



BVA animal welfare strategy

An evaluation and next steps

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BVA animal welfare strategy – evaluation and next steps

Animal welfare is of high societal importance, and there is an expectation that the veterinary profession must reflect modern scientific understanding of animals’ needs, preferences, pleasures, and pains across veterinary policies and advocacy, coupled with sound ethical reasoning.

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Vets speaking up for animal welfare – BVA animal welfare strategy

In 2016 we published the BVA animal welfare strategy, following a year of consultation led by Sean Wensley, BVA President at the time.

Recognising the primacy of animal welfare for veterinary surgeons, reflected in the declaration that each makes upon admission to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons,¹ the development of the strategy was initiated by our members, who identified animal welfare as the top lobbying priority for BVA as the UK veterinary profession's national representative body.



At the time, it was clear that the field of animal welfare science and its ethical implications was a rapidly developing area. Following the creation of the Five Freedoms, subsequently translated into the five welfare 'needs' incorporated in the Animals Welfare Acts 2006, and more recently the development of the Five Domains model, advocating animal welfare was a multi-stakeholder field with animal welfare scientists, politicians, industry, NGOs, consumers, and animal owners all having a role to play. Additionally, there were trusted professionals in direct daily contact with animal owners - veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses - and an expectation that they would maximise their animal advocacy potential and help to secure good welfare outcomes for animals.

The strategy recognised that, for veterinary professionals, opportunities and challenges occurred at different levels when advocating the best interests of animals:

- Through individual vets and vet nurses directly working with animal keepers and owners;
- Through veterinary practices engaging the surrounding community; and
- Through professional associations aiming to achieve political impact and challenge societal norms

¹"...ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care." <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/#declaration>

The strategy also recognised that highlighting animal welfare problems might sometimes be viewed as a threat by veterinary professionals if long-held attitudes, values, and approaches were challenged. However, there were reputational risks to the veterinary professions of not playing a full and visible role in the advancement of animal welfare, with accusations of complicity in systemic animal welfare problems a real and present danger.

With that in mind, the strategy committed to supporting members through the development of animal welfare resources and tools, prompting ethical debate on animal use, and providing informed national advocacy on behalf of the membership.

The overall aim was to provide a clear, coherent and consistent approach for BVA to advocate good animal welfare, and to support members to maximise their animal advocacy potential and achieve good welfare outcomes for animals. The ultimate priority for the strategy was for BVA and our members to contribute to solutions for real-world priority animal welfare problems. It would also ensure that positive examples of veterinary contributions to improved animal welfare were identified and conveyed to the public, the media, and decision-makers.

Once consensus was reached on a working definition of animal welfare, the consultation process identified six priority areas as the building blocks for specific actions:

Animal welfare assessment
Ethics
Legislation
Advocacy
Education
International

Based on feedback from consultees, the priority areas were developed into overarching aims, with specific actions. Those aims and actions were supported by BVA Council in December 2015, leading to the publication of the strategy in February 2016.

Since then, we have achieved an enormous amount, building on existing campaigns, supporting the veterinary professions to advocate for animal welfare with clients and take part in lobbying activity, encouraging debate, working with key stakeholders to develop resources, influencing policy makers, and inspiring others at an international level.

Animal welfare assessment

Aims

For BVA to assist in developing a profession-wide consensus on animal welfare concepts, definitions, and frameworks, including indicators of positive welfare.

To assist with the dissemination of findings of animal welfare science to BVA members, the public and policy makers.

To ensure BVA animal welfare policies are informed by available animal welfare science.

Progress against actions

1 Promote and apply animal welfare assessment frameworks and tools, including the five welfare needs, FAWC's 'good life' framework, practice-based quality of life assessment tools and pain assessment tools.

- We delivered the BVA Congress session (2018) 'Quality of life isn't just about death' with James Yeates, and accompanying blog, discussing the challenges associated with assessing quality of life in a practice setting. Vet Record covered the key arguments from the session in a subsequent editorial.
- BVA's charity, the Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) delivered the Discussion Forum debate (2018) 'Is insurance compromising quality of life?', addressing the issues of quality of life alongside clients' increasing expectations for their pets to receive human-like healthcare. AWF also hosted a series of Discussion Forum sessions on quality of life and overtreatment: Clinical excellence or overtreatment? (2019), Innovation and overtreatment (2021), and Equine overtreatment (2022).
- We worked with our Ethics and Welfare Group, and subsequently our Ethics and Welfare Advisory Panel, to identify animal welfare assessment frameworks. In our policy position on animal welfare (2021) we called for the welfare of sentient animals to be assessed using up-to-date concepts and tools, including assessment of behaviour and mental wellbeing, as seen in the Animal Welfare Assessment Grid, FAWC's 'Good Life' framework, and Dawkins' 'two questions' approach.

2. Working definition of animal welfare 2015: BVA believes that animal welfare relates to both the physical health and mental wellbeing of the animal, as encapsulated by the five welfare needs. There is a legal duty of care placed upon all animal keepers and owners under UK animal welfare legislation, and in line with this, BVA believes that the five welfare needs are essential to the welfare of any animal.

2 Disseminate animal welfare research findings to BVA members and promote the relevance and importance of animal sentience to the veterinary profession.

- We successfully campaigned for the principle of Article 13 of the Lisbon Treaty, which recognises animals are sentient and puts a duty on the state to have due regard for animal welfare in the development and implementation of policy, to be explicitly enshrined in UK legislation post-Brexit.
- We published our policy position on the recognition of animals as sentient beings (2020) and responded to the Efra Committee inquiry: Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill (2021).
- AWF funded and disseminated welfare assessment focused research projects including: An assessment of the relative welfare impacts of different rat control methods (2020), Recognition of pain in calves and decisions around treatment among farmers in UK (2022), and Confidence and capability to identify and treat stress in horses: A self-reflection by veterinary professionals (2023).



