



MAY 2011

# AGV Times

NEWSLETTER



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### President's section

It is my privilege as your President to welcome you to our Spring Newsletter. The reflections of my predecessor Adrienne Conroy in our Autumn Newsletter were coloured by references to the changing landscape and the effects on both public and private sectors of the financial crisis and consequent spending review. Six months further on changes within this context continue apace and are an important part of our environment.

In our lead article from Nigel Gibbens Chief Veterinary Officer his thoughts on the challenge of protecting public health, animal health and the economy from the impact of major animal disease within significantly reduced resources are especially welcome at this time. Clearly there will be many challenges in the months and years to come. In his article Nigel focuses especially on the newly created AHVLA and emphasizes the challenge of creating a common culture – an important aspect of the current merger to form AHVLA, and one which will need understanding and patience on all sides to build the foundations. As your President I am mindful that similar challenges are being faced in most of the departments and agencies from which we draw our members. Good professional relationships across the AHVLA and beyond will be important to foster morale, communication and progress and I hope AGV will be able to provide a forum where these can be nurtured.

On becoming your president some 6 months ago I pledged my intention to strive to build on the work of my predecessors to ensure that AGV is able to sustain its position as a thriving association and one which is flexible and fit for purpose in the current changing times.

To do this AGV is very dependent on the commitment, energy and skills of its officers, council and members. It must also be mindful of the limits of its financial resources, which largely depend on membership subscriptions. I feel very well supported by the competent, enthusiastic, dedicated Council our Senior Vice President Adrienne Conroy has been able to put together. I would like to provide a brief overview of our recent activities on your behalf.

AGV continues to represent your views nationally through Adrienne as our BVA representative and internationally at the European Association of State Veterinary Officers (EASVO) through myself. Of interest to AGV members is the outcome of the preliminary meeting of the Veterinary Development Council formed following the recommendations of the Lowe report to discuss the needs and expectations of veterinary clients. Government was acknowledged as an important client as was the need for the veterinary profession to recognise the challenges to the farming industry and itself to work together towards improved welfare and food production.

EASVO with its sister organisation UEVH (Union of European Veterinary Hygienists) also has an interest in the Lowe report. Other issues include development of a joint programme for a session at a meeting of the European Public Health Association EUPHA to be held in November.

#### Editor:

[alexandra.tomlinson@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:alexandra.tomlinson@fera.gsi.gov.uk)

[linda.smith@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:linda.smith@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk)

#### Artistic editor:

[rebeca.garcia@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:rebeca.garcia@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk)

## President's section—continued

Further details will be available after our June meeting. Board members also represent our views on FVE working parties such as one on puppy transport and another on Veterinary Statutory Bodies. Various welfare issues discussed recently include slaughter of pregnant animals especially cattle and pigs and transport problems concerning head heights and the effect of disparities in legislation on transport times between rules for drivers and those for our animals.

In recent years AGV has been privileged to form a part of the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA)/Government Veterinary Service (GVS) conference. At last year's conference our session on Vets in a Changing Environment was very successful. Professor Christopher Wathes, then chairman of FAWC, provided a thought provoking start reviewing welfare definitions within the framework of our professional oath. A presentation on health planning from cattle practitioner Jon Statham was complemented by one from Bob Monies and Sara Robertson of VLA explaining the development of Herd Sure – VLA's Cattle Health Improvement Service. Stewart Houston and Mark White on behalf of the Pig Development Council provided a very interesting resume of the development of pig health schemes. The session raised many issues on working together across the profession and the food and farming industry, furnishing the basis for an interesting discussion.

In recent months your Council has considered options for the possibility of a stand-alone symposium as well as contributing to the AHVLA Conference. This would provide an opportunity for our membership to get together as a group at a central venue as well as a forum for our AGM.

It would require an investment of additional resources to organise and will also mean that we are responsible for the financial management of the entire meeting. Against this it may provide a small surplus for the Association's funds.

May I thank you for all for helping us to consider this and other initiatives by completing our questionnaire on CPD and networking, recently circulated to all potential AGV members. I am particularly grateful to Linda Smith for developing the questionnaire, and to senior managers across government for supporting its distribution. I look forward to sharing the results with all of you in due course.

In addition to considering a 'stand-alone' symposium we are pleased to have a presence at the AHVLA International Conference where there will be an AGV session on Thurs-day 15th September. The topic will be evidence based medicine and speakers will be confirmed shortly. I hope to see as many of you as possible there.

