YVN facilitators handbook
How to create a successful YVN meeting
Contents

Young Vet Network meetings .................................................. 3
Starting up a YVN meeting .................................................... 4
Organise where and how ........................................................ 5
Promote ............................................................................. 7
Young Vet Network meeting checklist .................................... 8
The BVA — support and services for recent graduates ............. 9
Testimonial .......................................................................... 10
Annex A — sample agenda ................................................... 11
Annex B — ice breakers .......................................................... 12
Annex C — meeting invite template ....................................... 13
Your notes ........................................................................... 14
Young Vet Network meetings

The BVA’s Young Vet Network (YVN) was introduced to assist the transition from veterinary student to graduate and to help address the feelings of isolation that so many graduates experience on entering practice.

The drop out rate and mental health issues among veterinary surgeons has given a clear indication that, in addition to the support offered by the Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF), there is a need for preventative support for graduates. The early years after graduation have been identified as a vulnerable time when individuals would most benefit from a support network. YVN meetings provides this support face-to-face at a local level.

YVN meetings take the form of facilitated network meetings at which recent graduates are encouraged to collectively find solutions to problems, both clinical and employment related, which they encounter in practice and to find support in their local area.
Starting up a YVN meeting

This guide will help you plan, promote and start up your own YVN meeting and tell you who at the BVA to contact should you need help at any point.

**Facilitator’s role**
As meeting facilitator and organiser you will need to be enthusiastic, committed and positive. It is important to realise that you are not there in the capacity of a mentor and therefore you are not expected to offer advice, provide answers or recommend a particular course of action. The facilitator’s role is to remain neutral and allow the group to reach their own solutions by sharing their experiences with their peers.

The group may need to be managed — this could mean drawing out those who lack the confidence to say what’s on their mind or preventing one or two individuals dominating the conversation. Your role as facilitator is an important one and you need to be not only committed to running these meetings but also organised and set aside some time to manage them.

**Budget costs and sponsorship**
Obtaining sponsorship can be an excellent way of funding your meetings. Some companies are willing to sponsor these meetings in return for a 10–15-minute speaker slot and to hand out promotional material. If sponsorship is involved, establish the boundaries beforehand and try to put aside some time for the social side, ensuring that advertising and promotion does not encroach on this.

Once your group is established you will find them willing to pay their own way, but for those first few gatherings the lure of free food and perhaps a free drink can help with attendance and of course help a group of strangers to feel more relaxed and willing to chat.

At the moment BVA is not able to provide funding for YVN meetings but we can help with promotion and provision of delegate packs, see page 7 for more information.

**When**
Experience has shown that meetings are best held on weekday evenings, with specifically Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays achieving the best turnout. Your start time should be no earlier than 7.30pm in order to allow those who are travelling further or working later an opportunity to attend. Some people may be put off if they feel they are in danger of walking into a meeting late.
Organise where and how

Where
Think carefully about the location you choose. It should be easily accessible from most parts of your area, so perhaps somewhere in the middle, or, if your area is very large, you may choose to hold two separate events, and find somewhere near to public transport and with a car park. Many successful meetings are held in pubs as they often have good parking facilities, can offer good value food, and are easy to find.

The appeal of enjoying a drink as part of the meeting has also proven popular and helps to keep the atmosphere relaxed and informal. As your group and meetings become more established you might think of going for a meal and a weekend trip to paint-balling or go-karting, or a pub quiz and ten pin bowling, but ask your group and get them involved.

Structure
The structure of your meeting is important, particularly with a new group where the graduates do not know each other. It’s a good idea to have an agenda and you can find a sample meeting agenda in Annex A, page 11.

While you wait for everyone to arrive you may want to have drinks available before moving on to an introductory discussion or icebreaker game to get everyone feeling comfortable and able to chat freely. Think about seating to ensure that everyone is involved but it doesn’t feel too formal, having small tables and group seating is a good arrangement.