Impact

Timeline of a campaign – a win for animal sentience

- 2017**
 - coordinated a 1,200 signature letter from the veterinary professions jointly with the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) in 2017
 - published a blog on the politics of animal sentience (2017)
- 2018**
 - briefed BVA Honorary Associates, tabled parliamentary questions, and met with the then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove (2018)
 - responded to the Defra consultation on the draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill (2018) and responded to the Efra Committee recommendation that clause 1 covering sentience should be removed from the draft.
- 2020**
 - published our policy position on the recognition of animals as sentient beings (2020)
- 2021**
 - called for animal sentience to be enshrined in law in our manifesto for animals, vets, and public health in Wales and Scotland (2021)
 - responded to the Efra Committee inquiry: Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill (2021).
- 2022**
 - Welcomed the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022.

Aims

For BVA to provide members with advice, guidance and support to assist in moral reasoning and ethical decision-making, which can improve both the quality and consistency of decisions as well as veterinary wellbeing (through resolving stressful ethical conflicts).

For BVA to assist in developing a profession-wide consensus on principal ethical duties, recognising that veterinary surgeons' duties to animals, clients and other veterinary professionals may sometimes conflict.

For BVA to promote consensus on the stakeholders to consider in policy formulation and to consistently account for their interests, for example by using ethical frameworks.

Progress against actions

3 Develop guidance, facilitated discussions and CPD to assist members in ethical decision-making.

We have delivered CPD and thought-provoking discussion across a range of channels including:

- Through our Carpool Cases series, created especially for students:
 - Ethics of breeding,
 - Difficult conversations on the euthanasia of treatable companion animals,
 - Overtreatment - just because we can, does it mean we should? (delivered by AWF),
 - and Is farm animal welfare being overlooked in favour of production? (delivered by AWF).
- Through BVA Congress and BVA Live: Everyday dilemmas - navigating tough cases in practice (2017) and Ethical dilemmas in the BVA Interactive Zone (2022).
- Through our blogs: How do we treat brachycephalic dogs ethically?
- Through face-to-face CPD: A practical approach to the cost-challenged case (2017) and 2018), Dealing with dilemmas - animal welfare and ethics in everyday practice (2017).
- Through our journals: In Practice series 'Everyday Ethics'.
- Through the AWF Discussion Forum sessions on ethical decision-making, What would you do? case studies, and free student talks.
- Through our resources and guidance: Advertising guidelines - Pets in advertising: A social concern, and Guide to Euthanasia.

4 Identify or develop ethical frameworks to apply to BVA policy formulation.

- We worked with our Ethics and Welfare Advisory Panel to develop a framework for ethical review, which is applied during the development of policy.
- We ensure that the Ethics and Welfare Advisory Panel is represented on all BVA working groups, and the Chair of the panel is a member of Policy Committee and BVA Council.

Impact

Ethical considerations, unintended consequences, possible courses of action and the appropriate balance of animal welfare, environmental impact, the interests of citizens and consumers, and veterinary professional ethics are duly considered throughout BVA's policy development process, leading to robust evidence-led positions which are credible and relevant. Ethical debate is mainstreamed and accessible to the professions.

Evolution of animal welfare goals case study - non-traditional companion animals

- Our updated policy position on non-traditional companion animals was adopted by BVA Council in December 2022, following 18 months of work from the Non-Traditional Companion Animals Working Group.
- The position replaced BVA's 2015 policy statement and represented an evolution by the veterinary profession towards advocating ethical principles, including the idea that kept animals should experience a Good Life and that enhancing, protecting, and securing the health and welfare of animals is the veterinary profession's fundamental purpose.
- In particular, the position recognised that the scientific assessment and acceptance of fish sentience had developed significantly since the previous statement, giving attention to the low-welfare shipping of fish by online retailers, and the sometimes-controversial matter of wild-capture of fish for the pet trade.
- The group consulted and responded to a wide range of stakeholders, including industry and non-governmental organisations, and benefited greatly from species-specialist representation from the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS) and Fish Vet Society (FVS). The result is a balanced position which takes into account the One Health challenges associated with the pet trade, whilst prioritising animal welfare.

PROGRESS AND IMPACT Legislation

Aims

For BVA members to be supported and guided on animal welfare legislation and its enforcement.

Progress against actions

- 5 Consult with local authorities and government veterinary surgeons on areas where updated guidance and refresher courses on current legislation would be useful.
 - We worked with BSAVA, BVZS, the Companion Animal Sector Council (CASC) and Canine and Feline Sector Group (CFSG) to develop resources to support private veterinary surgeons and local authority veterinary inspectors in undertaking their respective roles under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) England Regulations 2018.
 - We worked with Local Authorities and Trading Standards on our #CutTheCrop campaign calling for a ban sell or importing ear-cropped dogs (2021)
 - We updated our guidance on Dangerous Dogs (2019)
- 6 Develop and promote guidance on reporting suspected animal welfare breaches, including suspected non-accidental injury.
 - AWF, in partnership with the Links Group, updated and published Suspected Abuse of Animals and People: Guidance for the veterinary team with the accompanying template practice protocol: Recognising abuse in animals and humans.
 - We worked with SSPCA to empower members to support animal welfare investigations through a webinar on 'Veterinary forensics, the link and professional responsibility: what you need to know about animal welfare casework'.
- 7 Develop a strategic relationship with the local authorities' National Animal Health and Welfare Panel to, for example, develop guidance on enforcement.
 - We worked with Trading Standards and the National Animal Health and Welfare Panel to develop guidance and accompanying compliance flowcharts for illegally imported pets in England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Impact

Members are supported with simple and accessible guidance and at-a-glance flowcharts on some of the key issues being faced in practice. Resources are valued and regularly accessed by vets in practice dealing with illegally imported pets, suspected non-accidental injuries, or dangerous dogs.



AWF and the Links Group

In 2013 AWF delivered a Discussion Forum session 'Grasping the 'golden moment' - the vet's role in tackling abuse in animals and humans', which led to a total of £74,000 in funding being secured from the Margaret Giffen Charitable Trust. This funding was used to develop the Links Group's guidance and contribute to:

- Resource packs for veterinary practice teams
- Vet schools programme, with the Links Group now speaking at every vet school on the subject of non-accidental injury and recognising and acting on abuse.
- Vet team CPD, with the Links Group running a series of courses and webinars to engage the veterinary profession and train them to recognise and act on concerns about non-accidental injury or other forms of abuse.
- Online training module for human health professionals to help them recognise and act on any animal welfare concerns within homes they visit, and understand what these issues may indicate for the safety of any vulnerable people living in that home.
- Pet fostering network enabling pet owners to flee an abusive relationship without leaving their cat or dog behind.

