

The EU referendum and the UK veterinary profession

This paper sets out:

- [Background and BVA position on the EU referendum](#)
- [BVA working in Europe](#)
- [Key issues of interest to the veterinary profession](#)
 - [Legislation on animal health and welfare and public health](#)
 - [Funding for surveillance and disease eradication](#)
 - [Veterinary medicines](#)
 - [Trade and the UK farming sector](#)
 - [The veterinary workforce and freedom of movement](#)
 - [EU funding for R&D](#)
 - [Impact on the RCVS](#)
- [Further information](#)

Background and BVA position on the EU referendum

On Thursday 23 June 2016 UK voters will be asked:

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

A simple majority is required to provide the result. In the event of a majority voting to leave, a two-year negotiating period would begin to allow the UK to negotiate a withdrawal agreement and the terms of its future relationship with the EU. During that time the UK would continue to abide by EU treaties and laws, but not take part in decision-making.

On Wednesday 13 April BVA Council discussed the upcoming EU referendum. BVA is a non-partisan organisation and recognises that members will hold differing personal views on the referendum and vote according to a wide range of factors. BVA Council therefore agreed that

BVA would not take a position in favour of the leave or remain campaigns, but that it should facilitate debate and discussion amongst the profession and signpost to information of relevance to the veterinary profession, including animal health and welfare and workforce issues.

This paper sets out the broad issues of interest to the veterinary profession and provides links to further information. It draws information from a number of sources, including BVA's response to the [Defra/FSA review of the balance of competences in relation to animal health and welfare \(192 KB PDF\)](#), March 2013.

BVA working in Europe

BVA is a member of the [Federation of Veterinarians of Europe \(FVE\)](#) holding joint UK membership with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). The UK is one of 38 member countries of FVE.

BVA and RCVS seek to influence FVE positions on key issues and FVE in turn lobbies the European Commission on behalf of the European veterinary profession and provides information to MEPs on veterinary matters.

BVA directly lobbies UK MEPs, particularly those who sit on the most relevant committees – [AGRI](#) (Agriculture and Rural Development) and [ENVI](#) (Environment, Public Health and Food Safety). We also seek to influence the UK Government's position on key issues ahead of negotiations with other Member States.

Key issues of interest to the veterinary profession

It is not possible to point to facts regarding the impact of a vote to leave the EU because much will depend on the negotiations that would take place following the referendum and the decisions taken by the UK Government regarding, for example, whether or not to maintain existing laws and rules. This paper therefore highlights some of the key issues of interest to the UK veterinary profession and invites members to consider and debate the potential impact of the UK leaving the EU (so called 'Brexit').

Legislation on animal health and welfare and public health

Much of the UK's legislation relating to animal health and welfare, and public health, derives from Brussels – including legislation on disease control, imports and exports, animal welfare, veterinary medicines, and food safety. In a BVA Council debate in April 2015 it was agreed that membership of the EU had enabled the UK to influence and improve animal health and welfare standards in other Member States.

In the event of the UK leaving the EU it is likely that in order to continue trading with the EU the UK would need to comply with many of the existing EU rules. However, the UK would no longer have input to the development of new EU legislation.

The [European Commission](#) sets out areas covered by EU legislation, including:

- Veterinary medicines
- Livestock and food chain traceability
- Food labelling
- Livestock identification and record keeping
- Food safety
- Disease prevention, control, eradication and outbreaks
- Surveillance
- Control and disposal of animal by-products
- Official animal welfare checks
- Welfare at slaughter
- Animal welfare standards for different species
- Welfare in transport
- Controls on food products and livestock at ports
- Pet travel
- Commercial movement of animals
- Use of animals for research

The new EU Animal Health Law was recently agreed and provides a framework for disease prevention and control across Europe, covering a wide range of areas, including disease research, surveillance, biosecurity and veterinary involvement on farms. In discussions feeding into development of the new law, BVA's Veterinary Policy Group agreed that the UK should be considered within the epidemiological unit of Europe for disease control.

Funding for surveillance and disease eradication

The EU provides funding, typically up to 50% of the national government cost, for the eradication, control and surveillance of animal diseases. For example, half of the funding for the UK's bovine TB eradication programme comes from the EU and in December 2014 it was reported that

around £25m would be provided to the UK from the EU, representing the single largest allocation for a Member State's animal disease eradication programme. The EU also funds the UK's Salmonella and avian influenza surveillance programmes.

Member States can also use this EU funding to facilitate rapid action in response to emergency animal disease outbreaks and cover unbudgeted costs such as compensation payments, for example during the foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks of 2001 and 2007. The EU provides Member States with advice from experts across Europe via the Disease Eradication Task Force.

The EU also funds EU Reference Laboratories to research major animal diseases. In 2011 the European Commission allocated €1,416,700 of funding to UK based EU Reference Laboratories in the field of animal health and live animals. These were the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (now AHVLA), the Institute for Animal Health (now the Pirbright Institute) and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas).

If the UK were to leave the EU access to the Disease Eradication Task Force, continued benefit from the work of the EU Reference Laboratories and funding for surveillance or disease eradication programmes would be dependent on post Brexit negotiations.

Veterinary medicines

The Veterinary Medicinal Products Directive 2001/82/EC (as amended) sets out the controls on the manufacture, authorisation, marketing, distribution and post-authorisation surveillance of veterinary medicines applicable in all Member States. The Directive provides the basis for UK controls on veterinary medicines, which are set out nationally in the Veterinary Medicines Regulation (VMR). Brexit could mean a new regulatory regime for veterinary medicines would be necessary.