AGV is only able to thrive with the input and support of our members. May I encourage you to visit our website. Your council and I will be pleased to have your feedback on our activities and your views on professional matters which arise. Contact details are set out on the final page of this Newsletter. We will also be pleased to discuss the benefits of membership with interested parties.

Especially thanks go to our editing team Alex Tomlinson, Linda Smith and Rebeca Garcia for ably putting together this Newsletter.

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## BVA services for members—advice to help you

At times of change you might have questions in relation to your employment terms and conditions or other work related matters. The British Veterinary Association offers free legal support to their members as part of their membership package to all members, including those employed by the Government.

If you are involved in a dispute the BVA team of specialist legal advisors will be able to offer you guidance on the most appropriate steps to take. If your advisor believes that your particular situation would benefit from referral to the mediation and/ or representation services, they will ask your permission for your case details to be forwarded to the appropriate team.

Once the full details of the case have been considered, you will be contacted by the mediation or representation team who will advise you on the next steps or give you a clear explanation as to why your case is not suitable for either service.

Further information about this and other services is available in the BVA website [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk).



Aiden Foster

### Why did I join AGV Council?

I joined the VLA in 2004 having spent several years in general practice and then pursuing a career as a veterinary dermatologist based in academia. I still see myself as a dermatologist with roles as editor-in-chief of *Veterinary Dermatology* published by Wiley-Blackwell, as past-president of the European Society of Veterinary Dermatology and a visiting teacher appointment with the University of Nottingham veterinary school.

The day job is that of a veterinary investigation officer (VIO) based at the Shrewsbury regional laboratory, where we see a large number and variety of farmed species in the post mortem room. My work includes being project manager for miscellaneous exotic/farmed species (including camelids and deer such as reindeer) and supporting VLA links with the Government Veterinary Surgeons (GVS) and with veterinary students doing extra-mural studies.

Over the past year I have been involved with visits to the vet schools in Edinburgh and Cambridge as part of a round of visits by GVS vets to raise awareness in veterinary undergraduates of the work carried out by vets in Animal Health (AH), VLA and core Defra; covering amongst other topics the roles of AH, the Scanning Surveillance Programme and animal welfare. It has been a pleasure working alongside colleagues from AH and Defra including the AGV council members Rebeca Garcia and Linda Smith.

One of the VIOs at Shrewsbury usually sits on the committee of the Shropshire BVA (SVA) territory. As a committee member of SVA I became familiar with the workings of the committee and its relations with BVA HQ. SVA is a long standing well supported division that organises CPD events and has support from commercial sponsors for the monthly meetings that attract a wide variety of people reflecting the range of vets in practice in the county and beyond. There is also a link with the local BMA group and a co-hosted meeting held once a year. The Shrewsbury VLA vets provide the speakers for the CPD events held in spring which may, for example, include topics such as nervous diseases in sheep, common conditions of backyard chickens and psoroptic mange in cattle.

In 2010 at the AGM I gave a brief overview of mycobacterial infection in non-bovines, having previously covered TB in south American camelids. I included cats, dogs, goats, pigs, sheep and wild boar. In many ways my five years with SVA prepared the ground for moving to AGV.

In joining the AGV one might ask, as some do, what is the difference between AGV and GVS?

1. Members of AGV pay a small annual membership fee to be part of a BVA specialist territory that represents the views of government vets to BVA, the Government and other groups (such as the RCVS). This representation includes discussion and contributions from members on the various consultations produced by Defra and the BVA council papers.
2. AGV represents the views of vets working in any UK government department or executive agency including the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA), Defra, FERA, Food Standards Agency, Home Office, RAVC and Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD).
3. There are over 600 vets employed across government who carry out various roles which are substantially different from the roles of vets in other specialist BVA divisions. So, it is important for us to be represented as a group, to make a contribution to discussions / consultations on veterinary matters and to be aware of the activities of wider veterinary community through involvement with the BVA.

All vets employed in government are automatically members of GVS, which aims to:

1. Reach out to veterinary schools and raise awareness of the work of vets in government.
2. Help government vets to develop their skills and provide opportunities for learning and development.

The GVS and AGV share the aim of providing high quality CPD for government veterinarians (and other interested parties). Another important and valuable outcome of being involved with both organisations is that there are opportunities to meet, work and collaborate with colleagues from different parts of government. Since it is likely that the number of government vets will shrink in the near future it is more important than ever that we have the means to develop partnerships with colleagues in various government agencies and departments. The AGV has a vital role to play in developing those partnerships.