The work of the Links Group has directly led to prosecutions for animal abuse, children being removed from abusive homes, and the pet fostering scheme has directly enabled survivors to leave abusive situations.

AWF has continued to promote the work of the Links Group through the Discussion Forum, encouraging vets to engage with this important cause.

PROGRESS AND IMPACT

Advocacy

Aims

For BVA and BVA specialist divisions to develop policy positions and campaigns to raise awareness of animal welfare problems and to promote evidence-based improvements.

For BVA to help ensure that animal owners and policy makers understand the animal welfare costs associated with different types of animal use to inform ethical appraisal and debate.

For BVA to assist veterinary professionals to be effective animal advocates. For veterinary leadership in animal welfare to be recognised by the public.

Progress against actions

- 8 Work closely with BVA specialist divisions, members and committees, to develop a list of specific animal welfare problems on which to develop positions and proactively campaign.
- We surveyed all species-specialist divisions of BVA and carried out a desk-based review of UK animal welfare problems to create a list of priority animal welfare problems, prioritised and approved by BVA Council (2017).
 - AWF funded a Delphi research project Expert consensus on animal welfare priority issues in the UK. The research was presented at the AWF Discussion Forum (2019) and is used by other charities and grant funders to guide their work.

Impact

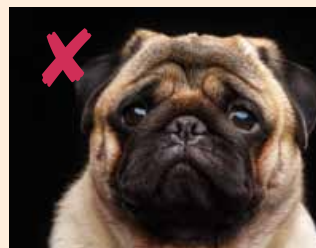
- 9 Members are supported to actively engage in BVA campaigns through the provision of toolkits, underpinned by evidence-based policy positions on priority animal welfare problems.

> Abnormal behaviour



> Analgesia in calf disbudding and castration

> Anthelmintics and anthelmintic resistance in livestock

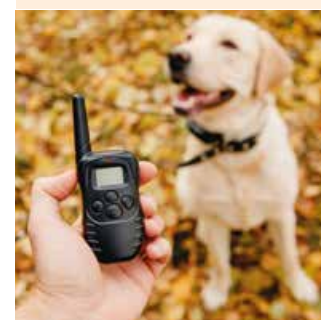


> Brachycephalic dogs

> Companion animal obesity (dogs, cats, horses, donkeys and rabbits)

> Crustacean welfare, through position on the recognition of animals as sentient beings

> Extreme conformation



> Aversive training devices in dogs and cats



> Feather-pecking in laying hens

> Goat kid disbudding and analgesia



> Housing pet rabbits in pairs or compatible groups

> Non-traditional companion animals

> Sheep castration, tail docking, and pain management

> Surplus male production animals



> Sustainable finfish aquaculture



> Tail-biting in pigs

> Welfare of animals at slaughter



> Welfare of livestock during transport

> The use and sale of snares for the control of free-ranging wildlife

> The use and sale of rodent glue traps

- 10 When appropriate, act on recommendations by credible animal welfare bodies such as independent advisory bodies.
- We referenced reports from a range of independent advisory bodies across a number of our policy positions, including welfare of animals at slaughter, UK sustainable animal agriculture, and non-traditional companion animals, as well as in consultation responses and submissions to select committees.
 - We collaborated with colleagues from the Wild Animal Welfare Committee on ensuring the licensing regime for glue traps use is sufficiently robust.
 - BVA Animal Welfare Foundation regularly invited speakers from a range of independent advisory bodies to the annual AWF Discussion Forum.
- 11 Develop media toolkits to support veterinary professionals in engaging with local and regional media on topical animal welfare problems and BVA animal welfare campaigns.
- We developed the BVA media guide for vets (second edition 2019) - a resource for vets to engage with their local media on topical issues and animal welfare campaigns.
 - We developed the #BreedtoBreathe toolkit including social media infographics and a template letter asking companies to stop using brachycephalic breeds in their advertising and marketing.
 - We developed the BVA guide on responsible use of pet animals in advertising to provide good practice guidance and support decision-making.
 - Our campaign #CutTheCrop included a toolkit of graphics and a template letter to send to retailers about the sale of ear cropping and/or ear splinting kits.



- 12 Develop templates to assist members in engaging with politicians on BVA animal welfare campaigns.
- We provided members with template letters to engage with parliamentary candidates on key pledges ahead of elections in Scotland and Wales (2021), and ahead of Northern Ireland Assembly elections (2022).
 - We developed a template letter for members to call on their MP (England only) to oppose proposals for compulsory microchip scanning (2021), and more recently a template letter calling for progression on the Kept Animals Bill (2023)
 - We use social media to link veterinary professionals to our public affairs priorities and the activity of our parliamentary Honorary Associates and Honorary Members, so it can be shared, re-tweeted, and achieve greater reach and influence.
- 13 Develop school packs to facilitate veterinary engagement with school children on animal welfare principles and concepts.
- As a member of the Veterinary Animal Welfare Coalition - which also includes the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA), British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS), Blue Cross, PDSA, and RSPCA, we launched a set of stickers to coincide with the 10-year anniversary of the Animal Welfare Acts as an educational tool for vets, teachers and parents (2017).
 - We teamed up with SSPCA to jointly host an outreach event 'Vetastic Adventures', to promote veterinary careers to children and their parents, reaching over 6000 children from schools across Scotland (2021).
 - We supported the Vet Team in a Box initiative, a resource to encourage secondary school-aged pupils to consider a career in the veterinary professions (2022).

- 14 Continue supporting the Animal Welfare Education Alliance, including its campaign to include animal welfare in the national curriculum.
- We included a call for animal welfare to be part of the national curriculum in our manifesto pledges for the General Election 2019 and the Scotland and Wales parliamentary elections (2021).
- 15 Explore options for promoting existing animal welfare advocacy training.
- We embedded debate on animal welfare subjects into BVA Congress at London Vet Show and BVA Live programmes, including 'What is the price of animal welfare? How the cost-of-living crisis will impact all creatures great and small' (2022) and 'What about welfare when it comes to sustainable food?'
 - We continued to support the AWF annual Discussion Forum, which brings together expert speakers, veterinary and animal welfare professionals, students and parliamentarians to confront current welfare issues and inspire change.
- 16 Gather positive case studies of veterinary professionals improving animal welfare for BVA to highlight to the media.
- We secured recognition for Dr Collin Willson via the RCVS Impact Award for his work on welfare at slaughter, working alongside halal certification bodies.
 - We highlighted the international recognition for Paula Boyden, honoured with the WSAVA One Health Award for her work as chair of the Links Group.
 - We secured international recognition for BVA past president Simon Doherty via the WVA Global Veterinary Awards, winning the One Health category and being named World Vet of the Year 2024.

