Minutes of the VDC Meeting - 12 September 2011

Attendance

Prof. Richard Bennett Chair, VDC
Prof. Bill Reilly Past President, BVA
Harvey Locke President, BVA
Carl Padgett President Elect, BVA
Tim Brigstocke English Cattle Health and Welfare Group (ECHAWG)
Ruth Clements Food Animal Initiative (FAI)
Neil Cutler DairyCo
James Fanshawe EBLEX (The organisation for the English beef and sheep industry)
John Fishwick British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA)
Christianne Glossop CVO, Wales
Neil Gibbens CVO
Simon Hall Veterinary Director, AHVLA
Colin Hart Deputy CVO, Northern Ireland
Stewart Houston BPEX/ NPA
Gwyn Jones National Farmers’ Union (NFU)
Fred Landeg BVA Veterinary Policy Group
Catherine McLaughlin National Farmers’ Union (NFU)
Liz Redmond FSA
Prof. Stuart Reid Royal Veterinary College (RVC)
Anthony Roberts Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)
Alick Simmons Deputy CVO
Peter Scott Fish Veterinary Society (FVS)
Frank Stephen Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Steering Group, Scotland

Apologies

Peter Baber English Sheep Health and Welfare Council
Richard Griffiths British Poultry Council (BPC)
Heather Jenkins Waitrose
Stephen Rossides British Meat Processors Association (BMPA)

Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and gave a review of the previous meeting in April. The record of the last meeting was approved.

2. The Chair reminded the Core Group that all records of meetings were available on the BVA website on the VDC page.

Working Group reports

Food Supply Chain

3. Gwyn Jones reported on the work of the working group looking at engagement with the food supply chain.
4. The group had met once since the last meeting of the Core Group in April. In addition to Gwyn Jones and Catherine McLaughlin of the NFU the group consisted of the following members:

   a. Ken Boynes     AHDB
   b. Javier Dominguez FSA
   c. Ruth Clements    FAI
   d. Heather Jenkins  Waitrose
   e. Matt Dobbs      Westpoint

5. G Jones noted that there was a perception that vets had a significant influence on profits in the food supply chain and could reduce farmers’ costs through health planning initiatives. However, despite this there was a belief that vets were not seizing the opportunities available to them and adapting to the change in market forces. The Core Group’s first meeting had highlighted the need for a change in mindset. This also had implications for the recruitment of vet students and the routes of entry or barriers to involvement for graduates.

6. The group had been in contact with the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) who already had some information on retailers but had also offered to do a consumer survey. A further meeting had been scheduled with the IGD and it was hoped that this could be signed off shortly. The Chair emphasised the importance of pursuing the food industry side in terms of ensuring that abattoirs and processors were also covered by any survey.

7. G Jones noted that the working group was also looking at the attitude to vets in Spain, where one third of vets worked for government and were involved in the food industry. In addition, the group had also conducted a number of interviews with vet students about their experiences with the food supply chain.

**Business Models**

8. John Fishwick, Chair of the Working Group looking at different business models gave a report of their progress. The working group consisted of:

   a. James Gazzard    RVC
   b. Colette Henry    RVC
   c. Jonathan Rushton  RVC
   d. Andrew Curwen     XL Vets

9. The Working Group had met in July and had decided that their main priority was to create a survey of vets working in farm animal practice. This survey would look at the different types of practice in use, and case studies of successes or failures and would provide an evidence base for the working group.

10. The survey had been developed on Survey Monkey and was now available on the BVA website. It would also be circulated directly to BVA and BCVA members, although the survey was open to non-members to complete as well. The survey contained 20 questions and the aim was for it to provide a short, realistic estimate of the current situation. It also included questions about how practices marketed themselves and questions about succession management. Some of these questions were open-ended to allow for respondents to provide case studies of their experiences. None of the questions were compulsory.
11. The survey would be kept open for 6-8 weeks, after which the group would meet again to review results. It was agreed that the BVA Secretariat would circulate a copy of the survey to other members of the core group. **Action**

12. J Fishwick reported that there had been some suggestion on the BVA Community Platform that the Working Group contact SPVS and accountancy firms. The Working Group would explore this as well.