Aiden Foster

"AGV represents the views of vets working in any UK government department or executive agency"



Nigel Gibbens

From 1 April 2011 Animal Health and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) will merge, bringing together the two principal Defra agencies working to combat animal diseases and combining their considerable expertise and scientific capability. The new agency will be known on an interim basis as the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) until a permanent name is decided. In this article, Nigel Gibbens, CVO UK, talks about the merger and the benefits it will bring to animal and public health.

This is a challenging time for those who work in Government, along with the people we serve across the country. The need to live within very significantly reduced resources will change both what we do and how we do it. In state veterinary medicine the job to be done remains the same: to protect public health, animal welfare and the economy from the impact of major animal diseases. In addition, we have an important part to play in helping farmers increase production sustainably; protecting the environment and limiting impacts on climate change. Achieving this in radically different ways, with less money, brings opportunities as well as threats and the new Agency is a good example.

Combining the expertise and knowledge of Animal Health and the VLA will create a new agency with considerably enhanced resilience, disease emergency response capability and scientific expertise.

The merger will give us a fantastic shared platform of expertise on which to build for the future; bringing together knowledge and expertise across the whole scope of animal health and welfare delivery to make the best possible impact on policy formation and outcomes on the ground, and enabling us to offer wider career and personal development opportunities to our staff.

AHVLA will be further enhanced by the planned transfer of the veterinary and scientific advice team within Defra's Food and Farming Group to the new agency on its inception. The skills and expertise of this team, who provide support or veterinary and related scientific evidence to policy functions, will complement those of the current Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agencies to provide policy with high impact, evidenced based advice.

This transfer of veterinary and scientific capability from Defra will give the new agency the capacity to understand and respond in the best possible way to policy requests, and allow it to make a bigger difference than ever to animal health and welfare outcomes.

With possibilities like these within reach, the hopes for the AHVLA are understandably high –however, the merger process will not be without its challenges. Merging staff on differing terms and conditions is always complex, and Catherine Brown, the Chief Executive designate of the AHVLA, and her senior executives, will be critical in bringing the agencies together harmoniously. As Catherine has stressed, this is a new agency not a take-over, and forming an understanding of differences between organisations and taking steps to create a new common culture can sometimes be as important as written terms and conditions.

This merger is an opportunity to review the model of professional development in AHVLA, capturing best practice from Animal Health, the VLA and Defra's veterinary and scientific advice team, and ensuring the agency is not only about delivery but a full partner in policy development as well.

Strategically, the intention is to make AHVLA a centre of expertise, and once AHVLA's senior leadership is in place they will work with staff and customers to define what the agency is going to do and how it will operate. Obviously, as vets in Government, we will continue to deliver statutory policies, provide emergency response capability and expert knowledge, and engage in surveillance and risk assessment work for policy colleagues. This work will always be of critical importance, and Government vets should be valued for the skills and knowledge they bring to these tasks.

"The merger will give us a fantastic shared platform of expertise on which to build for the future"



Nigel Gibbens

However, the impact of cuts in Government spending puts pressure on AHVLA, animal keepers and producers and leads to increased risks in normal business. This reduced public resource means we will have to work smarter, apply new technology and ways of working, while at the same time ensuring we don't drop our standards, especially in respect of health and safety. There must be greater efficiency in the use of the resources available, particularly as policy needs are not decreasing and evidence remains of paramount importance. The London-based SCS Director of Advice Services will be responsible for monitoring and ensuring that advice to policy teams properly draws on all the knowledge available within AHVLA. The value and quality of service the agency provides will also be monitored, so it will be important to ensure that the work of the new Agency is properly prioritised and resourced. Catherine Brown and the Project Board will be monitoring this as SLAs are drawn up to ensure there is suitable alignment between policy needs and Agency resources.

As we move forwards, working in partnership and finding different ways for Government, industry and other stakeholders to work together will be key.

We must recognise that not all work needs to be done in Government, and in the future we will see more functions delivered by the private sector or in partnership with Government. Catherine Brown touched on this at the first meeting of the Veterinary Development Council in January 2011, when she spoke about the potential to move to a more collaborative and strategic approach to working with private practitioners.

AHVLA will face significant challenges in the future, and building a more strategic supplier relationship with the veterinary profession could play a part in tackling those challenges. One option would be to change Government's role in the delivery of veterinary services and consider whether, in the right circumstances, outsourcing some of the work could be part of the agency's strategy for the future. This would obviously depend on veterinary businesses driving down their costs - both by examining the use of paraprofessionals and by consolidating their administration - and delivering a consistent, high quality service. There may also be further changes to AHVLA's functions as reforms continue in the animal health and wider delivery landscape. Clearly, the funding available next year will be paramount - both in terms of revenue funding for our ongoing activities, and in terms of capital to fund investment in estates, equipment, and IT.

