

General Secretary's Report



A warm welcome to you all.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy and peaceful 2019, and hope that you all had some family time over the Christmas and New Year period.

I start this report with some sad news regarding the loss of three individuals, which I am sure were known to many. The first to mention is Michael Fussey MBE. Mick was a great support to many a young MHI, as well as the Association, and was recognised as such as one of our Vice Presidents. An obituary for Michael will be published in due course.

We have also sadly lost Jim Fleming and Mark Cairns. Within this edition you will find obituaries to both from Ralph Wilson and Bob Hancock respectively, and my thanks to them for writing them. Our thoughts and condolences go out to all their families and friends at this sad time.

Also, within this edition, you will find details of this year's National AGM. In keeping with previous years, we will once again be holding the meeting at the Kings Manor Hotel, Edinburgh on Saturday April 13th. If you wish to attend, please let me know by the middle of March, so that I can arrange suitable catering at lunchtime.

2018 saw a comprehensive review in to Cutting Plants throughout the United Kingdom, as a result of some concerning findings during unannounced audits. The Association was represented during the consultation phase, and attended the meetings hosted by Food Standards Scotland. Following the publication of the interim report we submitted 5 questions for clarification of some of the points raised. The questions prepared by Angus Lowden were as follows;

1. Would the proposed information sharing initiative (point 20, page 9) be good for competing meat companies?
2. Who will verify the competency of staff? Will it be done in-house by FSA/FSS (point 30, page 12) or independently?

3. Will extensive multi-level HACCP training really make a difference? (point 30, pages 12-13)

4. Point 31, page 13 of the report reads, "the UK industry produces meat considered by many to be amongst the safest in the world". Who are the 'many'?

5. Point 19, page 6 states that the successful implementation will, among other things, reduce the risk to public health. What is the current level of risk and what is the estimated reduction in risk after the recommendations have been implemented?

The points quoted refer to the final report which was published in October 2018, and can be found here https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-and-fss-review-of-meat-cutting-plants-and-cold-stores-final-report_1.pdf

Unfortunately, no questions were taken at the Board meeting, so the above points have been forwarded to Food Standards Scotland by Angus for comment. At the time of writing, we await their reply.

Professional Recognition

Towards the end of January, the Association was contacted by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to inform us that their Council was about to publish a press release on progress to date. We were asked if we wished to add a comment to the release. We accepted the opportunity, and the full release is reproduced below.

RCVS news: RCVS Council opens the path for paraprofessionals to become regulated by the College

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Council has approved a pathway for veterinary and animal health paraprofessionals to become associates of or accredited by the College and therefore fall within the RCVS regulatory remit.

At the June 2017 meeting of RCVS Council, members decided to look into two separate models by which paraprofessionals working in the veterinary, animal health or related fields, might be regulated by the College in the future under powers granted by the RCVS's new Royal Charter in 2015. The first was an 'accreditation model', which would involve the RCVS accrediting an organisation which would regulate the profession in question, the second was an 'associate/ full regulation' model, in which individual paraprofessionals would receive a similar level of regulation to that already received by veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses.

As part of its legislation review, the College met with numerous paraprofessional organisations and further considered the two different models before making its recommendations to RCVS Council. At its January 2019 meeting RCVS Council agreed to proceed with both proposed models of paraprofessional regulation (the associate and accreditation models), with the suitability of each model being considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the profession applying for recognition.

Council members also confirmed that two paraprofessional groups that have already expressed an interest in being regulated by the College – meat inspectors and animal

behaviourists – will now be invited by the College to apply for associate or accredited status.

Commenting on the decision Eleanor Ferguson, RCVS Registrar, said: “This is a very significant decision by Council to open up a pathway to related paraprofessions to apply to become regulated by the College. It is difficult to give a time-frame at this stage as to when these particular professions will be brought on board, as we will have to go through a process of developing a number of new regulatory structures including registration, education and investigation and disciplinary, as well as the appropriate governing bodies for each of the professions. However, we are very pleased that the Association of Meat Inspectors (AMI) and the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) have expressed an interest in being regulated by the College and we look forward to working with them to make this happen.”

David Montgomery, President of the ABTC, said: “The ABTC enthusiastically welcomes the news that the RCVS is expanding its influence to include paraprofessionals. We look forward to exploring the opportunity to demonstrate the professional status of ABTC-registered Animal Trainers and Behaviourists by coming under the regulatory umbrella of the RCVS for the benefit of animal welfare.”

Ian Robinson, a Trustee of the AMI, added: “The Association of Meat Inspectors welcome the news that the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons intends to invite paraprofessionals to be regulated under the ambit of the RCVS. We believe it will offer enhanced security, opportunity and status, and we look forward to further dialogue to explore the various models in due course.”

The RCVS is also in communication with a number of other paraprofessional groups, including those representing animal musculoskeletal practitioners and equine dental technicians, about the future of paraprofessional regulation. However, the RCVS Legislation Working Party (LWP) and RCVS Council agreed that, before such professions could become associates, there would need to be reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act in order to remedy some of the deficiencies of the current legislative regime and make sure that these groups have appropriate legal underpinning for their work. This complements the ongoing discussions on changes to the legislative framework to bolster the role of veterinary nurses. The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been asked to consider these specific changes to the legislative framework along with its wider review of improving the legislative underpinning of the veterinary professions.

One particular issue, about which there have been longstanding discussions, concerns equine dental procedures which are often carried out by well-trained paraprofessionals but without supporting legislation or regulation. The RCVS proposals are designed to remedy these deficiencies by providing a framework for these activities. Neil Townsend, Chair of the British Equine Veterinary Association’s (BEVA) Allied Professional Committee, said “Change to the current situation, where legislative enforcement is impossible, horse owners are confused, and horse welfare is compromised, is long overdue. BEVA is really pleased that the RCVS has listened and is supporting a proposal for regulation of all equine dental procedures. We hope that Government will act.”

Commenting on the decision of Council, RCVS President Amanda Boag, said: “This is a real milestone in the history of the RCVS and represents quite possibly the biggest shake-up in our regulatory role since the introduction of the Register of veterinary nurses in 2007, and should Schedule 3 reform be achieved it would be the most significant change since the role of veterinary nurses was first recognized in law in 1991. It is particularly befitting for our 175th anniversary year, as it demonstrates we are an organisation that can evolve to meet the changes occurring in the wider veterinary and animal health sector and use our regulatory experience and expertise to ensure that animal health and welfare and public health is safeguarded in different, but related fields of endeavour.”

The full approved paper regarding the review of the minor procedures regime and paraprofessional regulation can be found on the RCVS website at: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/the-royal-college-of-veterinary-surgeons-the-review-of-minor/>

I have no doubt that this will be a hot topic for discussion amongst members, and I would ask that you send your thoughts and questions to your Divisional Secretaries to bring to our Council meetings. There is still a lot to be discussed and decided, and we want as much input from members and interested stakeholders as possible, into the decision-making process.

Finally, the dates for this year’s seminar are Friday September 13th to Sunday September 15th at Harper Adams University. The Trustees are currently inviting prospective speakers, and planning for the event. Further details will be posted on our website at www.meatinspectors.co.uk in due course.

Regards,

Jeremy Thomas