



# The veterinary profession's manifesto for Northern Ireland 2017–2022

A call to action for politicians and policymakers





# Vets at the heart of a One Health government agenda 2017–2022

**As veterinary surgeons we are on the frontline caring for animals, detecting and treating disease, and undertaking pioneering research into animal and public health. We work at the cutting edge of science and at the heart of the communities in which we practise. As such we are in a unique position from which to offer the next government in Northern Ireland evidence-based and informed advice and policy recommendations.**

Delivering positive change requires partnership working. The island of Ireland presents a distinct epidemiological entity and the All-island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy provides a forum for discussion and practical cooperation on a wide range of animal health and welfare issues. It is essential that the impact of the UK's EU referendum does not have a detrimental effect on such a strategy, associated essential partnership working or specific plans like the all-island approach to tackling disease.

The 2015 announcement that Northern Ireland had been granted Officially Brucellosis Free (OBF) status is testament to how government, farmers and vets determinedly set out to eradicate this disease. We must continue to work together to keep up high standards of biosecurity and surveillance while we look ahead to tackling other endemic diseases such as bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) and Johne's disease.

Where animal health and welfare are concerned, we urge the next government to recognise the importance of the veterinary profession and consider how best to maximise the skills, knowledge and expertise of the veterinary resource. At individual, community and national levels, veterinary surgeons have a unique opportunity and responsibility to advocate animals' best interests and we are proud to have recently launched our landmark animal welfare strategy 'Vets speaking up for animal welfare'.

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



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**BVA Northern Ireland Branch President**



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The British Veterinary Association (BVA) 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.

The BVA Northern Ireland Branch represents all BVA members in Northern Ireland, bringing together representatives of BVA's specialist divisions, government, and research organisations in Northern Ireland.



# Safeguarding animal health

**Safeguarding animal health is vital to the Northern Ireland economy; to securing public health; and to ensuring the highest standards of animal welfare.**

The agri-food industry is a cornerstone of Northern Ireland's economy, employing tens of thousands of people and turning over more than £4.5 billion every year. The economic benefits of good animal health and welfare are crucial to the development and maintenance of a sustainable and competitive industry. Northern Ireland is fortunate in having a good veterinary practice network, but this must be underpinned by an effective, coordinated system of data capture that will enable vets to make the links to control new disease threats and tackle existing ones. At the same time veterinary surgeons' provision of preventive healthcare and emergency treatment to companion animals enables them to 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 and promote efficient production. In order to do that we need access to veterinary medicines, a strong surveillance network, and a legislative and regulatory framework that supports animal health.

## The next government should:

- Accept, and properly resource, the TB Strategic Partnership Group's strategy and implementation action plan, in order that progress is made towards the eradication of bovine TB.
- Review the outcomes of the Test and Vaccinate or Remove (TVR) project; moving towards a comprehensive bovine TB eradication programme that takes into account the single epidemiological unit of the island of Ireland, and which includes risk-based biosecurity and cattle controls, badger vaccination where appropriate and available, and targeted and humane culling of badgers by cage trapping and shooting only, in areas where bovine TB is endemic and the wildlife reservoir is significant in the epidemiology.
- Support vets and farmers in combating endemic livestock diseases, for example through the recently introduced compulsory bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) testing scheme in Northern Ireland and the voluntary all-island control programme to tackle John's disease, as well as maintaining the highest level of surveillance to keep Northern Ireland Officially Brucellosis Free (OBF).
- Ensure appropriate support for DAERA's review of animal health surveillance and the implementation of the recommendations from that review.
- Support the UK Government in the establishment of a central equine database and a single passport issuing authority, which are fundamental in promoting and sustaining responsible ownership of horses.
- Increase collaboration and integration of the veterinary and medical professions to promote the responsible use of antimicrobials.
- Lobby in Europe to protect the veterinary surgeon's right to prescribe and privilege to dispense veterinary medicines as a means of improving antimicrobial stewardship to safeguard their future use in animals and humans.
- Ensure that animal health and welfare are key in the future development of the Going for Growth initiative.

