Monday 18 April 2016

Dear Member,

Consultation on changes to the way we elect BVA Officers

In November 2014 BVA Board began a review of our governance structures to ensure BVA is a modern and fit-for-purpose association, keeping pace with changes in the profession and wider society.

As part of the consultation we heard that there was a lack of transparency in the way that BVA officers (president and junior and senior vice presidents) are selected. Although members had confidence in the outcomes, they were unsure of the process.

Working with our external consultants Compass Partnership, and through discussion at BVA’s standing committees, Council and Board, we have drawn on best practice within civil society organisations to develop a proposed new way to select and elect future BVA officers. I am grateful to my fellow members of the Governance Review Steering Group for their work in drawing up the proposals – Derek Williams, John Blackwell, Zara Boland, Paul Roger, Tricia Colville, and David Calpin.

The proposals are set out in detail in this document, along with background and information on the current system, and a summary of the differences.

Please do read the proposals and take some time to answer the questions set out in the document. You can respond via the BVA community or direct to Sally Burnell at sallyb@bva.co.uk

The closing date for responses is 9am, Monday 9 May 2016.

We very much look forward to hearing your views.

Kind regards,

Sean Wensley BVSc MSc Grad.DMS MRCVS
President
1. Summary of proposed changes

- The proposed system involves a combination of election and selection and increases openness and transparency by including open elections to the Electoral College (involving the whole membership).
- Proposed changes to the membership of the Electoral College would see the inclusion of three members elected from the whole membership and an independent chair.
- Members will be asked to put themselves forward or nominate another BVA member, rather than a list of candidates being populated by the members of the Electoral College. This is the first time members will be asked to apply to become a BVA officer.
- A clear role profile and information on the specific skills required will be fully publicised to the whole membership.
- As with the current system a single name will go forward to the vote at BVA Council and a single name will go forward to the AGM.

2. Summary of consultation questions

1. Do you agree that a combination of election and selection best meets the design criteria and would best suit BVA’s needs? If not, why not? Which other option do you prefer and why?
2. Do you agree with the proposed membership of the Electoral College? Should there be any Electoral College places reserved for particular membership categories (for example, recent graduates)? If yes, please specify.
3. Do you agree with the Terms of Reference for the Electoral College?
4. Do you think that enough BVA members will put themselves forward/be nominated to ensure a robust process?
5. Do you have any further comments about the nominations/applications process?
6. Do you have any further comments on any of the proposals?
**3. Introduction and background to the BVA Governance Review**

In November 2014 BVA Board began a review of BVA’s governance structures to ensure BVA was keeping pace with changes in the veterinary profession, that BVA has a fit-for-purpose structure that is effective, efficient, transparent and representative, and that it takes into account modern principles of good governance.

The Board commissioned an external consultant Compass Partnership to conduct the review. Following in-depth consultation with members of BVA Board, Council, committees, Branches, specialist and territorial divisions, and the RCVS, Compass advised that the review should focus on four priority areas:

i) The relationship between BVA and the specialist divisions

ii) Procedures for electing BVA officers

iii) BVA’s committee structure and appointments to committees

iv) The relationship between Board and Council

With two cross-cutting themes:

i) Member engagement

ii) Equality and diversity

**Key consultation findings on the appointment of BVA officers**

During the in-depth consultation Compass found that one of the key concerns was around transparency in relation to the appointment of officers. Although it was broadly felt that the right decisions were made, the process for selecting and electing officers was unclear, and therefore not in line with best practice in relation to transparency and member engagement.

Compass also found that there was a need for fresh faces and ideas and the engagement of younger members of the profession, but that BVA is seen as conservative and dominated by older, mainly male vets.

**Current process for electing BVA officers**

The current process for electing BVA officers is via an Electoral College made up of the existing BVA officer team and the three immediate past presidents who serve on BVA Council. Nominations are received from the wider membership (including divisions, Branches, and individuals) and members of the Electoral College are able to make nominations before and during the meeting. The Electoral College meets in private to consider the nominees against a list of criteria and must reach unanimity on the eventual nominee. Once the nominee has accepted the nomination, his/her name goes to Council for a vote by secret ballot, and a recommendation is made to the full membership at the following AGM.

More information about the current Electoral College is available on the BVA website.
4. Towards a new system for electing BVA officers

Design criteria for a new process for electing BVA officers

Drawing on best practice and the specific needs of BVA, some design criteria were developed by Compass in consultation with the BVA Board and BVA Council. Any new process for electing/selecting BVA officers must meet the following criteria:

1. The process is transparent and widely understood
2. The process is perceived by the membership of BVA to be open, fair and legitimate and to produce a President who has a mandate from BVA’s membership
3. The process is open for all members of BVA to put themselves forward for the position of President or to nominate any BVA member
4. The process tests whether each candidate has the required skills and experience and produces a President with those attributes
5. The process ensures that the Officer team represents an appropriate balance of the different areas of the veterinary profession (eg large animal/small animal/equine practice, public health, government, industry, academia, research etc)
6. The process does not deter good potential candidates from putting themselves forward
7. The process reflects BVA’s commitment to promoting equality and diversity
8. The costs of the process and the time required are not disproportionate for a small organisation, given that it is annual

Options for a new process

BVA Board and Council discussed a number of options for a new process ranging from open elections to selection and considered the options against the agreed design criteria.

A brief explanation of the options considered but not taken forward is as follows:

- **Open election by the full membership**
  - This would meet criteria 1-3 but experience in other organisations suggests that it would not ensure the winner had the necessary skills and experience, or that he/she would complement the skills and experience of the other officers (criterion 5).
  - Experience also suggests that some individuals and certain groups in society are reluctant to put themselves forward for open elections (eg women) and hence good candidates may be put off (criterion 6).