Games
Icebreaker games are not always necessary as you may find that your group begins to talk freely and naturally, perhaps because they already know each other through work or from vet school, or are simply sufficiently outgoing to do so. However, it is important to ensure that everyone in the group feels relaxed, and therefore able to share their thoughts, as quickly as possible. Icebreaker games can be an excellent way of achieving this. It is sensible to have a selection of games up your sleeve in case you need them. Some suggestions are available in Annex B, page 12.

TOP TIP:
Think ahead and book an area in a pub or ask about free room hire to save on costs.
Discussion topics
When planning your meeting it is a good idea to think about some discussion topics. Subjects that are raised for discussion time and time again include:

- **Complaints from clients**
- **Difficult bosses**
- **Euthanasia consults**
- **Working conditions and concerns (rotas, on-call, holiday, contracts, etc.)**
- **Specific clinical procedures; such as bitch spays, caesareans, etc.**

There are different ways to gather the concerns of the group and encourage them to say what’s on their mind. You may find that everyone is happy to simply offer ideas and that the other members of the group naturally build on these suggestions with their own experiences.

Over time as your group get to know each other you may find that you don’t need to suggest topics, however, to begin with you might want to ask everyone write their worry/concern/topic down on a piece of paper, which can then go into a hat and be discussed as they are drawn out. Finding solutions to the problems and worries can be achieved in a similar way. Again, you may find that the group naturally offer ideas — perhaps someone has already had the exact same experience and can offer tips on how (or how not!) to handle it. You may have to elicit suggestions by asking each person in turn, or consider splitting them into groups and giving them a selection of issues to work on before reporting back.
Promote

Promoting your meeting is key to getting young vets in your area involved. Below is a list of things that you can do to get your meeting promoted in your area.

- If you are a BVA recent graduate member, you can post details of your meetings on the Young Vet Network (YVN) discussion forum, or use the forum to ask graduates what kind of meeting they would like [www.bva.co.uk/community](http://www.bva.co.uk/community).
- You can also post details on your regional forum to raise awareness of the event to local vets to pass on to colleagues and friends [www.bva.co.uk/community](http://www.bva.co.uk/community).
- Post details of your meeting on the events page of the BVA website [www.bva.co.uk/events](http://www.bva.co.uk/events).
- Set up a regional YVN Facebook group and invite local vets to join.
- Use the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeon’s (RCVS) Find A Vet tool [www.rcvs.org.uk/findavet](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/findavet) to search for fax numbers and email addresses for local practices.
- Contact your BVA regional representative and see if they can offer help to promote it or help facilitate [www.bva.co.uk/community](http://www.bva.co.uk/community).
- Ask your territorial division for help—find your local division [www.bva.co.uk/divisions](http://www.bva.co.uk/divisions).

**BVA help**

BVA can assist in promoting your meeting by:

- Providing you with an up-to-date list of email addresses for BVA members one to eight years’ qualified living in your area.
- Publishing a free advert in the Gazette section of *Veterinary Record*.

We can also provide you with example meeting invitations to help you put together your own flier for circulation, which can be easily printed off by the practice manager and pinned to the practice notice board. An example is available in Annex C, page 13.

To find out more or to get in touch with the BVA please contact helend@bva.co.uk.
Delegate packs
All YVN meeting facilitators can obtain free BVA delegate packs to give to all attendees. Each pack includes:

- BVA guide to job hunting
- Contracts of employment guidance leaflet
- A BVA joining form
- BVA pen and notepad

To obtain delegate packs for your meetings please contact alysw@bva.co.uk

Young Vet Network meeting checklist

☐ Plan ahead: book a free venue and keep it informal, relaxed and friendly
☐ Keep the BVA informed and use all of the free promotional help offered
☐ Publicise like crazy
☐ Start a regional YVN Facebook group
☐ Ask your regional representative and/or territorial division for help
☐ Keep it informal, relaxed and friendly
☐ Take pens and paper with you on the day
☐ Experiment with different locations
☐ Seek sponsorship
☐ Encourage attendees to register to receive notifications from the BVA events page
☐ Maintain email contact with the graduates in between meetings
☐ Do not be disheartened if attendance is sometimes low – send an email round asking why and then make new arrangements.
The BVA—support and services for recent graduates

The BVA provides a number of services that graduates attending your meetings should be made aware of. While the purpose of the meeting is by no means to promote BVA membership, there are some relevant member benefits that recent graduates may wish to consider taking advantage of.