Nigel Gibbens

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### Christmas card 2010



Council decided once again to save money by designing our own Christmas card (Council member Rebeca Garcia artistically obliged), and donate money saved to the Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF). VBF was most grateful for this contribution to their funds, and the card was generally very well received particularly by outside bodies with many reciprocal greetings sent to the secretary.

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### Check it out!

Following his recent attendance on your behalf at a working party at the RCVS on veterinary specialisation, Aiden Foster's notes on the discussions extending from the wider public perspective to thoughts on potential roles for government vets wishing to attain qualifications or to provide coaching for others in our areas of expertise are available on our website [www.agv.org.uk](http://www.agv.org.uk).

Information from presentations from our conference session 'Vets in a changing environment' will be available very shortly on our upgraded website [www.agv.org.uk](http://www.agv.org.uk).

## Life after Government – “An Old Duffer’s Guide to Retirement”

On the third issue we continue with the series of contributions from retired members of AGV. This time, George Marshall tells us his thoughts and plans for retirement.

First Thought – Marvellous – no more boring meetings, impossible deadlines, in-year reviews – the list was endless.

Second Thought – What am I going to do?

Third Thought – I need a plan.

This is where things started to unravel, as obviously during all my years in the SVS I had never needed any skills in planning, and this was an entirely new area for me. I purchased several books on forward planning, couldn’t understand any of them, so decided just to make up the plans as I went along.

**Plan A. The Great Escape** – Luckily, before I retired from full time employment in Defra I was part of a working group dealing with the transition to agency status, and to soften the blow of giving up work I was able to continue working part time for a while (mainly dealing with carpets and soft furnishings as I recall.)

Unfortunately, as in my entire career, I never was quite sure what I was supposed to be doing, so I was soon rumbled, and decided that the time had come for me to sever connections completely – however with all the friendships I had made over the years and the support I had received, it was difficult to just walk away, so, as well as the Old Farts’ Club meetings, I still keep in contact with the Lincoln staff. We meet occasionally for a pub lunch – although it is difficult to fit a meal in, as the vets are always so keen to get back to work.

*Verdict – Useful initially, but quickly lost its appeal (except Old Farts’ Club and pub lunches)*

**Plan B. Community Service** – Still looking for something to occupy my time, I applied for the post of independent lay member of the Lincolnshire Police Authority Standards Committee and continued this for three years after retirement. This involved alternating between Chairman and Vice Chairman of the committee and attending various conferences and meetings. Going to conferences in a chauffeur-driven limousine came as a slight change from what I had been used to in Defra, but the conduct of some of the members, especially in meetings, did make me think that perhaps Defra wasn’t as bad as I had thought.

*Verdict – Useful insight but almost as frustrating as working for Defra*

**Plan C. Grandchildren** – I have to admit that this was not actually part of the retirement plan, but I am lucky enough to have four grandsons aged 1 to 18 years old, who provide all the enjoyment of having children with none of the responsibilities! As a result I can indulge in everything from building Lego toys to going to Scotland Internationals without my wife questioning my sanity, (especially when I say we are going to the internationals!).

*Verdict – Not really part of the plan, but highly recommended.*

**Plan D. Volunteering** – I am a volunteer photographer for the National Trust which is a great way to feel part of a team again, and we all have a good laugh along the way.

The only tricky bit so far has been photographing, from the ground, young ladies abseiling down a castle wall without getting arrested. (Perhaps a step too far???)

*Verdict – Highly recommended*



George Marshall

"I could do whatever I wanted whenever I wanted"

## Life after Government—An old duffer's guide to retirement.

**Plan E Hobbies** - I also looked into what hobbies were available for the old and confused on retirement, and decided that woodturning might be worth a try. This is a hobby specifically designed for the elderly retired gentleman (a fact that was confirmed when I attended an exhibition in Stoneleigh Exhibition Centre and for the first time in my life had to stand in a long queue to use the gent's toilet!)

The downside is that I quickly found that there is a limit to the number of people that actually appreciate vases which will only stand up when propped against a wall, and now when I give anyone a present they usually shake it to see if it might contain any alcoholic liquid, and if not they just put it aside and move on to the next one.



Next, in a somewhat optimistic attempt to keep fit I decided to take up golf. Again this was not entirely successful, however over the years I sometimes think I have improved from totally appalling to just impossibly bad, and I can now very occasionally hit the ball. As well as joining a local golf club (one with very low standards), I also play regularly with Mike Jones, who unfortunately recently resorted to the very underhanded tactics of getting lessons, typical of an Old Fart!