Impact

We teamed up with SSPCA to jointly host an outreach event '**Vetastic Adventures**'



scottishspca.org/assets/vetastic-quiz/story.html

scottishspca.org/assets/vetastic-adventure/story.html

Our **#BreedtoBreathe** toolkit challenged companies not to use brachycephalic breeds in their advertising and marketing.



PROGRESS AND IMPACT

Education

Aims

For BVA to assist veterinary professionals in undertaking CPD related to AWSEL and to promote inclusion of AWSEL in under- and postgraduate veterinary education.

Progress against actions

- 17 Explore the ways in which animal welfare science, ethics and law (AWSEL) is currently delivered to veterinary undergraduates as a Day One Competency, and further developed through the Professional Development Phase (PDP).³
 - We published our policy position on UK undergraduate veterinary education (2019) calling for awareness and training in animal welfare, science, ethics and law to be integrated across undergraduate curricula, and for PDP to provide opportunities to apply moral reasoning and ethical decision-making.
 - Our response to the RCVS Graduate Outcomes consultation (2019) called for animal welfare to be at the heart of any new Day One Competences model.
- 18 Map the availability of AWSEL CPD training, support the development of further courses, and explore the development of a BVA online hub as a repository for AWSEL resources.
 - We met regularly with colleagues at the Animal Welfare Science Ethics and Law Veterinary Association (AWSELVA) to identify opportunities for collaboration, including contributions to the My Vet Future online careers hub.

3. The Professional Development Phase was subsequently replaced by the Veterinary Graduate Development Programme (VetGDP), with the last PDP enrolment in 2021.



Impact

The importance of AWSEL as a key element of undergraduate veterinary education is recognised in the refreshed RCVS Day One Competences.

Champions of AWSEL were recognised by the veterinary community, including the Chiron Award awarded to Ed Varley, founder member of AWSELVA and past AWF Trustee, in acknowledgement of lifetime achievements.



Aims

For BVA to develop and maintain close links with appropriate international animal welfare initiatives and groups for two-way collaboration, coordination and knowledge transfer.

To ensure that animal welfare is recognised as a sustainable development goal, and to explore and promote the links between animal welfare and other One Health objectives such as biodiversity loss and rising global meat consumption.

Progress against actions

19 Develop closer relationships with the medical profession to advance One Health at an association level and to allow the roles and status of animals to be promoted.

- We led the formation of the One Health Coordination Group, including members from the Royal College of Nursing, the British Dental Association, and the Royal Society of Public Health. In 2019 we published the One Health in Action Report, including case studies from the medical professions.
- At BVA Congress 2022 the Wooldridge memorial lecture was delivered by Dr Matt Morgan, intensive care doctor and researcher - How kissing a frog can save your life: why doctors should learn from vets.

20 Develop a position on humane, sustainable animal agriculture that includes the importance of animal welfare in sustainable development, defines stakeholders that the veterinary profession should consistently account for (those whose interests would be affected by decisions made) and considers how their interests should be weighed by an animal welfare focused profession.

- We published our policy position on UK sustainable animal agriculture (2019), calling for safeguarding the highest standards of health and welfare for production animals to be recognised as a key sustainability objective, in the wider One Health agenda.
- In our policy position on UK sustainable finfish aquaculture we recognised that sustainable aquaculture should be undertaken in a way that is environmentally, ethically, and economically acceptable for consumers, producers and wider society.
- AWF delivered the sessions 'Farming, sustainability and welfare' at the Discussion Forum 2021 and 'Environmental sustainability, diet, and animal welfare' in 2023.

21 Work with the British Medical Association to understand its policy position on meat consumption and explore joint messaging to link food demand management with human health, animal welfare and environmental protection.

- We promoted the concept of "less and better", in which UK consumers reduce the quantity of animal-derived products purchased, whilst maintaining proportional spend, in order to buy better, higher quality, and critically, more welfare-friendly foods. The launch was accompanied by a blog 'Less and better - a call to value our food', which considered the One Health approach and role of the medical professions.

22 Develop a position on the veterinary profession's response and commitment to addressing biodiversity loss, including preventing associated animal welfare harms and promoting benefits of biodiversity to human wellbeing.

- In our policy position on UK sustainable animal agriculture we recognised biodiversity as a key sustainability objective, calling for animal agriculture-related policies to address the use of natural resources, and the protection and conservation of species, habitats and biodiversity in order to better protect the shared environment.
- We published our policy position on the responsible use of parasitides for cats and dogs, addressing the role of vets, clients, and other stakeholders in balancing animal health, human health, and the health of the wider ecosystem. Our associated five-point plan supports veterinary professionals in their decision making, and our waiting room graphics guide clients on the safe use of parasitides.
- At BVA Live (2022) we asked attendees to share their thoughts on how we can move towards a greener veterinary profession. This was then turned into a

graphic, of which a stand-out theme was the need for a biodiverse world, with links between reduced biodiversity and pandemics recognised.

- With Vet Sustain, SPVS and BVNA, we launched the Greener Veterinary Practice Checklist to help veterinary workplaces operate in a more environmentally friendly way. The checklist includes enhancing on-site green spaces, reducing energy consumption, waste management and promoting biodiversity in surroundings. We also ran an associated campaign, with blog posts and webinars providing advice on how to be greener, as well as highlighting the benefits of doing so to both wildlife and human wellbeing.

23 Review BVA's own food procurement policy in light of an agreed position on humane, sustainable animal agriculture.

- We developed a food procurement policy in 2016, which we also ask our venue partners to comply with for BVA events.

24 Link advocacy on priority animal welfare problems to increased consumer awareness of assurance schemes that seek to address these problems.

