

the RCVS registration data<sup>2</sup> suggested that 49 per cent of UK-practising non-UK vets would not have been registered for five years by March 2019 and this may indicate that many would have to apply for pre-settled status first. Anyone wanting more information on this should look at the BVA's website<sup>4</sup>.

While we can discuss much of this in terms of facts and figures we must also not forget the emotional strain that uncertainty can put on our profession – particularly non-UK EU nationals. According to the RCVS survey, 67 per cent of non-UK EU national vets are “finding the uncertainty about their future difficult” and, sadly, 64 per cent “feel less welcome.” Interestingly, 79 per cent were awaiting the outcome of the Brexit negotiations before deciding what to do. Given that this survey was last carried out in June 2018, it would be interesting to see what this 79 per cent are thinking now as the negotiations are extended.

While the workforce crisis has not been caused by EU exit, it has brought it into sharp focus. The profession is beginning to understand – and tackle – some of the issues; and, in this respect, the recent report on Motivation, Satisfaction and Retention<sup>5</sup> and another on Gender Discrimination<sup>6</sup> from the BVA and University of Exeter, are well worth reading.

The profession is looking to the future and actioning many of the suggestions laid out in the BVA/RCVS Vet Futures and Vet Futures action reports. It is also calling on the Government to reinstate vets on the Shortage Occupation List and has actively engaged with the Migration Advisory Committee to this end – watch out for its report due for publication soon. But as with anything, these actions will take time, which is why there needs to be clarity for the veterinary workforce in terms of EU exit.

Many suggestions are often more complex than would appear on the surface. For instance there have been calls for an expansion of the number of UK student places to study veterinary science, with a view that this would increase the number of UK national veterinary surgeons – a similar pledge was made by Jeremy Hunt in October 2016 to increase the number of UK doctors.

While this may be one part of the workforce solution, we need to be aware that 22 per cent of veterinary academic staff are non-UK EU nationals and there would need to be a significant monetary investment, because it is estimated that the cost of educating one veterinary student is around £20,000 per academic. I would recommend reading the BVA's brand new position on UK veterinary education to really understand the challenges and opportunities here; so keep an eye on the BVA website for this position statement coming live.

Certainty has been brought to the registration of veterinary degrees in the event of a no-deal. Currently, under the existing Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive, applicants from the EEA and Swiss nationals can automatically join the RCVS Register. In the event of a no-deal scenario – which could mean that MRPQ no longer applies – the recently passed Statutory Instrument (The Veterinary Surgeons and Animal Welfare (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019) will allow the RCVS to continue to register degrees obtained at EEA institutions, provided the degree meets the RCVS educational requirements and standards. If these standards are not met, then the Statutory Examination will need to be passed to obtain membership of the RCVS. However, the right to register a degree is not the same as the right to work, which will depend on any future immigration policy.

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### Animal health and welfare

Obviously diseases do not respect borders, which is why as a member of the EU, the UK has been part of EU surveillance schemes for animal health. As highlighted by the BVA in their Brexit and the Veterinary Profession report, ‘A high proportion of UK Government animal health policy is enacted via EU legislation’.<sup>7</sup>

While there are a myriad of important Regulations and Directives that we could talk about, the important point is that the protections currently in place for animal health must not be diluted after EU exit and, where possible, the opportunity to enhance them in a proportionate and reasonable manner should be seized.

Animal welfare is at the heart of what we do as vets and it also captures the attention of the general public. Welfare is legislated for through several avenues including national legislation and international treaties. However, around 80 per cent of the welfare legislation is from the EU. One area that captivated the media was that of sentience. Article 13 of Title II of the Lisbon Treaty puts a duty on Member States to have regard for animal welfare when formulating and implementing policy (with caveats) and states that animals are sentient beings. Unlike EU Regulations – which are, where appropriate, transferred in to UK law via the EU Withdrawal Act) – a treaty will not automatically become UK law on leaving the EU.

While we have good animal welfare law in the UK, none of it states that all animals are sentient and there is no explicit duty put on the state to consider animal welfare when developing and implementing policy. The Government has made commitments to embed the principle in Article 13 within UK law. This is partly thanks to the lobbying of the veterinary professions – but it is not there yet.

This one point on animal welfare shows the need to make sure that at no point do we dilute the current animal welfare standards. Indeed, we have the opportunity to enhance them and make Brand UK a high welfare one. Of course, this means that animal welfare must be prioritised in any trade deals and if we end up trading under World Trade Organisation rules, we must protect animal welfare as a public moral imperative.

### And the rest

There is so much that can be said about EU exit and the reach of the veterinary profession, but word count just won't allow it. While I have focussed on the people in our profession and the health and welfare of animals, it is not intended to diminish the importance of any others and the opportunities and threats that each of them faces. The BVA Brexit and the Veterinary Profession is a great place in which to delve and learn more.

So where are we now? As of the 23 April (always good to date things as they can move in any direction rapidly) a no-deal EU exit is looking less likely – although technically still possible. But would this have been so bad for the veterinary profession?