Verdict - Great opportunities sadly limited by lack of ability

**Plan F. What happens when none of the plans work?** As you will have gathered my attempts at planning retirement have not been entirely successful, and when it all goes wrong I resort to the escape route of all retirees - namely, moaning about the state of the world. For instance - Why do barbers offer reduced rates to pensioners when the hair in your nose grows faster than the remaining hair on your head, and you have lost all interest in your appearance anyway? Why did I not get offered reduced rates when I was twenty and got my hair cut much more frequently?

Why do pensioners always say they have been "really busy" when they actually mean they have been "really slow". As an example, twenty years ago I used to come home in the evening, mow the lawn, trim the hedge and do a bit of weeding. Now I start at about 10am, cut half the lawn, have a cup of coffee, fall asleep and waken in time to have lunch and watch News at One. I then go back out, cut the other half of the lawn, have a coffee, read the paper, and go back in telling everyone that I have had a really busy day in the garden.

Verdict - You will have no options on this one - it will happen anyway - just accept it!

I could go on but I feel my medication is wearing off and I can't remember where I left my tablets, so I will finish now in the hope that you find at least some of this useful, although as you will not now retire until you are at least 85, you may have to tailor the plans to suit your age.

All the very best for the future and thanks for the memories.

George

"I decided that woodturning might be worth a try



## AGV Council—how to contact us.

Council Member	Organisation and location	Preferred contact details
<b>Catherine McVicar President</b>	Retired government vet and part time poultry practitioner covering Notts/Leics	<a href="mailto:catherine.mcvicar@minstervets.com">catherine.mcvicar@minstervets.com</a> <a href="mailto:catherinemcvicar@aol.com">catherinemcvicar@aol.com</a> 07771 608268
<b>Linda Smith JVP</b>	*Animal Health South East Region	<a href="mailto:Linda.smith@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk">Linda.smith@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:Linda.a.smith@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk">Linda.a.smith@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk</a> 07977 289733
<b>Adrienne Conroy, SVP</b>	Ex-government vet	<a href="mailto:adrienn.cy@btinternet.com">adrienn.cy@btinternet.com</a>
<b>Stewart Donald, Secretary</b>	*Animal Health Inverness	<a href="mailto:Stewart.donald@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk">Stewart.donald@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk</a> 01463 728800
<b>Fred Landeg, Treasurer</b>	Retired; Reading	<a href="mailto:Fred.landeg@btinternet.com">Fred.landeg@btinternet.com</a> 01189 452360 or 07777 684477
<b>Rebeca Garcia, AWF</b>	*DEFRA, London	<a href="mailto:Rebeca.garcia@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk">Rebeca.garcia@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk</a> 07799 470951
<b>Enrique Fernandez</b>	*Animal Health	<a href="mailto:enrique.fernandez-gamazo@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk">enrique.fernandez-gamazo@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk</a>
<b>Aiden Foster</b>	*VLA Shrewsbury Regional Laboratory	<a href="mailto:a.foster@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk">a.foster@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk</a> 01743 467621
<b>Trish Logie</b>	VMD	<a href="mailto:p.logie@vmd.defra.gsi.gov.uk">p.logie@vmd.defra.gsi.gov.uk</a> 01932 338441
<b>Kate Sharpe</b>	*Animal Health Leeds/Worcester	<a href="mailto:Kate.sharpe@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk">Kate.sharpe@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk</a> 07765 220691
<b>Lévon Stephan</b>	*Animal Health, Exeter	<a href="mailto:Levon.stephan@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk">Levon.stephan@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk</a> 07977 287754
<b>Alex Tomlinson</b>	FERA Gloucestershire	<a href="mailto:alexandra.tomlinson@fera.gsi.gov.uk">alexandra.tomlinson@fera.gsi.gov.uk</a> 01453 861416

\*AHVLA from April 2011

### Quiz Corner

What is the value of the second row?

õ	õ	õ	🐱	= 11
🐱	!	🐱	ò	= ?
ò	!	ò	ò	= 11
🐱	🐱	🐱	õ	= 9
= 8	= 21	= 8	= 7	

If you are taking longer than 3 minutes to work it out, you should reconsider your strategy!

### Contributions

Do you have anything interesting to share with all your colleagues? If you do, please email your ideas to the editors of the newsletter so they can be taken into account in future newsletters.



Lévon Stephan

Quiz Answer can be found at the bottom of page 4