- We campaigned on #Choose Assured, encouraging the veterinary profession and the wider public to choose UK farm assured products, which utilise veterinary expertise to set high standards of animal health and welfare and empower shoppers to make sustainable and ethically informed choices.

25 Assist BVA members to understand different farm animal assurance schemes and to signpost the public in a professional and ethically justifiable way towards those that promote higher animal welfare.

- We published our policy position on farm assurance schemes (2017) and accompanying #ChooseAssured UK Farm Assurance Scheme infographic

26 Examine the possible merits of a Welfare Stewardship Scheme and develop a position if deemed to be beneficial.

- In our Brexit and the Veterinary Profession report (2017) we called on UK governments and industry to work in partnership to develop a farm animal welfare stewardship programme, focused on health and welfare outcomes, and using public money to financially incentivise animal health, welfare, disease surveillance, biodiversity and environmental stewardship as public goods.
- We published our Veterinary Vision for Post-Brexit Agriculture (2017), proposing an animal welfare stewardship programme as a means of delivering animal health and welfare outcomes as public goods.
- We contributed to the development of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway for England, co-chairing the veterinary coordination sub-group. We also called for veterinary involvement in the design and delivery of post-CAP agriculture programmes in the devolved nations of the UK.

27 Explore the possible benefits of mandatory method of production labelling of food of animal origin and develop a position if deemed to be beneficial.

- We published our policy position on welfare of animals at slaughter calling for meat and meat products from animals that have not been stunned before slaughter to be clearly labelled so that consumers can make informed purchasing choices.
- With species divisions, we called for a UK-wide approach to food labelling which is simple, accessible, and helps to communicate the value of improved animal health and welfare to farmers, consumers, and retailers.

28 Offer further support to the campaign for a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare.

- We supported the World Animal Protection (WAP) campaign for a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare in 2006 and have continued to advocate for some of its key principles, including the recognition of animals as sentient beings.

29 Develop and strengthen strategic relationships with international animal welfare-focused professional organisations.

- We built on our relationship with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) through active engagement on policy development, particularly through FVE working groups. The FVE Animal Welfare Working Group was chaired by BVA past president Sean Wensley, leading to the publication of the FVE animal welfare strategy, which mirrored our Strategy.
- BVA past president Sean Wensley was awarded the World Veterinary Association (WVA) Global Animal Welfare Award for spearheading the development of the BVA animal welfare strategy.
- BVA past president Simon Doherty was awarded the WVA Global One Health Award.

Impact

Animal welfare in UK agriculture is recognised and incentivised as a public good, with mandatory production labelling progressed in a meaningful way which supports consumers choice. The concept of One Health is widely recognised, with vets at the forefront of championing the inextricable link between the health and wellbeing of people, animals, and the environment in order to effect change.

We called for safeguarding the highest standards of health and welfare for production animals to be recognised as a key sustainability objective



What next for vets speaking up for animal welfare?

Since the publication of the BVA animal welfare strategy in 2016, animal welfare has continued to grow in profile, with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) recognising animal welfare as

“...a complex and multi-faceted subject with scientific, ethical, economic, cultural, social, religious and political dimensions ... attracting growing interest from civil society”¹.

Changing understanding of animal welfare

With developments in animal welfare science, we are now better able to characterise animal welfare, and frameworks for assessing and managing animal welfare have evolved.

Historically, animal welfare assessment and management has centred on identifying and minimising negative effects on animal welfare.

More recently, animal welfare assessment has shifted towards models that strive not only to minimise negative welfare but also to maximise positive welfare.

Such approaches recognise that animals used by humans or under the care of humans should have, at least, ‘a life worth living’, with a focus on moving towards all animals having a ‘good life’.

Our own definition of animal welfare has evolved, from focusing on the legally required five welfare needs to recognising that to protect, advocate for and enhance animal welfare, the welfare of sentient animals should be assessed using up-to-date concepts, tools and scientific approaches. This includes awareness and assessments of behaviour as both a welfare indicator and welfare determinant, and assessment of mental wellbeing.



We have turned towards the Five Domains model of welfare assessment², which differs from that of the ‘Five Freedoms’ and ‘Five Needs’ by distinguishing between the physical and functional factors that influence an animal’s welfare and the overall mental/emotional or ‘affective’ state of the animal arising from these factors.

Domains 1-3 largely focus on animal-care based inputs and internal survival-related factors, eg. internal imbalances or disturbances which have nutritional, environmental and health origins. Domain 4 focuses on external situation-related factors and the behavioural outputs animals demonstrate in response to their external conditions, eg. external restrictive confinement or restraint, or otherwise unusual space availability, and/or negative impacts of the presence or absence of other animals (including humans).

Crucially, the model emphasises that what matters to animals in terms of welfare is their subjective experiences, and that physiological mechanisms and affective (emotional) responses interact dynamically.

One of the many strengths of the Five Domains model is the clarity it provides that merely minimising or resolving negative physical or mental states does not necessarily result in positive welfare, but may only provide, at best, a life worth living. To have a ‘good life’, animals need more than this; they must have the opportunity to have positive experiences, such as physical health, satiation and opportunities for positive environmental and social interactions.

² Mellor DJ, Beausoleil NJ, Littlewood KE, McLean AN, McGreevy PD, Jones B, Wilkins C. The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human-Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare. *Animals* (Basel). 2020 Oct 14;10(10):1870. doi: 10.3390/ani10101870. PMID: 33066335; PMCID: PMC7602120 and Mellor D. J. (2016). Updating animal welfare thinking: moving beyond the “Five freedoms” towards a “life worth living”. *Animals* 6 (3), 21. doi: 10.3390/ani6030021

¹ <https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-do/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare/>



Further clarification of the veterinary profession's primary animal welfare leadership responsibility

We are clear about our duty to champion animal welfare more broadly across society – beyond the bounds of animals under our direct care – and to challenge activities that compromise animal welfare.

BVA's 2021 policy position on Animal Welfare clarified that 'Overall, the veterinary profession has a dual duty – to advocate for the best interests of animals under the care of individual veterinary surgeons (at individual level), as well as to advocate for changes and solutions to address the root causes of animal welfare problems (at community, national and international levels).'

