

British Veterinary Association Day Speech

Dr. Rob Williams MVB MBA CMgr FCMI MCIPD FRCVS

Outgoing BVA President 2025/26

24 September 2026

There's a saying that whilst 'days are long...the years are short' and that couldn't be more true than for the BVA presidential year. What an incredible 12 months!

I feel extremely privileged and very lucky to live in 'interesting times'. During my tenure significant advancement has been made on a number of issues that have been impacting our members for several years, and in the case of reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act...decades.

Of course, whilst I would like to, I can't take all the credit for these advances. They are in fact the culmination of the hard work of numerous presidents and the team at BVA. It is testament to them all, and how influential BVA is as an organisation, that together we've been able to drive forward changes that will not only benefit the profession today but vets long into the future.

The most pressing, and certainly the most high-profile, has been the conclusion of the Competition and Markets Authority's investigation into vet services for household pets. This week the CMA published its final orders. It's been a very long and at times bruising three years. Whilst we know the outcome isn't perfect, as a profession and as a sector, we're in a much better place today than when the CMA first published its initial considerations back in 2024.

I'll be sharing more detail on the impact BVA has had on the outcome of the investigation in a special spotlight session later today. But it is not over stating things to say that without BVA, without you our members, paying your subs and choosing to be part of this community, the profession would be facing a very different, more concerning reality this week.

BVA membership, our representation of 19,000 vets, is what got us in that room with the CMA and enabled us to speak and advocate on your behalf. Collaboration with many represented in the room today helped shape our representation of the profession. We were able to shift their perspectives from an ill-informed idea of the veterinary landscape to the actualities of being a vet and running a veterinary practice today. As a result, this week we have a set of requirements that while not perfect are now more proportionate and fairer for both vets and pet owners – and we did this together.

Of course, for many of you and for our colleagues in practice the real work started yesterday. I understand it might seem daunting, but in reality most practicing vets are already doing much of what's being asked; it's simply a case of ensuring to consistently deliver customer-focused care to our clients. And BVA is here to help and support you every step of the way. New practical resources and explainers are already live on the member portal, with more on the way to help with the transition.

One of the most important influences BVA had on the investigation was to secure backing from the CMA on the need for legislative reform. We now have a White Paper on Reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act which is expected to be laid in the UK Parliament in early 2027 – and not before time.

This blueprint for veterinary legislation will see veterinary businesses and veterinary allied professionals regulated, alongside vets and vet nurses; and the Vet Nurse title will be protected.

Here I must give a huge shout out to my colleague Liz Mullineux who has led on this issue for BVA. She has sat in hours and hours of meetings, worked tirelessly with Defra colleagues and veterinary stakeholders, thrashing out the detail of what new primary legislation should look like.

With the publication of the White Paper, we've reached a pivotal moment. We now need to get the profession and parliamentarians behind the bill between now and the next session of Parliament.

That process has already begun. We hosted a reception in Parliament in July, alongside colleagues from RCVS and BVNA and were joined by MPs and peers from across the political spectrum to discuss why we need this reform so urgently. We were pleased that Baroness Hayman of Ullock, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at Defra delivered a speech backing reform, alongside MP and vet Neil Hudson.

We've also been hosting MPs at veterinary workplaces, to see the incredible work you do and understand why they should get behind reform. We need your help to keep this momentum going, to get this legislation over the line. If you can host your local MP at your workplace, please speak to us today. We will support every step of the way.

Shaping the profession of the future was my presidential theme for this year, and I'm pleased at how the progress we made and action we have taken has moved us closer to this ambition.

When it comes to shaping the future of the profession, ensuring access to high-quality education remains paramount. So, when Cambridge Vet School faced closure earlier this year, we stood shoulder to shoulder with our members – students and staff - on the picket line calling on Cambridge University to rethink its approach. We also pushed further, I met directly with the senior leadership at Cambridge to remind them of the critical role Cambridge plays in building a resilient veterinary workforce across the spectrum of veterinary professional activity. BVA made a difference through this work, and we are delighted that the school has been saved.

It was a personal highlight to be able to show the power of BVA membership to our student members, to illustrate very tangibly our ability to effect change.

Another good example of BVA's convening and influencing power was illustrated this year when the UK government agreed at our suggestion to create the Supply Coordination Forum to help protect the supply of veterinary medicines to Northern Ireland following the end of the post-Brexit grace period. It ensures that the situation is now being properly monitored and we have a mechanism to voice our members concerns.

There is lots to celebrate this year but, the work goes on. Our new President Gwen Rees will outline her priorities for her presidential year later which will include the work we need to do as a profession and as a country to build resilience in the face of growing infectious disease risk.

Disease resilience is an important issue and it is also an opportunity remind the public that whilst important, the role of vet stretches way beyond the nation's pets. Our work feeds the nation; secures our borders from disease; contributes to the advancement of scientific and clinical knowledge, is vital to trade and the UK economy – as vets we touch the lives of everyone in our society and we must make sure this is better understood.

A few thank yous before I sit down. I honestly wish every single one of our members could do this job, to have the opportunity to step through the green door and see the talent and passion of what is really quite a small BVA staff team. They are small but they deliver in spades for us all – so thank you.

Thank you for our dedicated branches and volunteers. You give up your time because you believe in the work we are doing here and I'm so impressed with your energy. Your experience, perspective and expertise is vital to ensuring our work is of the highest quality and thoroughly robust.

But of course, our members are the engine that drives us. By signing up, by giving us your commitment, we achieve outstanding results for you, your colleagues but also for the animals in our care. We simply cannot do it without your continued support; so thank you.

And so I leave you all in good hands... thank you.