The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom and has over 15,000 members. Our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the veterinary profession in this country, and we therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.

The BVA’s Welsh Branch brings together representatives of the BVA’s territorial and specialist divisions, government, academic institutions and research organisations in Wales. The Branch advises BVA on the consensus view of the Welsh members on Welsh and United Kingdom issues.

We were pleased to have been given the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government Strategic Framework for Welsh Agriculture having previously responded to the series of consultations on the Wales Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Proposed vision

We support the proposed vision of ‘A prosperous, resilient agriculture industry promoting Wales’ present and future well-being’ and strongly agree that high standards of animal health and welfare must feature prominently in any measures to develop the full potential of the agriculture industry as an efficient producer. The economic benefits of good animal health and welfare must be at the heart of support measures made available to farmers as high standards of health and welfare are crucial to the development and maintenance of a sustainable and competitive industry.

Challenges, opportunities and threats

We agree with the assessment of the challenges, opportunities and threats, in particular:

Challenges

- **Drive improvements in the industry to raise efficiency, profitability, and productivity**: as referenced above, long term viability will not be achieved without a sustainable approach to raising standards of animal health and welfare, and any investment should link to improved resilience. Resilience is key when global market forces prevail and the veterinary contribution to this via the realisation of optimum animal health and welfare is invaluable. The long-term viability of veterinary businesses must also be considered and the loss of veterinary expertise in Wales guarded against.

- **Strengthen capacity to withstand setbacks whatever the cause**: the farming sector must be supported to cope with extreme adverse weather conditions, as were seen a few years ago when it became clear that there was a need for the development of contingency plans to protect the health and welfare of livestock.

Opportunities
• Recognised food products with large and well established UK and EU markets with potential for increased exports and improved added value: support for producer groups and cooperatives, the development of the range of quality assurance schemes available, and the development of a ‘Wales’ brand should all be invested in, with veterinarians playing a crucial role in assurance aspects through the supply chain, adding value and credibility to Welsh products.

• An established network of first class education and training establishments: Aberystwyth University is one of a number of institutes that plays an important role in agriculture in Wales. We single out Aberystwyth University to highlight our support for its work in animal science through teaching, CPD provision and research, working closely with private veterinary practice and industry. The recently established Wales Veterinary Science Centre, alongside the university in Aberystwyth, has the potential to play a key role in helping to meet the challenges, opportunities and threats faced by the livestock sector, not just through education and training but through its contribution to the Welsh surveillance network. We have also previously expressed our support for bodies such as Farming Connect and the Farm Advisory Service, and believe that programmes to foster knowledge transfer by combining demonstration farms, online interactive learning material, and contributions from academia should be developed with input from the veterinary profession. We would welcome further support for these programmes through the Rural Development Plan.

• Potential for more co-operation within the agriculture industry and to strengthen supply chains: as above, veterinarians have an important role to play in adding value and credibility to the supply chain, through interpretation of food chain information and application at an individual farm level, as well as perceived higher value of those products which represent high health and welfare standards.

Threats
• The emergence of new animal disease: well informed and appropriately trained veterinary surgeons, as well as the preservation of adequate laboratory services in Wales and collaborative working with farmers, play a key role in countering the threats of new and re-emerging animal disease and the very real danger of failure to achieve the highest standards of animal health, animal welfare and disease control. In guarding against new and emerging disease, focus on the control and eradication of priority non-statutory production animal diseases should not be lost, and we welcome recent proposals for strategies to tackle diseases such as BVD and Sheep Scab.

Partnership approach
5) We support the principle of a partnership approach with a Partnership Group established to own the vision and lead action. We note that this group shares some common ground with the recently established Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group. We would suggest that a clear governance model is established to ensure that their respective roles and responsibilities are communicated effectively and that they speak with one voice on animal health and welfare.

Due to the importance of animal health and welfare, surveillance and risk management, and credibility of the food chain to the success of the vision, we
suggest that the veterinary profession should be closely involved in the partnership approach. BVA, as the representative body for the profession should be represented on the Partnership Group.

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