

# BVA response: DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020-2025

## Who we are

1. The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With 18,000 members, our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the United Kingdom's veterinary profession. We, therefore, take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.
2. The BVA's Northern Ireland Branch brings together representatives of local veterinary associations, BVA's specialist divisions, government, and research organisations in Northern Ireland. The Branch advises BVA on the consensus view of the Northern Ireland members on local and United Kingdom issues.

## Introduction

3. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry into the DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020-2025. We support the initiative to provide a systematic framework for encouraging innovation. This is particularly timely given the challenges and opportunities arising as a result of exit from the EU.
4. Within an innovation strategy, priority should be given to incentivising innovation, technology and new processes which can support animal health, animal welfare and public health whilst optimising productivity and competitiveness. The veterinary profession plays a pivotal role in driving innovation while ensuring animal health, animal welfare and public health needs are met. It is therefore disappointing that the veterinary profession is not referenced within the DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020-2025 document itself.
5. The veterinary profession has considered the role of innovation in the Vet Futures report<sup>1</sup> and Action Plan<sup>2</sup>. As a profession, vets take advantage of progress in scientific knowledge, innovation and technology to advance animal health and welfare, and challenge the status quo to drive continuous improvement. At the same time, we are alert to the impact of new technologies on animal health and welfare – and insist on robust ethical appraisal before new technologies are introduced.
6. Inspired by Vet Futures, ViVet is an ambitious and wide-ranging programme designed to ensure veterinary professionals are at the centre of innovation in the animal health sector. <sup>3</sup>ViVet is driven by the mission of 'enabling creative veterinary solutions for the good of animal health and welfare'. The programme is managed by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS).
7. This strategy should be mindful of the RCVS review of "Under care." In response, we have established a working group which is examining all aspects of this review including how

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vetfutures.org.uk/resource/vet-futures-report/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vetfutures.org.uk/resource/vet-futures-action-plan-2016-20/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vivet.org.uk/>

innovation should be supported and fostered where it contributes positively to animal health and welfare and supports the veterinary professions in upholding their oaths. There are many different drivers for regulatory change to enable innovation and the use of new technologies, but the regulator must ensure that animal health and welfare is paramount.

## Veterinary innovation

8. Veterinary researchers are addressing some of the biggest social and economic problems of today, including:
  - Inefficiencies in the food-chain;
  - National food security, ensuring that indigenous food industries are competitive;
  - Prevention of animal disease, zoonotic or otherwise;
  - Antimicrobial resistance;
  - Improving food animal welfare;
  - Climate change: Food-producing animals have been implicated as contributors to, and are impacted by, global warming;
  - Conservation of wildlife;
  - Improving companion animal and equine health and welfare.
9. Epidemiology is central to the understanding of disease and how different interventions and controls affect these. The evidence provided by epidemiological research underpins the government policy, veterinary advice and industry action. Government should support innovative epidemiological research, to further our understanding of disease.
10. Investing in veterinary innovation makes economic sense. For example, it is estimated that the Bluetongue vaccination programme in 2008 has saved £460 million and 10,000 jobs in the UK, not to mention countless animal lives.<sup>4</sup> A report commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) found that in 2012/13 research and development income for veterinary science totalled £55m. Agriculture, forestry and veterinary science research is singularly adept at leveraging public sector funding to attract additional private sector finance that otherwise would not have occurred,<sup>5</sup> as can be seen in the below graph.<sup>6</sup>

