

## **The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS): Guiding principles for a post-Brexit world**

### **The role of the RCVS**

1. The RCVS is the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the United Kingdom. We are responsible under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 for keeping the register of veterinary surgeons eligible to practise in the UK, setting standards for veterinary education and regulating the professional conduct of veterinary surgeons.
2. The RCVS also exercise powers under our Royal Charter to award Fellowships, Diplomas and Certificates to veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and others.
3. The RCVS aims to enhance society through improved animal health and welfare. We do this by setting, upholding and advancing the educational, ethical and clinical standards of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses.

### **Brexit: challenges and solutions**

4. Brexit presents numerous challenges to the veterinary profession, but many of these challenges can be addressed by the profession itself, and others with appropriate support from government.
5. The veterinary profession in the UK is very reliant on graduates of European veterinary schools to meet domestic demand for veterinary services. Over half of vets registering in the UK each year come from overseas, the vast majority from the European Union. Some sectors, such as public health and the meat trade, are especially reliant on European workers. Any rapid reduction in numbers, either through ending the current system of mutual recognition or by restrictions on immigration, are likely to cause significant labour shortages which would jeopardise public health, animal welfare, and economic production.
6. However, given sufficient time and increased funding for veterinary education, such shortages could be addressed by boosting the number of veterinary graduates in the UK. Brexit also creates the opportunity to rethink the role of paraprofessionals in the UK (particularly veterinary nurses), to work to boost retention rates, and the take a fresh look at broadening participation in the veterinary profession.
7. In the longer term, if the risk of veterinary shortages is mitigated by boosting the numbers of UK veterinary graduates, then post-Brexit there may be an opportunity to ensure that only graduates of overseas schools meeting UK-equivalent standards are entitled to register in the UK. This will increase veterinary standards at home while encouraging improved standards (and the verification of those standards) overseas.

## **RCVS Brexit Principles**

**Principle: Vital veterinary work continues to get done.**

**Policies: We can achieve this through:**

1. Ensuring EU vets and veterinary nurses (VNs) currently working in the UK are allowed to stay indefinitely; ensuring that current and future graduates of UK vet schools, regardless of their nationality, are prioritised for UK work visas or equivalent.
2. Ensuring that any reduction in the migration of veterinary surgeons and VNs from overseas is offset by an increase in the number of home-grown vets & VNs; this would require an appropriate increase in funding and capacity for UK veterinary education.
3. Developing new measures to support veterinary surgeons and VNs to have thriving and successful careers and thereby boost the rates of retention within the professions.
4. Upskilling and extending the role of veterinary nurses to enable a multi skilled workforce, employed in roles better suiting their skills and sufficiently adaptable to any changes in employment patterns.

**Principle: High standards of animal welfare remain and improve.**

**Policies: We can achieve this through:**

1. Moving towards a reform of mutual recognition so that only graduates from schools accredited by organisations working in accordance with IAWG standards (e.g. RCVS, American Veterinary Boards Council (AVMC), American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), South African Veterinary Council (SAVC), and the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) are eligible for mutual recognition.
2. Advocating that, if freedom of movement for veterinary surgeons from the EU is to be reduced, then restrictions should focus on graduates from non-EAEVE accredited schools.
3. Continuing to contribute to discussions on advancing standards of global accreditation. Being active on the international stage whether at OIE, EAEVE, FVE or AVMA to ensure the UK voice is heard.
4. Ensuring that any new regulatory frameworks replacing existing EU regimes whether in medicines or employment, should uphold the appropriate high standards of animal welfare.

**Principle: RCVS is a global force for good**

**Policies: We can achieve this through:**

1. Ensuring that UK vets and VNs working abroad continue to be held up as exemplars of the profession, and that their rights to continue to live and work in the EU are protected.
2. Expanding our membership globally, with an aspiration to double it over 10 years;
3. Showing leadership by developing UK Mind Matters Initiative into a global standard for mental health and wellbeing; developing a world leading evidence based veterinary medicine hub that will transform animal treatment globally; becoming renowned for veterinary innovation; and ensuring we provide leadership at a global level;
4. Working with developing countries, both bilaterally and through overseas regulators and agencies, to improve the accreditation of veterinary schools (as we have recently begun with India).