13. S Houston asked whether the Working Group had any plans to compare their findings with the circumstances in other countries or professions. J Fishwick replied that this was something that the working group could consider at a later stage, although the priority at this stage was to complete the UK business models survey. It was agreed that the US was a potential opportunity for this.

**The Role of Technicians**

14. Bill Reilly, Chair of the Working Group looking at the role of the veterinary led team reported on their work. The group consisted of:

- a. Neil Cutler  Dairy Co
- b. Peter Scott  FVS
- c. Cat McLaughlin  NFU
- d. David Catlow  Practising Vet
- e. Bob Moore  Practising Vet

15. He noted that the group did not currently contain a paraprofessional, but that paraprofessionals would be consulted at a later stage.

16. The group had met in June and agreed terms of reference and a course of action. The group had agreed to identify the range of services that could be supplied to the farming community by a veterinary-led team and were working on a matrix of tasks, which were categorised in terms of who could provide them.

17. The group had also contacted AHVLA, as one of the veterinary profession’s biggest clients, to see what services the organisation could envisage being provided by technicians as part of a veterinary-led team in the future. AHVLA had responded noting that lay bTB testing was currently permitted by AHVLA staff, although if there was demand, AHVLA could consider amending legislation to expand this to private practices. Other suggestions included blood sampling and tasks that were not acts of veterinary surgery such as inspections. B Reilly noted that obviously lay TB testing was a controversial issue at the moment.

18. The second aspect of the working group’s work had been to assess the current use of technicians within practice and also to assess the desire of veterinarians to work with technicians. The group had therefore developed a survey for practices to complete which had been launched two or three weeks before the Core Group meeting.

19. The survey was a simple one with 16 questions and so far had had 223 responses. R Bennett noted that this was an excellent response. B Reilly reviewed some of the initial responses for the Core Group.

20. He noted that the next steps for the group were to examine in greater detail the farmer perspective, to analyse the final data from the survey and to explore the technicians’ perspective.
21. The Chair thanked the Working Groups for their efforts so far. It was agreed that the Core Group would meet again in late November or early December which would give the Working Groups a little more time to conclude their investigations. The BVA Secretariat would co-ordinate the meeting with the Core Group. **Action: BVA Secretariat**

22. The Chair also asked the Working Groups to start thinking about the implications for veterinary education and policy (the remaining ‘main issues’ identified at the first meeting of the VDC) within their work streams. **Action: Working Groups**

**Discussion**

23. The Core Group then held a general discussion about the issues raised above and the work of the working groups.

24. S Reid asked that if the outcomes of the working group investigations were to suggest changes to veterinary school curricula, that these should be contrasted with what was already provided and not a perception of what was provided. J Fishwick reported that there was a huge amount going on within veterinary education to make the training given to students relevant. He noted that at the RVC they had reviewed their curriculum following the release of the Lowe report and that as a consequence of the report only a few changes had actually been required.

25. The Chair asked if there were any gaps which needed to be filled in the work of the VDC. It was agreed that, in relation to the work of para-professionals and technicians, the actual size of the market was one issue which could be explored further and R Bennett agreed to do this. **Action: R Bennett**

26. The Chair asked for a perspective from AHVLA and the CVO on discussions so far. S Hall noted that many of the issues raised, especially in the context of the discussions of paraprofessionals, were also issues that AHVLA was currently considering. He referred to the work currently being undertaken by AHVLA on proposals to develop partnership working with private practices and the role of the practice as a tool for clinical governance as well as being a business. N Gibbens stated that he believed that the VDC should retain its focus in the first instance on what could be done within the current legislative constraints as he felt that this was where the VDC could produce its most useful recommendations.

27. The Chair also asked C Hart if there were any issues particularly pertaining to Northern Ireland which the VDC had not yet covered. C Hart responded that the issues were very much the same, although there were some differences in the distribution of large animal practices. He noted that the Lowe report had highlighted a number of opportunities, but that realising these opportunities was a challenge.

**Next Steps**

28. As noted above it was agreed that a further meeting of the Core Group would be scheduled for late November/early December to discuss the outcomes of the working group’s research and any implications that may have come to light regarding education, training and policy.

29. The Chair put forward a suggestion that for a future meeting, it might be helpful for the new Chairman of the Animal Health and Welfare Board, Michael Seals, to attend to give an introduction to the organisation. It was agreed that an invitation should be extended. **Action: BVA Secretariat**