Similarly, FVE's 2022 animal welfare strategy promotes the profession's aim 'to make the world a better place for animals', while FVE together with the American Veterinary Medical Association and Canadian Veterinary Medical Association assert that animals under human stewardship should be respected and experience both a Good Life and a humane death.

BVA's 2021 Animal Welfare policy position also emphasises that there is a limit to acceptable animal welfare compromises associated with each area of animal use (such as for companionship, food, sport etc). If these limits are reached and cannot be adequately addressed, the position clarifies that the veterinary profession will oppose that use or practice.



Social science and understanding human behaviour

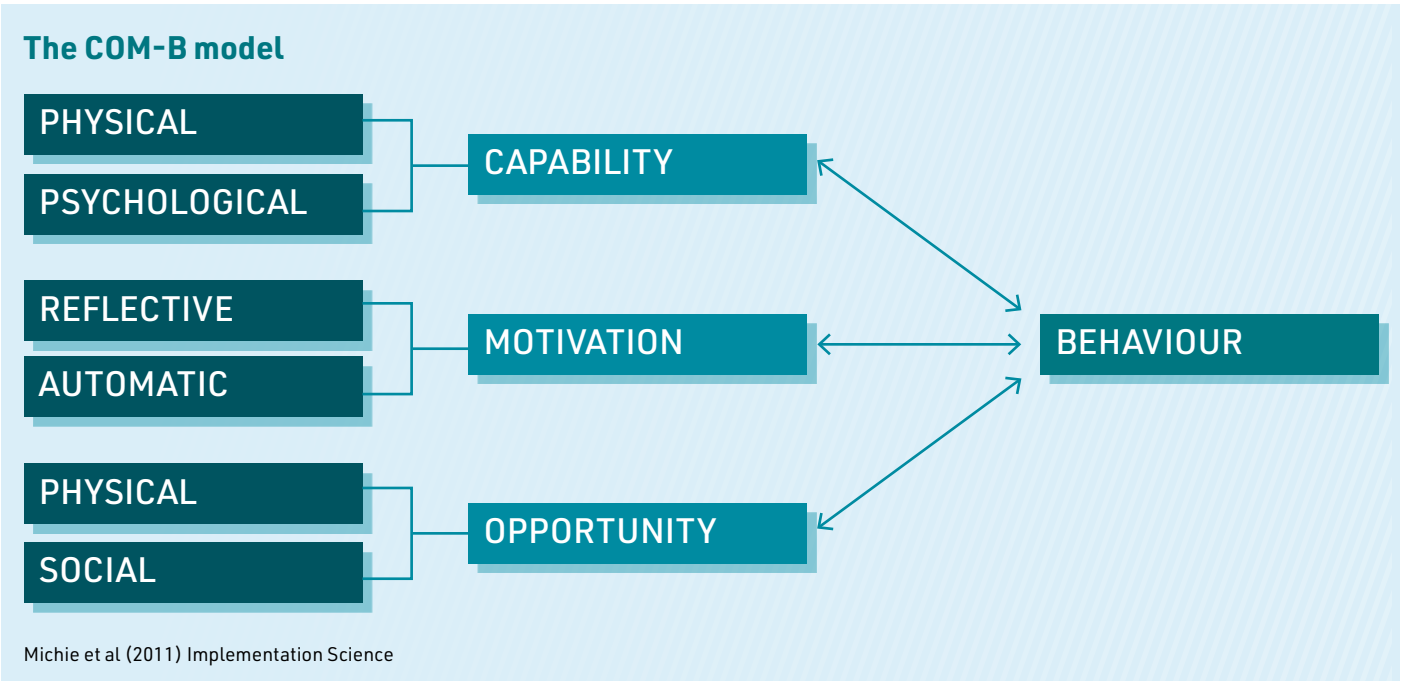
Recent years have also seen growing recognition and acceptance of behavioural science, and it is rapidly becoming central to thinking about animal welfare challenges. Few animal welfare challenges can be solved without an accompanying change in the behaviour of people who interact with those animal populations. Understanding that behaviour is often a central key that can unlock animal welfare improvements.

There are a variety of methods and models that are used by research groups and NGOs that work in this area. These recognise that a range of different factors influence human behaviour beyond simple knowledge transfer – knowing something does not mean you will do it, and awareness doesn't always result in behaviour change.

Building a comprehensive picture of the challenges and influences that people experience in their day to day life supports a better understanding of the problem, the barriers, and the enablers for any behaviour change that has a positive impact on animals. An important component of this is an awareness of the wider systems that individual decision making exists within; for example, the decision to eat sugary foods is influenced by advertising and food policy.

Two common frameworks used to evaluate human decision making with animal welfare are the COM-B model (shown below) and the Health Belief Model³.

Breaking down the problem and understanding its context can result in interventions that are tailored and often very simple. These can be the key to addressing animal welfare challenges and effecting real and permanent positive change.



3. Rosenstock, I. M. (1966). Why people use health services. Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, 44, 94-127.

Many of the commitments outlined in the Defra Action Plan for Animal Welfare have yet to be realised

A changing social, economic, and political landscape

In the years since the publication of the animal welfare strategy, we have seen significant change and disruption; from the UK's departure from the European Union and the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, to the more recent cost-of-living crisis – all of which have impacted and continue to impact in myriad ways on animal welfare and the way animal owners, veterinary professionals, producers, policy makers, and other stakeholders view the social licence around the use of animals.

All of this is of course set against a backdrop of the global emergency of climate change and debate over the role of technology in sustainability and climate change mitigation.

The last eight years have, more than ever, demonstrated the importance of the role of the veterinary professions in advocating animal welfare, and all the opportunities and challenges that come with that responsibility and privilege.



Brexit

In 2017 we published our report, 'Brexit and the veterinary profession', including a chapter devoted to animal welfare. In the report, we called on the UK Government to ensure a strong, risk-based framework to protect animal health and welfare which would endure post-Brexit, and for animal welfare standards to be maintained in trade negotiations. We also stressed the importance of partnership working, to develop a farm animal welfare stewardship programme funded through domestic agricultural policies, and called for legislation to ensure clear labelling of imported goods. Mandatory method-of-production and slaughter labelling with welfare outcome safeguards was also a specific recommendation.