# Promoting animal welfare

## **The welfare of animals, including farmed and non-farmed animals, is protected by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.**

Veterinary surgeons work day and night to help clients understand the needs of their animals and to fulfil their duties as animal keepers and 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. BVA welcomes the recent review of the implementation of animal welfare legislation on dog breeding establishments and also the joint working of DAERA, the Irish Pet Advertising Advisory Group (IPAAG) and the Pet Advertising Advisory Group (PAAG) in introducing minimum standards for online sales of pets. We must utilise regulation, advice and education to continue to improve and promote better animal welfare.

## **The next government should:**

- Protect the welfare of animals by requiring all animals to be stunned before slaughter to ensure they are insensible to pain: there is no non-stun slaughter currently carried out in Northern Ireland but, while non-stun is permitted under the EU derogation, the next government should introduce measures to label meat as stunned or non-stunned to allow consumers to make an informed choice.
- Introduce mandatory CCTV use in all approved slaughterhouses as a useful tool in helping to meet general animal welfare requirements in slaughterhouses; and supporting legislation to ensure Official Veterinarians (OVs) have unrestricted access to slaughterhouse CCTV footage.
- Ensure robust enforcement of existing legislation to tackle the illegal import of puppies and import of rescue dogs into and through Northern Ireland, all of which are potentially associated with disease, welfare and behavioural problems.
- Ensure funding for the enforcement of the revised regulations for dog breeding establishments, which now include socialisation as well as environmental enhancement and enrichment.
- Enact legislation and develop guidance on the sale and ownership of non-traditional companion animals/exotic species to ensure their health and welfare needs can be met.
- Bring forward legislation to ban the ownership of animals whose welfare needs cannot be met, such as the keeping of primates as pets and use of wild animals in travelling circuses.

# 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, including testing for bovine TB and other diseases, and providing pet passports. Vets play an important role in ensuring a robust and trusted agri-food sector, and contribute to a thriving export market for Northern Ireland. A positive relationship between government and vets, and a sustainable relationship between veterinary surgeons and their clients, is therefore vital in delivering effective animal health measures to industry and wider society.

In recent years BVA has raised concerns that measures to reduce government costs could undermine the UK's network of veterinary practices and surveillance facilities, and the associated impact on animal health and welfare and disease preparedness. BVA welcomed the decision to retain a vital Veterinary Diagnostic Unit in Omagh which had been considered for closure recently as a result of financial pressures facing DAERA and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI). Its closure would have left vast areas of the country without effective surveillance capacity.

Internationally, the fight against disease is underpinned by world-class research. The global impact of Northern Ireland's excellence in research and development through work carried out at AFBI must also be maintained.

## The next government should:

- Work closely with the UK Government to ensure the maintenance of the Common Travel Area, which is vital in order to facilitate movement in an all-island context for both work and study purposes.
- Protect the budget to maintain the vital AFBI laboratories at Stormont and Omagh to ensure effective disease surveillance and investigation across Northern Ireland.
- Maintain Northern Ireland's excellence in research and development given the local and global impact of AFBI's work which covers, for example, its diverse range of research into fish diseases, its work on novel and emerging viruses in pigs, and its internationally recognised bovine TB research and development.
- Ring-fence the budget to retain the role of the local vet as a trusted source of evidence-based advice for farmers, thereby maintaining this fundamental relationship in ensuring robust disease control and eradication strategies.
- Ensure that the veterinary profession plays a key role in the 'Going for Growth' initiative and that funding is available for the upgrade and modernisation of animal handling facilities on-farm in order to improve health and safety for both farmer and vet.
- Provide funding for the maintenance of a sufficiently large body of suitably trained veterinary surgeons to launch the initial response to an outbreak of an epizootic disease, and for a core complement of trained contingency planning and emergency response staff within DAERA Veterinary Service Animal Health Group.
- Embrace partnership working between government and the veterinary profession, recognising the unique skills, knowledge and expertise of the veterinary team across animal health and welfare and public health.





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