In BVA's [consultation response on the balance of competences \(192 KB PDF\)](#) in 2013 we stated that BVA supports a system of authorisation that calls for one dossier, one application and one approval throughout the EU, as well as a single market so each product would become automatically available throughout the community. We also support harmonisation of systems for data collection on the sales and use of medicines in the EU and harmonisation of the distribution channel for medicines within the EU.

In a BVA Council debate in April 2015 members raised concerns that any future EU decision in favour of "decoupling" would adversely affect the ability of UK veterinary surgeons to dispense medicines. However, the UK has been a strong voice against decoupling in the recent

negotiations on new EU veterinary medicines legislation, which is currently still under consideration.

Trade and the UK farming sector

Much EU legislation relating to animal health and welfare concerns the trade in live animals and their products in order to safeguard public health and animal health and welfare.

In the 2013 BVA [consultation response on the balance of competences \(192 KB PDF\)](#), we stated that UK membership of the EU enables the UK to trade with other Member States with the minimum of bureaucracy, and that compliance with EU conditions aids UK exports to third countries.

If the UK were to leave the EU the UK would require equivalent laws to maintain the standards set by the EU in order to continue trading. However, the UK would no longer have a say in the legislative process to set those standards.

NFU Council debated the issues relating to the EU referendum in April 2016 considering inter alia agricultural trade with the EU and the rest of the world, the balance of risks of a national farm policy versus the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), farming regulation and agricultural labour, and the impact on science and R&D relating to agriculture. The Council decided that the NFU will not be actively campaigning in the referendum but resolved that on the balance of existing evidence available, “the interests of farmers are best served by our continuing membership of the European Union”.

The [NFU website](#) contains further information on issues relating to the UK farming sector.

The veterinary workforce and freedom of movement

The UK veterinary profession has recently been debating concerns about a shortage of ‘experienced’ vets, with surveys conducted by BVA and SPVS highlighting difficulties experienced by practices in recruiting.

The availability of qualified veterinary surgeons in the UK workforce is impacted by UK membership of the EU. Under the EU Directive 2005/36/EC on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications the RCVS must register vets with qualifications awarded by European institutions that are recognised in another EU or EEA Member State. According to the RCVS, in recent years nearly half of veterinary surgeons registering in the UK qualified from veterinary schools elsewhere in the EU.

RCVS has also stated that some sectors, such as meat hygiene, are currently heavily reliant on EU-qualified veterinary surgeons and it is not clear whether the potential shortfall created by Brexit would be made up by an increase in graduates from non-EU countries registering in the UK.

In [a letter to Veterinary Record](#) published on 9 April 2016 the RCVS responded to questions relating to (a) permission to work in the UK and (b) the recognition of degrees conferring eligibility for registration with the College. In relation to the rules surrounding permission to work in the UK, the RCVS stated that this would be a matter for the UK Government to decide. The RCVS expected that in the short term it would be unlikely that existing registrants would have their membership revoked, but that new applications for registration might be affected.

In relation to the recognition of degrees, the RCVS explained that the UK could continue to opt in to the existing EU Directive, as Iceland, Norway and Switzerland do, or the UK Government could negotiate an alternative form of mutual recognition. Opening a negotiation could provide an option for the RCVS to reject those with qualifications from EU veterinary schools that had not met the standards of the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE), or for the RCVS to develop its own model for accrediting European vet schools.

If the UK were to leave the EU there would also be an impact on the ability of UK veterinary surgeons to live and work within the EU and the details would need to be agreed as part of the post-referendum negotiations.

EU funding for R&D

The House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee [report on EU Membership and UK Science](#) in April 2016 concluded that the EU funding system for science and research is complicated which means that UK researchers can struggle to navigate through the system. It found that during the period 2007–13, the UK was a net contributor to the EU overall, but a net receiver of EU funding for research, and concluded: “science is a significant dimension of the UK’s membership of the EU.” However, the committee found it difficult to define unambiguously the level of EU spending on R&D in the UK and how this compares with other Member States.

Impact on the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

In an article in Veterinary Record [“Professional registration and ‘Brexit’”](#), published on 9 April 2016, the RCVS has outlined a number of issues for consideration in relation to the EU referendum, including:

- Financial impact on the College – Brexit would impact on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications which could have a significant impact on College finances and could result in fee increases.
- Amendments to the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 – in the event of the UK leaving the EU the VSA would need to be amended. Re-opening the Act could allow for changes such as allowing language tests to be imposed on EU veterinary surgeons.

Should the VSA be reopened it may also open the debate on what constitutes an act of veterinary surgery and the regulation of allied professionals.

Further information

1. In July 2013 the UK Government published the [Review of the Balance of Competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union: Animal Health and Welfare and Food Safety Report](#), which summarises the findings of the consultation with key partners, including the veterinary profession. The report includes a lot of detail on existing European issues and covers the following themes:
 - Trade and the EU Internal Market
 - Protection of Animals and People
 - Economic Growth and Innovation
 - Risk-based Approach
 - Differential Interpretation
 - International IssuesBVA's [consultation response on the balance of competences \(192 KB PDF\)](#) is referenced within this paper.
2. House of Commons Library research paper on [Leaving the EU](#), July 2013
3. House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report on [EU Membership and UK Science](#), April 2016