

Wednesday 24 June 2025

British Veterinary Association Annual Welsh Dinner 2025

President Dr. Elizabeth Mullineaux speech

Thank you Phoebe and welcome to your first dinner as President of BVA Welsh Branch. I know that under your stewardship, the Branch is going to have a really successful year. I look forward to working with you.

Noswaith dda foneddigion a Boneddigesau. Last year, then President Anna Judson really excelled herself with her Welsh. As a Lancastrian who can barely speak English properly, I'm not going to embarrass myself or destroy your beautiful language any further.

It's my great pleasure to welcome you to the British Veterinary Association's annual Welsh dinner, in this iconic Cardiff Castle.

I'd like to extend a special welcome and a big thank you to Huw Irranca-Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, he's going to be our guest speaker this evening. BVA works really closely with the Welsh Government on many important issues including animal health and welfare, Wales' biosecurity, disease prevention, and One Health. We ensure the views of the veterinary profession here in Wales are represented and valued by governments and decision makers on these really critical issues.

The veterinary profession across the UK continues to face many challenges. These include the threat of endemic diseases, such as Foot and Mouth disease in Europe. We also continue to struggle with workforce pressures in some cohorts of the profession including those operating in rural and remote areas, and also in public health.

However, this evening, I would like to focus on two key areas: the first is the potential for a new Veterinary Surgeons Act, which represents a once in the a generation opportunity to bring this woefully outdated 1966 legislation kicking and screaming into the 21st century. It would have positive impacts for vets and vet practices in Wales. The second area I'm going to speak about is the Competition and Markets Authority investigation into UK veterinary services for households pets, which stands to not only change the landscape of veterinary businesses, but unless the CMA gets this right, could have profound negative impacts on animal welfare. While we understand these aren't devolved matters, I think you will agree they are both of great relevance for Wales.

Promoting animal health and welfare sits at the very heart of the veterinary profession. It's a priority for BVA and for most of us, it's the reason we became vets in the first place.

However, in order to do our jobs successfully, we need a modern regulatory framework that is fit for purpose and recognises the importance of all members of the veterinary team and the modern structures of veterinary businesses. After years of campaigning, we're pleased that both the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and the UK Government have listened to the profession, and we're working closely with Defra to ensure that a new Veterinary Surgeons Act is progressed promptly and efficiently.

The current Act fails to protect the title of 'veterinary nurse', and to recognise the importance of other allied professionals such as equine dental technicians, musculoskeletal professionals and vet techs, or to embrace the full potential of the wider veterinary team. The regulation of allied professionals and the recognition of the important work they do, working with farmers and vets, will be particularly important in Wales. It will help to increase capacity in rural areas and recruitment and retention of Welsh talent into the industry, through more varied and practical routes.

The Veterinary Surgeons Act currently also fails to regulate veterinary practices, meaning that individual vets and nurses are currently held accountable for business decisions which are not always under their control. The CMA has already acknowledged this failing, outlining the

changes that the industry has undergone in the past 60 years and the challenges resulting from the absence of practice regulation. Regulation of veterinary practices needs to be a key part of a modern veterinary industry.

We appreciate that the ongoing CMA investigation into UK veterinary services for household pets has recognised the commitment of vets and vet nurses to pet owners and their animals. We are also very pleased with the way the CMA have acknowledged the proactive work that the profession has done already, particularly at BVA; to address issues around fee transparency and client choice. We have however expressed significant concerns about the CMA's disproportionate and in some cases totally unworkable potential remedies outlined in its May consultation document. These include proposed caps on prescription fees, price controls on medicines, overly burdensome and complex standardised price lists, and the suggestion of a veterinary ombudsman. We will continue to work to ensure that any remedies are both proportional and achievable for the profession.

While the CMA investigation focusses on household pets, the proposed remedies it has set out will impact on all types of veterinary practice, including large animal and mixed species practices such as those found

in many areas of Wales. BVA will continue to ensure the consequences of any possible remedies are understood beyond small animal practice and continue to warn the CMA of the possibility of unforeseen impacts, especially on the viability of remote rural practices and mixed practices.

We continue to work really hard to ensure that the role of vets is understood and valued by the general public and that media stories are not just all about prices. Our Senior Vice President Anna Judson and Ifan were on the radio today and did 12 interviews on this issue, including Welsh language interviews. So for that great thanks to both of them.

As Phoebe has explained during this evening, we would really like to hear your views on how best we can support the veterinary profession in Wales and work with you to ensure that the role of veterinary surgeons is understood and valued, safeguarding both the present and future of the veterinary profession. Welsh vets are at the forefront of delivering high-quality animal health and welfare services across a diverse landscape, from urban practices in Cardiff and Swansea to large-animal and mixed practices serving rural communities in regions like Powys and Carmarthenshire. With growing demand across all sectors, the veterinary

community in Wales remains a cornerstone of animal welfare, sustainable agriculture, and community engagement. Today is a truly a day to celebrate our remarkable profession and our colleagues in Wales.

So now, if everyone would please stand, and raise your glasses, I would like to make a toast to the future of the Welsh veterinary profession.

[Toast]

It's now my pleasure to hand over to Huw Irraca-Davies,

Diolch yn fawr