Young Vet Network (YVN) is the BVA’s key support initiative and is available to all members, free of charge, up to eight years’ qualified. The main benefits of YVN membership are:

- Reduced membership fees
- Free personal accident insurance
- Discounts off selected CPD courses
- Discounts on the BVA Careers Service and exclusive access to the BVA Careers Fair
- A secure online discussion forum — made up of just YVN members
- Graduate representation on BVA Council

All members of YVN also receive a free copy of the *BVA new graduate guide*, which includes advice on:

- Career options
- Preparing a CV, application letters and job interviews
- Dealing with consultations, complaints and emergencies
- Insurance and financial considerations
- Advice from new and recent graduates

A copy of this guide is also available to all facilitators free of charge and can be obtained by contacting marketing@bva.co.uk

More information on YVN is available at www.bva.co.uk/youngvetnetwork
Testimonial

As a new graduate moving to a new area, I was really keen to get involved in the Young Vet Network. With some support from existing members, I recently organised a meal and meeting to get the ball rolling again. We had a good turnout and met lots of people who were also keen to get involved. I think that loads of people are keen to attend both social and clinical meetings, and the key really is to promote the meetings in good time - email and social media seem to be good ways to reach lots of young vets. There are also lots of companies who are keen to support meetings, particularly if their products link to the clinical theme. I think the Young Vet Network can be a great way to meet new people, share experiences and really help with the transition from vet school into life in practice and I am really looking forward to being part of it.

Katie Fitzgerald, YVN member
Annex A—sample agenda

Young Vet Network meeting agenda

7.30 pm  Welcome and introduction of facilitators
7.45 pm  Ice breaker games
8.00 pm  Networking/discussion and food!
9.00 pm  Sponsor talk (if applicable)
9.15 pm  Meeting close— but delegates are welcome to stay and socialise
Annex B—ice breakers

YVN introductory ice-breakers

**The name game**
Get everyone to stand in a large circle and whoever goes first says his/her name first. The next person must say the first person’s name, and then his/hers. The third person must say the names of the first two, and then his/her own. Play keeps going until the last person has to say everyone’s names in the room. This exercise is great for learning everyone’s name and also quite fun.

**Three things**
Group attendees into small groups of about five people. Each person must write down three things about them—two of which are true and one that isn’t. The others have to guess which one isn’t true.

**Birthday game**
The group must arrange themselves in a line in order of their birthday without writing or talking and just using other methods of communication, such as hand signals.

**Story-building**
There is one where each person writes down three-five words from a story that was (i.e. scariest thing to happen to them, most exciting thing etc.) and then the rest/or in smaller groups if lots of people have to make up what happened, then at the end the original person tells the true story.
Dear all

On behalf of the XXXXX region and the British Veterinary Association we’d like to invite you to attend a Young Vet Network meeting. The meeting takes place on:

**Date** XXXXX

**Time** XXXXX

**Location** XXXXX

Join us to meet other graduates in the area to discuss life in and out of practice and enjoy some food and a drink or two.

If you’re an older graduate how about coming along to help more recent grads out, or forward this to friends or colleagues who may find it of interest.

To book a place please contact name@email.com

If you are unable to attend but you are interested in being kept informed about upcoming meetings please like our Facebook page FACEBOOKPAGE LINK or reply by email so that your email can be kept on our database. Alternatively, please let me know if you’d like to be removed from further emails.

Kind regards

XXXXX XXXXX