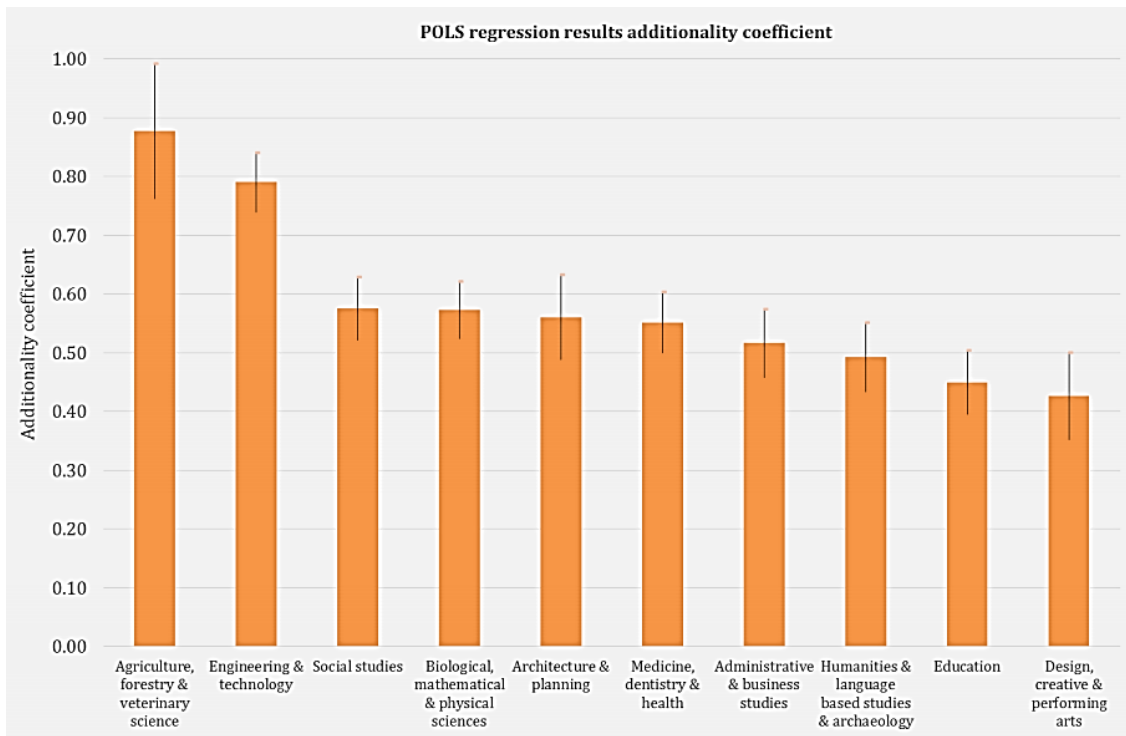
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<sup>4</sup> RCVS Research Subcommittee 2013 *Veterinary research in the UK: a snapshot*, 2013

<sup>5</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *What is the relationship between public and private investment in R&D?* 2015

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/438763/bis-15-340-relationship-between-public-and-private-investment-in-R-D.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/438763/bis-15-340-relationship-between-public-and-private-investment-in-R-D.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *What is the relationship between public and private investment in R&D?* 2015, 215



11. A successful innovation strategy will encourage the sharing of expertise from multiple disciplines to better understand the factors behind our most pressing problems and identify new opportunities. Research in the social sciences provides insight into decision making. The prominence of social science research within animal health policy design is growing. Greater application of social science concepts and findings should form a central aspect of any innovation strategy.

### Innovation in action

12. Equally as important as commissioning innovative research, is the dissemination of research and new learning from researchers into innovative practice on farm. Vets are the trusted advisors to farmers and uniquely positioned to offer advice that encourages the uptake of innovative approaches. There should be greater utilisation of behavioural approaches to encourage the application of the findings of innovative research into practice.

13. EU Exit provides the opportunity to develop strong, competitive and innovative agriculture and food sectors which enjoy the confidence of customers at home and abroad. Vets recognise the role of new technologies and innovative methods in monitoring animal health and welfare outcomes, addressing animal health and welfare conditions and optimising the contribution of each animal to agriculture systems such as Precision Livestock Farming<sup>7</sup>. Within a future post-CAP agriculture policy, we would welcome the use of grants or pilot schemes to trial the use of innovative technologies to improve animal health and welfare.

<sup>7</sup> Precision Livestock Farming is the creation of 'a management system based on continuous automatic real-time monitoring and control of production/reproduction, animal health and welfare, and the environmental impact of livestock production'. Berkmans, D., 2014 Precision livestock farming technologies for welfare management in intensive livestock systems. Rev. sci. tech. Off. int. Epiz., 2014, 33 (1), 189-196. Available at: <https://www.oie.int/doc/ged/D13666.PDF>

14. This is an opportunity to exploit the existing ecosystem of organisations with an interest in encouraging the adoption of innovation, new farm management practices and technology transfer from the lab to the field. This includes organisations such as Further Education (FE) Colleges, CAFRE, Queens University and Ulster University, AFBI and Catalyst Inc. Encouraging early adoption and a culture of evaluation will allow Northern Ireland to be a test-bed for new technologies. The role of the private vet will be essential to advise any farmer involved in early adoption, to collect data and ensure animal health and welfare are maintained.