- **Election by Council**
  - This would meet criteria 1 and 3, but may not be considered to meet criterion 2 as it involves the wider membership in a very limited way.
  - It is more likely than open elections to deliver a candidate with the right skills and experience (criterion 4) but it cannot be guaranteed that Council members would bear in mind the key criteria when they vote.

- **Selection**
  - This is similar to the current arrangements and has the advantage of ensuring the calibre of the candidate (criterion 4) and balance within the officer team (criterion 5).
However, it would fail to meet criterion 2 in terms of openness and transparency meaning that the candidate may not be perceived as having a mandate from the membership.

To meet the design criteria BVA Board and Council agreed that a combination of election and selection would best suit BVA’s needs. The proposed new process is outlined in detail below.

5. Preferred option for a new process: combining election and selection

The preferred option agreed by BVA Board and Council for your consideration combines elements of election and selection. It retains an Electoral College but increases openness and transparency by including open elections to the Electoral College (involving the whole membership).

Proposal for a new Electoral College

The proposed new process includes members of the association being elected to serve on an independently chaired Electoral College alongside current and former BVA Officers.

The proposed terms of reference and membership for the new Electoral College are as follows:

**Proposed terms of reference for Electoral College:**
- to carry out a gap analysis within the officer team for the following year and draw up a list of preferred skills/attributes to publicise during the nomination/application period
- to receive and consider nominations and applications for the post of junior vice president
- to evaluate nominations and applications against the role profile and preferred skills/attributes
- to agree a name to put forward to a vote at BVA Council
- to promote the process and encourage strong candidates to stand

Note: members of the Electoral College should not nominate individuals themselves, but should encourage strong candidates to stand. In the first year, members of the current Electoral College (including existing BVA officers) will be tasked with encouraging good candidates from the existing rolling list to stand. Thereafter, a rolling list will not be maintained.

**Proposed membership of Electoral College:**
1 Independent (ie non-vet) chair* – non-voting
3 Elected members**
3 Officers
1 Past president (the most senior past president serving on Council)

Plus:
Board Chair as observer – non-voting

* BVA Board will appoint an independent chair from outside the veterinary profession on the basis of a role profile/person specification. The Board will invite applications from
individuals with experience of similar processes in other bodies, for example professional associations or other civil society organisations.

** Three members of the Electoral College will be elected by the whole membership using one member one vote and preferential voting.

- Members will be invited to nominate themselves to be elected to the Electoral College.
- Nominations will be open to all BVA members, except serving BVA officers, BVA past presidents, serving divisional and RCVS officers, and non-MRCVS members (ie students, vet nurses, honorary members etc).
- Members of the Electoral College will usually serve a three-year term and be eligible to stand for a second three-year term.
- To allow for continuity the terms of office in the first three years will be as follows: the person receiving the highest number of votes will serve three years, the second highest will serve two years (and be eligible for re-election), and the third highest will serve one year (and be eligible for re-election).
- Elections will be held online and, when appropriate, will coincide with the annual elections to BVA Council.

** Question 1**: Do you agree that a combination of election and selection best meets the design criteria and would best suit BVA’s needs? If not, why not? Which other option do you prefer and why?

** Question 2**: Do you agree with the proposed membership of the Electoral College? Should there be any Electoral College places reserved for particular membership categories (for example, recent graduates)? If yes, please specify.

** Question 3**: Do you agree with the Terms of Reference for the Electoral College?

Proposal for a new process – from nomination to election

The proposed process and timeline is as follows:

**July to early September: Nominations/applications for Junior Vice President (JVP) open**

- BVA will put out a call to the whole membership for nominations and applications using all of our communications channels.
- The supporting information will include a role profile and will indicate any specific skills and attributes for the coming year to ensure an ongoing balance in the officer team.
- Any BVA member can submit an application and any BVA member can nominate another member. (NB individuals should be aware that they are being nominated and give consent by signing the application/nomination form to state that they are happy for their name to go forward.)
- Nominations/applications must be accompanied by up to two sides of A4 outlining how the candidate meets the criteria in the role profile.
- Nominations and applications are made in confidence to the chair of the Electoral College by a set deadline in early September.
Question 4: Do you think that enough BVA members will put themselves forward/be nominated to ensure a robust process?

Question 5: Do you have any further comments about the nominations/applications process?

October:
Electoral College meeting

Electoral College will meet in October to consider the nominations and applications against the role profile and specific skills and attributes, having regard for the balance of skills in the officer team.

The Electoral College will agree on a name to be put forward to a vote at BVA Council. Note: see above for more information on the proposed membership and terms of reference for the Electoral College.

December:
BVA Council meeting

• BVA Council members will be invited to vote for or against the named candidate via a secret ballot at the December Council meeting.
• A vote in favour (simple majority) will mean the name will be put forward as a recommendation to the AGM (September of the following year).
• A vote against (simple majority) would require the Electoral College to meet again to re-consider the list of candidates and select another candidate to put forward to a vote of Council (at the April meeting or via secret electronic ballot).

Question 6: Do you have any further comments on any of the proposals?
Diagram outlining proposed new process

Whole membership

Electoral College

- 3 x elected members
- 3 x BVA officers
- 1 x past president
- 1 x independent chair (non-voting)
- 1 x Board chair (non-voting)

Board

BVA Council

AGM ratifies

Nomination/Applications to Electoral College

Elects

Appoints

Puts forward a candidate

Elects next JVP (secret ballot)