Although progress has been made, including the recognition of animal sentience, the development of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway for England, and a call for evidence on method of production labelling, there is still much more to be done. Many of the commitments outlined in the Defra Action Plan for Animal Welfare have yet to be realised and with the failure to progress the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, there remain some key animal welfare issues where the UK risks being left behind the rest of Europe. Post-Brexit trade negotiations have also set a concerning precedent that could see British farm produce undercut by imports from countries with lower animal welfare standards, with opportunities for the UK economy being at the expense of the UK's high reputation for animal welfare.

Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a series of national lockdowns with government advising that people must stay at home except for very limited purposes. The first of these saw veterinary practices recognised as providing essential services, which were vital to ensure safe food production and safeguard animal welfare. This meant that veterinary professionals could continue to work, providing urgent treatment and emergency care where animal welfare would be compromised by delays, and carrying out activities essential to maintaining the current and future food supply chain. During this time, some vets sadly experienced abuse and undue pressure from clients, whilst working hard to provide essential care for animals and exercising their clinical and professional judgement in order to balance animal health and welfare, public health, client safety and the safety of their teams.

Later that year, we responded to the Animal Welfare Committee call for evidence on animal welfare issues related to Covid-19 restrictions, in which we focused on the operation and sustainability of veterinary practices, the anticipated financial downturn which would likely impact on the ability of clients to pay for veterinary services, and the increase in irresponsible pet purchasing decisions, all of which were likely leading to poorer welfare outcomes for animals.

In 2021, the BVA Animal Welfare Foundation Discussion Forum featured the session 'Covid-19: Upholding animal welfare in the face of a pandemic' where panellists discussed new and emerging animal welfare problems, the impact of the pandemic on veterinary practices and welfare charities, and the effects of it on production animals and equines, giving an overview of the pandemic and how it changed the profession.

Although the worst of Covid-19 itself has passed, the direct and indirect impacts on animal welfare decision-making will be keenly felt for years to come. The threat of further pandemics linked to interaction with wildlife also looms large, with the role of the veterinary profession in surveillance for new and emerging disease a key contribution to the One Health agenda.

Cost-of-living crisis

More recently, the cost-of-living crisis has begun to impact on animal welfare. Our 2023 Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey revealed that almost all (99%) of vets across the UK had seen pets in the last 12 months who should have been brought to them for treatment earlier. This represented a significant increase of almost 20% since 2018 and equated to an estimated 1 in 5 pets not receiving timely treatment.

When asked about the main reasons for the delay, 91% vets reported financial reasons as a key factor. More than half of vets (52%) said the number of clients reporting difficulty covering the cost of preventative veterinary care for their animal had increased compared to 2021. This figure rose to 70% when it came to covering the cost of diagnostic care and treatment.

We have encouraged owners to help to reduce the need for vet visits by taking preventative measures, to take out pet insurance, and to discuss financial concerns with their vet to help find the right treatment for each individual's circumstances, while ensuring the animal's welfare remains the priority.

The cost-of-living crisis has also meant an increase in economic euthanasia, and the increased risk of moral injury and burnout that attracts for the veterinary professionals involved.

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How have we identified new actions in support of animal welfare?



Sustainability

In 2019, 89% of vets said that they would like to play a more active role in the UK environmental sustainability agenda and, in recent years, we have advanced our sustainability activities, driving progress on both animal welfare and environmental problems. The recognition of animal welfare as a goal within the sustainability agenda is a key objective for the veterinary professions, captured in our position on UK sustainable animal agriculture, sustainable finfish aquaculture, and in FVE's animal welfare strategy.

The professions' desire to drive ethical and environmental sustainability are linked. A key element of the professions' environmental responsibility derives from the primary professional aim of helping make the world a better place for animals. Environmentally destructive processes impact on the welfare of individual living animals and that of future generations of animals. Habitat destruction, over-exploitation, pollution (including increasing greenhouse gas emissions resulting in climate change), and the introduction of non-native species, all introduce potential impacts on the quality of individual animals' lives. The profession's mission to protect and enhance animal welfare, including for those animals beyond the bounds of direct care such as wild animals, is increasingly compelling the promotion of environmental stewardship.

As well as endorsing the World Veterinary Association's (WVA) position on the Global Climate Change Emergency, published in time for World Earth Day 2021, we continue to offer practical advice and guidance. Our campaign 'Working towards a greener profession' introduced the greener veterinary practice webinar series in collaboration with Vet Sustain and VDS Training, based on the topics covered in the 'Greener Veterinary Practice Checklist'. We have also developed resources such as the 'One Health in Action Report' and the 'Sustainability in the vet profession action plan'. We have also addressed

our own green credentials, achieving the Investors in the Environment's (iIE) highest 'green'-level accreditation for improving our sustainability performance, subsequently being named iIE's Sustainability Influencer 2022 for inspiring change beyond our core activity.

Yet, there is much more to be done. The profession must be live to the risk that a focus on environmental sustainability could lead to animal welfare being sidelined by government and other stakeholders, be that through resource allocation or within policies themselves where animal welfare harms may be seen as justified if those harms are argued to reduce carbon footprint.

Instead, the role of good animal welfare in supporting and promoting environmental sustainability must also be recognised and fully embedded. In 2019 the Council of the European Union published their 'Conclusions on animal welfare', the first being:

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: Emphasises that good animal welfare is an integral part of sustainable animal production.

Similarly, regarding the European Commission's Farm to Fork Strategy, Commissioner Kyriakides said:

"Animal welfare is an essential element of the Strategy. It is a vision that can lead us to sustainable livestock production and to a much-needed change of our current farming system. I believe that proper reform of animal welfare legislation will support this goal. It will bring about positive change both in accordance to our ethical values as well as in respecting our citizens' calls."

Stakeholder survey

In early 2022 we repeated the original questionnaire, which had been developed to map stakeholders' perceptions and expectations of BVA's role in promoting animal welfare. This time we asked stakeholders to think about the role of vets and vet nurses in improving welfare through their direct interactions, the role of employers and workplaces, and the role of veterinary associations.

The survey attracted responses from NGOs, academics, government, farm assurance schemes, and others.

What we heard

It was essential that the veterinary professions kept up-to-date with animal welfare science and assessment frameworks, which must include behavioural science and mental wellbeing as key indicators of welfare.

