

Speech to the BVA annual Welsh Dinner

Malcolm Morley, President of the British Veterinary Association

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AS DELIVERED

Diolch o galon, Gwen.

Foneddigion a boneddigesau, mae'n bleser mawr iawn ac yn ffrindiau gennyf eich croesawu chi oll i ginio Cymreig blynyddol Cymdeithas Milfeddygon Prydain. Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi gyd am ymuno â ni. Mae'n braf iawn i weld hen ffrindiau yma a gwneud rhei newydd.

Thank you so much, Gwen.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the British Veterinary Association's annual Welsh dinner. Thank you all very much for joining us. It's great to see old friends here and make new ones.

We are delighted to have Lesley Griffiths — Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd — with us this evening, and look forward to hearing from her in a few moments.

Tonight, I'm just going to cover three key issues because I'm very aware that Lesley and I are all that stand between you and your dinner:

- Veterinary education in Wales
- The sustainable farming scheme
- Antimicrobial resistance

But first, I want to say what a pleasure it is to be here tonight. My connection with Wales began as a vet student. We were assigned a "foster practice" with which we had a close bond, and that practice provided much of our work experience. With great fortune, my foster practice was the Ystwyth Vet Group in Aberystwyth, where I spent many formative weeks. I'm particularly happy that one of the vets who looked after me so well is with us here tonight. Thank you Hywel for your mentorship and kindness at that time.

I would also like to welcome Dr Richard Irvine in his new role as Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales. With more than 25 years' experience, Richard brings a wealth of knowledge, and we are looking forward to working with him on some of the key issues facing the profession in Wales.

Veterinary Education

As many of you will know, the veterinary profession has been under significant pressure in recent years, with workforce shortages in all sectors. However, the situation is particularly challenging in rural areas — like much of Wales — where only a limited number of graduates look to work and settle. But the veterinary profession plays a key role in these communities — supporting agriculture, food production and boosting the rural economy.

This shortage of skilled vets demands action, and in the long-run, inclusive veterinary education can play a pivotal role. Aberystwyth University, being the sole veterinary school in Wales, presents a unique opportunity to address this issue. In order to gain a stronger insight into Welsh veterinary needs, they stipulate that at least 50% of their students' work experience must be undertaken in Wales, encouraging them to establish their careers here upon graduation. But for this vital course to flourish, it is essential that it's well funded.

The costs of veterinary education per student are inherently higher compared to other disciplines due to the wide range of clinical and professional skills required upon graduation. But, veterinary courses across the UK are suffering from chronic underfunding, heavily relying on alternative income sources — and this alarming trend threatens the quality and sustainability of UK-wide veterinary education.

To ensure a sustainable future for the veterinary profession in Wales, we urge decision-makers to provide sustainable funding for the veterinary school in Aberystwyth, supporting its growth as a flagship institution. By delivering top-tier education, cutting-edge facilities, and robust research programs, we can attract, educate and retain a new generation of skilled vets to safeguard animal well-being, and promote the sustainable growth of the Welsh agri-economy. Through a collaborative ecosystem that bridges academia, industry, and the community, the veterinary school will also become a vibrant hub for innovation, entrepreneurship, and knowledge exchange, maximising its value to the veterinary profession and wider society in Wales.

Sustainable Farming Scheme

BVA has strong links with Aberystwyth and welcomes its focus on rural mixed practice and support for projects relating to antimicrobial stewardship, bovine TB and diagnostics. Farm vet training is particularly relevant considering the essential role farming plays in the national and local economy, with vets serving as trusted advisors to farmers in regards to animal health and welfare. The Sustainable Farming Scheme in Wales provides a platform to leverage this unique relationship, enabling collaborative efforts for positive outcomes.

Central to this is developing sustainable agricultural practices that minimise environmental impact while prioritising animal health and welfare. Good animal health and welfare not only contributes to climate and productivity goals, but must also be acknowledged as a valuable outcome in its own right.

We know that the Minister is dedicated to recognising the importance of animal health and welfare, and we're pleased that the consultations on the proposed Bill specifically state that regulatory reforms will include improvements in these areas. However, there needs to be more clarity on how the Sustainable Land Management scheme will support animal health and welfare beyond the legal baseline.

To support this, it is vital that the role of the veterinary surgeon continues to be properly recognised by government and policymakers in relevant areas, and we are pleased to have been included as part of the Sustainable Farming Scheme working group, and we look forward to further collaboration as the scheme progresses.

Antimicrobial resistance

When we consider animal health and welfare, it is essential that we do so in relation to "One Health". For those of you who might not recognise this term, it describes the significant cross-over between animal health, human health and the environment in which we all live.

An important example of this intersection — which poses a significant threat to both animal and public health — is antimicrobial resistance.

Wales has emerged as a leader in the fight against antimicrobial resistance in animals and the environment, thanks to the remarkable initiatives of projects like Arwain Vets Cymru and Arwain DGC.

These interlinked programmes work in partnership with key Welsh agricultural stakeholders, veterinary delivery partners, and academic institutions to highlight this pressing issue. Through training, applying new technology, data gathering, and improving understanding, it encourages and demonstrates ways to reduce the need to use antibiotics, and therefore the risk of antimicrobial resistance developing. Their commendable One Health approach to preserving these vital medicines for the wellbeing of both animals and humans sets an exemplary standard.

We're now calling for a sustainable funding model to future-proof the remarkable work Wales has done to date on antimicrobial stewardship in livestock. Furthermore, we should encourage an expanding remit to tackle this issue in companion animals and horses.

Parliamentarians please help us:

During the evening we would like to hear your thoughts on how we can best support you and collaborate to address these important issues.

- We need sustainable provision of veterinary education that can help address workforce shortages and support the future of the Welsh economy. I urge you to ensure that adequate funding is made available to support the veterinary course at Aberystwyth, enabling it to grow and thrive.
- Veterinary engagement will be key to successfully delivering the Sustainable Farming Scheme, which must support animal health & welfare and sustainability. We encourage you to continue working with us to ensure there is adequate veterinary representation as this is developed.
- We need a sustainable funding model to future-proof the work Wales has done to date to tackle AMR and antimicrobial use in livestock, and to expand this impact to pets and horses.

Finally, I would like to say a very big thank you to Collin Willson for all he has done for BVA's Welsh Branch during his term as President. Collin has recently been awarded the RCVS Impact Award for his long and impactful career in veterinary public health and food safety. Of particular note has been his work as Chair of BVA's Welfare at Slaughter working group, where he was instrumental in developing relationships with Halal certification body representatives to further our mutual aims of good welfare from farm to fork – thank you Collin.

I would like to welcome Gwen Rees to her new role as BVA Welsh Branch President. Gwen is a lecturer in Veterinary Science at Aberystwyth University and is currently leading the university's delivery of the Arwain DGC Project. She is a great asset to BVA. Thank you, Gwen.

Very sadly, I would also like to pay tribute to Peter Jinman, who passed away recently. Peter was a leading veterinary surgeon who many of you will have known, as he had considerable connections in Wales. Well-loved across our profession and a valued friend to many, he served as president of both BVA and RCVS. Peter will be sorely missed, but his tremendous legacy to our profession will live on.

Finally, I would like to add a huge thank you to all my colleagues, many of you who are in this room, who are part of BVA Welsh Branch. Your energy, commitment and expertise are hugely valued.

If everyone would please rise and raise your glasses to a toast to "BVA Welsh Branch and to the Welsh veterinary community".

Diolch yn fawr and I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening. I would now like to invite Lesley to speak.