

Speech to the BVA annual Welsh Dinner

Anna Judson, President of the British Veterinary Association

Wednesday 26 June 2024 at The Classroom, Cardiff

AS DELIVERED

Welsh

Diolch yn fawr Gwen. Boneddigion a boneddigesau, mae'n bleser gennyf eich croesawu i Ginio Cymreig blynyddol y BVA, diolch yn fawr iawn am ymuno â ni.

PAUSE

English

Thank you so much, Gwen. Distinguished guests, I'm delighted to welcome you to the British Veterinary Association's annual Welsh dinner. Thank you so much for joining us.

It's a great pleasure to be back in Wales where I spent many a happy summer as a child with my Welsh grandparents in and around Cardiff. I later ran a veterinary practice in Welshpool for almost 30 years and understand the many positives and the many challenges of working and delivering veterinary services in Wales.

We're delighted to have Huw Irranca-Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, with us tonight. Huw is an Honorary Associate of BVA and we're very grateful to him for his ongoing support. We look forward to hearing from him in a few minutes.

There are many issues facing the veterinary profession currently and I would like to talk to you about three of those tonight:

- Veterinary legislative reform
- Animal Welfare legislation
- And, Licensing of dog breeders and enforcement

One of the most pressing issues facing the profession is the Competition and Markets Authority's Market Investigation into the UK veterinary services market for pets. Now underway, it's expected to take around 18 months to complete.

While the investigation brings clear challenges for the profession, we cannot ignore the 58,000 people, both members of the public and of our profession, who responded to CMA's consultation to share their concerns. Whilst it can at times feel uncomfortable, this external scrutiny is a valuable opportunity to reflect on the service we deliver to our clients; consider whether we can do better to communicate more effectively and provide greater transparency; and also to explore the role contextualised care can play in the treatment we provide for our patients.

Since the CMA launched its initial review at the end of 2023, BVA has been working to ensure that it conducts its review, and now investigation, with a full understanding of the veterinary landscape. We're therefore pleased to see the CMA taking on board our call for reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, in response to its concern that the outdated regulatory framework is no longer fit for purpose.

Alongside RCVS, we've been lobbying for veterinary legislative reform for some time and have secured cross-party support. While progress is being made, it's slow, and we hope that the CMA's investigation will act as a catalyst for this much needed change. It's simply not possible to build a modern and effective veterinary profession on the foundations of legislation which was created in a different era.

As vets we are closely supported by others – such as registered veterinary nurses, vet techs, musculoskeletal professionals and equine dental technicians. The current Veterinary Surgeons Act doesn't recognise these important roles and it therefore fails to embrace the potential of the wider veterinary team. 'A profession for everyone' is my presidential theme, and, as a vet of over 30 years, I strongly believe that the legislative framework for the profession must support the wider teams we lead as vets, in order to be effective.

It must also provide legal protection for the title of veterinary nurse. Veterinary nurses work closely with veterinary surgeons and are highly skilled and qualified, yet no formal training or qualifications are actually required for someone to call themselves a 'veterinary nurse'. This is unacceptable.

The need for veterinary legislative reform was highlighted clearly by RCVS President, Dr Sue Patterson, last month in a Welsh Government Petitions Committee Inquiry into the veterinary sector. Dr Patterson reiterated the concerns I have highlighted this evening. As the profession stands united in its calls for reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, I ask for *your* support in lobbying Defra to help us achieve this.

The loss of the Kept Animals Bill just over a year ago was extremely disappointing as it would have tackled several significant animal welfare issues. However, it was positive to see that many of the issues it would have addressed were then picked up in individual pieces of legislation. We now have a strict licensing scheme in England to help prevent the keeping of primates as pets, a ban on live export in Great Britain and pet abduction is a specific offence in England and Northern Ireland.

Sadly, the General Election on 4 July means that additional pieces of animal welfare legislation to ban electronic collars and tackle both livestock worrying and pet import, have been dropped and will not become law. BVA has consistently lobbied the UK Government to take these important issues forward and we will continue to do so once a new government is in place.

Positive progress in relation to animal welfare is also being made in Wales on issues we have lobbied for, with the Senedd recently approving legislation making it mandatory for CCTV to be installed in all slaughterhouse areas where live animals are unloaded, kept, handled, stunned and killed. The regulations came into force earlier this month, providing important safeguards for animal welfare.

We also welcome the legislation being brought forward for a compulsory Bovine Viral Diarrhoea eradication scheme in Wales, with thanks to Dr Neil Paton and his team for their vital work on this project.

Wales is also making significant improvements to animal welfare with the Animal Licensing Project Wales. Forming part of wider plans to improve animal welfare, the aim of this important project is to ensure that dog breeding establishments are reputable and high quality, which in turn will promote responsible dog ownership.

The project has now been extended to 2025 and is currently providing some form of support or training to all twenty-two local authorities in Wales, improving training and qualifications for local authority enforcement officers, many of whom are part of trading standards and have limited expertise on animal health and welfare issues. There is significant veterinary

involvement, with vets working with enforcement officers to increase knowledge around fit-to-breed certificates, and providing support in cases where a breeder cannot be signed off.

Phoebe McCarter, our Welsh Branch Junior Vice President, is supporting this important work through her involvement with the Welsh Government's stakeholder group, which will produce criteria for inspections and fit to breed assessments. Welsh Branch member, Mike Jessop, who is here tonight, is also involved, working with enforcement officers to increase knowledge on the regulations around fit-to-breed certificates, and provide support where sign off cannot be given.

While the Animal Licensing Project has achieved considerable success to date, to develop it further, more sustainable funding is required so that it can become a benchmarking organisation and standardise practice across Wales. We ask for your support in achieving this.

During the evening we would like to hear your thoughts on how we can best support you and collaborate to bring about these important changes.

- Reform of the outdated Veterinary Surgeons Act is essential for the future of our profession and veterinary teams, and it will improve animal welfare as well as help build client trust. We ask for your support in pressing the UK Government to deliver this much-needed reform.
- Animal welfare legislation is progressing, both across the UK and especially in Wales. However, there is still more to be done. We ask you to prioritise delivery of this legislation and to ensure that the veterinary perspective is considered as it is developed.
- Sustainable funding is required to continue the positive work of the Animal Licensing Project in Wales, which is already having a positive impact on animal welfare. I urge you to ensure that adequate funding for this, and other key animal health and welfare projects, such as Gwaredu Scab, Arwain DGC and the Pembrokeshire Project, is made available.

Finally, I would like to say a huge thank you to all my colleagues, many of whom are in this room, who are part of BVA Welsh Branch. Your energy, commitment and expertise are hugely valued.

If everyone would please rise and raise your glasses for a toast to “BVA Welsh Branch and to the Welsh veterinary community”.

Thank you and I hope you enjoy the rest of the evening. I would now like to invite the Cabinet Secretary to speak.