There was support for the valued role of the professions as a source of evidence-led and impartial preventive healthcare information and advice, and recognition of the challenges faced when balancing client expectations and financial barriers to achieve optimal welfare outcomes for animals. More effective use of allied professions was also seen as an important element for achieving good welfare.

From a One Health perspective, the link between animal welfare, productivity, and environmental sustainability was recognised, with solutions to the root causes of welfare issues being seen as an area where the veterinary professions should be showing leadership.

BVA specialist divisions workshop

Our specialist divisions are part of the wider BVA organisation, are represented throughout our structures, and play a key role in the development of our policy positions. It was therefore essential that we sought their views, separately to the wider stakeholders list.

We did this through direct engagement at our annual divisions workshop, asking each representative to tell us what they and others had done well, what could be done better, and how we could work together more effectively to demonstrate leadership on animal welfare.

What we heard

Joint working on specific campaigns was highly valued, as was collaborating to develop joint positions on priority animal welfare problems, and the development of support and guidance for the professions.

Further opportunities for joint working should be identified, ensuring that all sectors of the profession were given an opportunity to play their part in advocating for animal welfare, with a cohesive voice presented to government and the media.



Consultation via BVA's committees

We subsequently invited BVA Council to identify opportunities for demonstrating leadership on animal welfare under three key headings of post-Brexit, post-Covid, and environmental sustainability and One Health. We also heard from our Branch Councils in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and members of our Ethics and Welfare Advisory Panel and our Policy Committee.

What we heard

It was clear that proactive lobbying on issues such as animal sentience and campaigns such as #CutTheCrop, were highly valued and demonstrated the impact of BVA's leadership and the power of joint working towards shared aims. Further opportunities to influence animal welfare legislation in the wake of Brexit, collaborating to ensure joined-up approaches to animal health and welfare policy across the UK, should be identified and pursued.

The role of telemedicine and technology, used appropriately, presents an opportunity to alleviate pressure on veterinary teams and potentially improve animal welfare. There is a need for the professions to establish and re-establish themselves as the key source of reliable information, with communication channels tailored for the twenty-first century.

There was growing recognition and acceptance that animal welfare was inextricably linked to human health and environmental sustainability. There is an opportunity to raise the profile of the profession as a reliable and impartial source of information on One Health, particularly given the potential for future pandemics originating from wildlife.

A new set of areas for action

This new set of areas for action adds to and builds on the valuable principles of the BVA animal welfare strategy 2016.

In 2025 where the legitimacy and importance of veterinary professionals being advocates for animal welfare is embedded at an individual and societal level, we are well placed to refresh our focus, whilst retaining and continuing to champion the achievements that have gone before.



Enabling veterinary professionals as leaders in animal welfare

- Promote the **essential role of the veterinary professions** as a source of evidence-led and ethics-led advice on animal welfare, and the **importance of partnership working** with other experts.
- Support the professions in **animal welfare decision-making** and communicate the challenges of balancing client circumstances, preferences, expectations, financial considerations and environmental sustainability considerations against optimal welfare outcomes for the animals under their care.
- Continue **joint working with specialist divisions** and other stakeholders to develop positions on the root causes of animal welfare issues, ensuring that the veterinary professions show leadership on solutions.
- Disseminate developments in **animal welfare science** and promote welfare assessment frameworks which recognise animal behaviour as one of the key indicators of welfare and mental wellbeing, working closely with AWF.
- Facilitate discussion to inform the veterinary view on **new and emerging ethical concepts** for animals.

Influencing, educating, and achieving change

- Support the professions to recognise that there are a **range of interventions** beyond simple knowledge transfer that encourage animal owners to exhibit behaviour that impacts positively on animal welfare.
- Collaborate with key partners to **proactively lobby on priority animal welfare issues**, presenting a cohesive voice to policy makers.

National and international advocacy

- Campaign for animal welfare standards to be maintained in **trade deals**, strive to protect British farm produce being undercut, and promote the critical role of vets in maintaining and progressing the UK's reputation for good animal welfare.
- Influence government to ensure that the UK demonstrates leadership on key animal welfare issues and does not get left behind the rest of Europe.
- Work with others to promote the explicit inclusion of animal welfare in the UN's revised **Sustainable Development Goals**.

Technology

- Explore the role of **technology and AI** in improving animal welfare cross-species and support the professions to integrate innovative approaches responsibly.

The veterinary team

- Embrace and promote the role **allied professionals** can play in contributing to good animal welfare outcomes, in partnership with the veterinary team.
- Support and promote diversity of **veterinary business models** to optimise access to veterinary services.

Environmental sustainability

- Support the veterinary professions to promote the role of animal welfare in **environmental sustainability and One Health**.
- Develop a position on the status of **wild animals** in relation to public expectation of veterinary care and provide supporting resources for vets.



PUTTING ANIMAL WELFARE AT THE HEART OF VETERINARY SCIENCE.

BVA's charity, the Animal Welfare Foundation supports the veterinary profession to use its unique position to drive improvements in animal welfare. The charity funds research, supports veterinary education, and encourages debate on key animal welfare issues, and is a key partner in progressing the new areas for action identified in the BVA animal welfare strategy.

Members of BVA set up AWF as an independent charity to work directly with the veterinary profession to improve the welfare of animals in the UK. As BVA's charity AWF has a close working relationship with the Association, and BVA remain one of its key stakeholders and supporters.

Education and debate

Through the annual Discussion Forum AWF inspires the profession to confront controversial animal welfare issues through open and honest debate. AWF student talks give veterinary undergraduates the chance to learn more about welfare and prepare themselves for the challenges they might face in practice.



Research grants

Funding scientific research to find practical solutions to animal welfare issues has been at the heart of AWF's work since the beginning.

AWF funded research has resulted in the development of novel educational tools, led to breakthrough diagnostics, and the development of techniques to promote the uptake of veterinary advice. AWF's student research grants provide a unique opportunity for students to develop their research skills and have a practical impact on welfare.

Resources

AWF provides pet owners with free resources that have been written and approved by vets on a variety of topics including euthanasia, poisons, and exercise. AWF also creates evidence-based guidance for veterinary professionals to support them in their work.

To find out more about AWF, including how to donate or become a corporate partner, take a look at the website: www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/

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