

British Veterinary Association Day Speech
Dr. Rob Williams, BVA President for 2025-2026
25 September 2025

Thank you Liz.

I am going to be wearing this everyday. Before I go any further, I would like to thank Rachel for her very kind words.

Rach was for a short time my boss and for a much longer time a valued colleague and friend and I've certainly learned a huge amount from her, not least the importance and value of different perspectives and challenging your own ideas. Which is an invaluable lesson for someone sure that their perspective is always correct.

As we gather here today we live in interesting times, times that will challenge each of our perspectives and possibly our conception of what it is to be a veterinary surgeon.

The CMA investigation outcome will change how we interact with and provide clinical care to pets and their owners. It's also possible the CMA's remedy decision will have some impact on other parts of the profession, particularly mixed clinical practice. These are unknown challenges but I'm confident we will meet whatever challenge the CMA set us.

Liz spoke about the work Defra are undertaking in preparation for potential reform of the current Veterinary Surgeons Act. This will again create much-needed change in the regulation and governance of the veterinary profession. This change has the potential to be challenging; however, we should not lose sight of the long-term benefits reform of the Act will bring for the profession.

The UK Government has announced it will negotiate a veterinary agreement with the European Union. This is welcome news, though it comes at a time when there are significant resourcing and operational issues across Government departments and agencies responsible for biosecurity and animal disease resilience, as shown in the recent National Audit Office and EFRA Committee reports.

Import of novel animal disease is a significant challenge for all parts of the veterinary profession. And these pose some questions. How as a profession do we best advocate for evidence-informed, pragmatic and effective biosecurity? What role do vets in private practice have to play in our national biosecurity and disease outbreak readiness in support of vets working across Government departments and agencies? How can we collectively meet these challenges in the national interest, particularly when the climate is undergoing such rapid change, making novel disease incursion more likely?

Each of these challenges could be viewed in a negative light; however, I would like us to meet these trials positively - challenges to be embraced, opportunities to be realised, a new and future-focused profession; a 21st century veterinary profession.

In September 1962, President Kennedy delivered a famous speech in Houston, Texas. His speech was about human endeavour, the positive impact of human curiosity and a challenge never before seriously contemplated- putting a man on the moon. He said:

"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things not because they are easy, but because they are hard. Because that goal will serve to

organise and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we're willing to accept. One we are unwilling to postpone."

I have that pinned to where I sit at work. The challenges we face as a profession are not comparable to those that NASA faced in the 1960s, however, we can draw on JFK's sentiment. The challenges I described can be met and by doing so our profession will *'measure the best of our energies and skills'*, it will be a profession ready to leap the many unknown hurdles we will face over the coming years and decades.

As incoming president, you are asked to choose a 'presidential theme' for the new BVA year. Thinking about these interesting times reminded me of a quote related to the future: "The future is already here, it's just not very evenly distributed". My presidential theme is *"Shaping the Profession of the Future"*. I believe the future is already here, in some veterinary practices, in the spirit, ingenuity and endeavour of many veterinary surgeons working today; we need to understand and embrace it.

Finally, before I go, I would also like to thank some people.

Thank you to Anna and Liz for your support over the past year, in different ways you have given me some insight into how I might rise to the Office of President.

Anna, you have taught me the value of inclusion and importance of giving voice to often marginalised and unheard perspectives. Thank you for that. I am also amazed at your singular ability to include the environment, climate change and sustainability, dung beetles, in literally every conversation you have no matter how off-topic this might be, including captivating a very socially conservative politician on the importance of considering sustainability in TB policy!

Gwen, I'm delighted that you are joining the team, a fellow Celt and I'm already appreciative that I have a colleague who can represent the profession and speak authoritatively on everything related to farm animals.

To the BVA Team, thank you. Without your knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm the officer team would not be able to represent the profession.

Last and not least, my family are here. All I can say is thank you.

It is my very great pleasure to perform my first act as BVA President – and award the Past Presidents' medal to Liz Mullineaux – a truly outstanding BVA President, colleague and friend.

I've learned so much from you this past year, (not least and despite what I think, the details really matter). Thank you for debating with me, including in public, most people choose not to!

Your dedication to positively advocating on behalf of the profession is inspiring at a time when this is much needed. I don't think anyone will ever truly appreciate or understand the enormous personal contribution you have made, so on behalf of the profession thank you for your service.

That ends the formal proceedings of the AGM.

I'd like to thank all of you for being here today and the BVA team for organising. I'd now like to invite you all to join us downstairs for some celebratory drinks.