29th June 2018

Dear Secretary of State,

Brexit – impact on the veterinary workforce in Wales

We are writing to outline our serious concerns about the potential impacts of the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union on the veterinary workforce in Wales. With less than a year to go, we as Assembly Members feel that there remains much to do to ensure that the veterinary profession is supported and can remain resilient in a post-Brexit Wales.

Vets across Wales are providing crucial and trusted services that offer wide-ranging benefits to the public, whether they are advising owners on the best care and treatment for their pets, safeguarding standards in the meat processing sector, carrying out vital research, supporting trade and helping farmers to rear healthy livestock.

While the profession is relatively small, its reach and impact - particularly in rural communities - is significant, and the loss of even a small percentage of the workforce would be keenly felt.

Nearly a quarter of vets working in Wales are non-UK EU graduates. However, we understand that this figure rises to 100 per cent when applied to Official Veterinarians (OVs) carrying out essential work to ensure that high standards of health and welfare are maintained at every stage in abattoirs.

With 44 per cent of EU vets saying that they are ‘fearful for their future’ and one in five actively looking for work outside the UK, there is a very real and present danger that without positive action, the food chain will be left exposed to an increased risk of food fraud and animal welfare breaches at a time when it has never been more imperative to preserve high levels of consumer confidence in UK produce, both at home and overseas.

Protecting and acknowledging the contribution of the veterinary workforce is doubly important when it comes to trade, especially the thriving market for products such as Welsh lamb. England’s former Chief Veterinary Officer Nigel Gibbens has suggested that Brexit may bring about a 325 per cent increase in the requirement for veterinary certification of animal products for export. However, as things stand there is disconcertingly low scope for supply meeting demand without urgent measures to safeguard against a crisis in capacity.

Action is needed now to ensure that Brexit and all the complexities and changes it will carry with it does not hamper the public and socioeconomic benefits that the Welsh veterinary workforce can deliver across so many areas.
As an immediate priority, we are asking you to support the British Veterinary Association's call to reinstate vets on the Shortage Occupation List, to ensure that we avoid a potentially problematic shortfall in capacity post-Brexit.

We would also like assurances that animal health and welfare standards are at least maintained as part of negotiations on the UK's exit from the EU and that the valuable role that vets play within this is both heeded and embedded.

Vets are critical for the ongoing protection of Wales' animal, human and community health and wellbeing, and there is palpable feeling across these communities that the workforce needs to able to continue to operate at full strength to keep these standards up in a post-Brexit world.

We hope that you will heed our concerns and look forward to discussing this further with you.

Yours Faithfully,

Llyr Gruffydd AM       Rhun ap Iorwerth AM       Sian Gwenllian AM
Adam Price AM           Elin Jones AM              Leanne Wood AM
Bethan Sayed AM         Simon Thomas AM           Steffan Lewis AM
Dai Lloyd AM            Vikki Howells AM           Lee Waters AM
Mike Hedges AM          Mick Antoniw AM           Jenny Rathbone AM
Dawn Bowden AM          Joyce Watson AM           Paul Davies AM
Janet Flinch-Saunders AM Mark Isherwood AM        Darren Millar AM
Hefin David AM          Julie Morgan AM            Lynne Neagle AM
David Rees AM           Jayne Bryant AM            Mohammed Asghar AM
David Rowlands AM       Mandy Jonec AM