

Malcolm's Members' Day presidential speech – 29 September 2022

As delivered

Firstly, I must thank Huw Griffiths for his kind words in support of my presidency.

I also want to pay particular tribute to Justine for her inspirational year as BVA President. She is an outstanding colleague and working alongside her these past twelve months has been a masterclass in what can be achieved with passion, precision, and exceptional leadership.

She's always perfectly prepared, meetings are chaired to the nearest minute, she's clear thinking, and she does inspiring speeches. We were sitting around this week comparing all the BVA officers to animals, and we rapidly realised that Justine is the swan of BVA. Everything looks perfect but that's only because there's lots of paddling under the water.

Her work to embed sustainability in the profession is vital and couldn't have been timelier. I look forward to continuing this work with her in the coming year and I'm sure you will all join me in thanking her again for her service.

When it came to deciding on my presidential theme, for me there was only one clear choice - 'Investing in People'.

Not only does this mean a great deal to me, but I believe it is fundamental to where our profession is now.

Veterinary medicine is often characterised by animals, but in reality, it is a profession intrinsically centred on people, whether they are our colleagues, our clients, the animal owning public or farming communities.

It is an immense credit to our teams that many see it as highly vocational and a life calling. Many of you have devoted much of your lives to the health and welfare of animals and I'm incredibly proud to be part of such a dedicated and selfless group of professionals.

However, such inherent dedication comes at a price....and it is particularly concerning when we are seeing so many colleagues leaving the profession.

And it's clear that many are not leaving to follow alternative life-long dreams or passions or because they no longer want to work in animal health. Instead, they are taking these difficult decisions as a result of deep-rooted disaffection with veterinary workplaces.

Undoubtedly, it's been a tough few years...

We can point to Brexit, the pandemic, and the rapid rise in pet ownership as external factors putting our profession under huge pressure and

leaving staff exhausted. However, we must acknowledge that not all the challenges are external or new and there are long-term systemic issues with retention, recruitment, and return to work. Workforce shortages are a key issue.

We stand at a crossroads... and the road that has brought the profession to where we are now will not be the same road that leads us forward. It can not be.

We can either put our heads down, tighten our belts and hope for the best or we can acknowledge the issues, focus on solutions and look forward to ensuring veterinary medicine is a great place to work.

These times of challenge must be a catalyst for positive change.

I'm challenging the profession to think differently and approach its work through the prism of people. To quote Huw speaking at BEVA's recent Congress, "The veterinary industry must listen to the next generation and ensure the work fits the workforce, not the other way email".

BVA's Good veterinary workplaces initiative goes to the very heart of this and has many of the best solutions. It shows how changes that focus on workplace culture, flexibility, career progression, inclusivity and wellbeing can boost contentment, help retain staff and of course, build a sustainable profession.

We've made a great start and I want to build on its success in the coming year along with many of you. I need your help.

There are practices who are excelling in the current climate, and many have embraced the good workplaces principles. I look forward to shining a bright light on those who can inspire others to bring about the changes we need.

The culture of any organisation is set by its leadership and we all need to focus on the importance of leaders and what they can bring to veterinary teams and workplaces.

By inspiring, mentoring and empowering vet teams, we see a strong link to improved animal welfare as well as the retention and satisfaction of people.

Championing and supporting the next generation of leaders is key to my theme of investing in people.

So, if veterinary medicine is about people, it surely must be about all people equally. A diverse workforce brings value to those individuals, to workplaces and the sustainability of the profession, which is so needed.

We must continue to champion widening participation, inclusivity and equity. A monoculture of people does not bring sustainability. Valuing

the differences of others is what ultimately brings us all together and can be the secret to a successful, thriving workplace and a fair work culture.

Much of veterinary medicine is also about how we communicate. I want to support the profession as it seeks to tackle the incredibly important and avoidable animal welfare issues inherent with poor breeding, husbandry and management. Simply telling clients and the animal owning public what is right or wrong is not enough and can easily disenfranchise the very people we are trying to reach.

The only way to tackle these big challenges is by trying new approaches and embracing human behaviour change principles - understanding people and their perspectives and adapting our approach to communicating. It's vital that we get this right if we are to bring about the meaningful change in animal welfare that's needed.

We'll also drive change through our lobbying activities, outlined in BVA's strategic and policy priorities.

Justine mentioned the Kept Animals Bill and how we will continue to push for it to pass into law.

Lobbying government for properly enforced import checks on animals and animal products also remains a top priority.

The rise of canine fertility clinics is a growing concern for many of you and of course, the cost of living crisis is starting to bite, impacting both people and animals.

So, as I start my tenure as BVA President I want to thank all my family who are here today for their immense support, without which it wouldn't be possible to take on this new challenge. And to my colleagues at Stable Close Equine Practice, who have enabled me to take time away from day-to-day practice to fulfil this role.

I'm really looking forward to the year ahead and I hope you are too. I know that from where we stand today, many of the challenges seem daunting. But I'm confident that if we put our faith and energy in our people, our greatest asset, we stand the best chance of not only prevailing, but building a thriving and sustainable profession that is fit for the future.

Thank you very much.

ENDS